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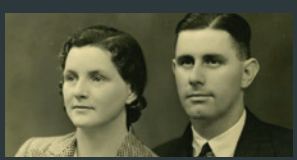
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The Miracle
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Faithful Until the End
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2025 General Conference Session Adopts Digital-First Approach
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Nature and Simple Meals Are Key to Resilience, Former World Champion Says
By Marcos Paseggi, *Adventist Review*


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Scripture consistently emphasizes treating others with love and justice.

Do Justice, Love Mercy

Many today claim Christ's name, but far fewer actually follow Christ. Many who claim Christ's name seek to lord over others—exhibiting little if any of the love, mercy, and justice of Christ.

Many claim to love Christ but hate their brothers and sisters. But 1 John 4:20, 21 is clear: "If someone says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen, how can he love God whom he has not seen? And this commandment we have from Him: that he who loves God must love his brother also."

This is a major teaching of Scripture, based on the two great love commandments—to love God and others—on which all the law and the prophets hang (Matt. 22:37-40). Accordingly, Scripture consistently emphasizes treating others with love and justice, opposing injustice against others. Isaiah exhorts: "Learn to do good; seek justice, rebuke the oppressor; defend the fatherless, plead for the widow" (Isa. 1:17). Later Isaiah writes: "Woe to those who decree unrighteous decrees, who write misfortune, which they have prescribed to rob the needy of justice, and to take what is right from the poor of My people, that widows may be their prey, and that they may rob the fatherless" (Isa. 10:1, 2; cf. Isa. 58:6-8; Jer. 22:13-16).

Likewise, God proclaims in Zechariah 7:9, 10: "Execute true justice, show mercy and compassion everyone to his brother. Do not oppress the widow or the fatherless, the alien or the poor. Let none of you plan evil in his heart against his brother."

These and many other biblical verses highlight God's great concern for justice and mercy, particularly for the downtrodden and vulnerable. Those who follow God should reflect His concern and live accordingly. Since love is the fulfillment of the law (see Rom. 13:8-10; Gal. 5:14), you cannot keep God's law simply by refraining from wrongdoing. The law commands us to actions of love—to a lifestyle of love.

Jesus did not mince words about this, saying, "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you pay tithe of mint and anise and cummin, and have neglected the weightier matters of the law: justice and mercy and faith. These you ought to have done, without leaving the others undone. Blind guides, who strain out a gnat and swallow a camel!" (Matt. 23:23, 24; see also Luke 11:42-44).

If we claim to follow Christ but do not practice love, mercy, and righteousness, we are taking the name of the Lord in vain (Ex. 20:7)—exhibiting the profound hypocrisy of claiming to be God's people, while living in ways opposite to God's love and justice. For "He has shown you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justly, to love mercy, and to walk humbly with your God?" (Micah 6:8).

Remember, when Jesus separates the sheep from the goats in the end, He will say to those on His right hand, "'Come, you blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world: for I was hungry and you gave Me food; I was thirsty and you gave Me drink; I was a stranger and you took Me in; I was naked and you clothed Me; I was sick and you visited Me; I was in prison and you came to Me,'" for "'inasmuch as you did it to one of the least of these My brethren, you did it to Me'" (Matt. 25:34-36, 40).



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INBOX

I think young people don't find identity and belonging in the church because they don't feel important to the church.

JAY ZIRA

TAKE UP THE CHALLENGE

The "Appeal to Unsaved Family Members" article by Ellen G. White (March 2025) challenged me. If we really loved our neighbors, be they friends, family, or strangers, we would earnestly labor to see them come to the Lord. Unfortunately, with many of our relationships our opportunities to share Christ are swiftly passing by.

Darius Songoni



I WILL GO

Rob Folkenberg III's article "Echoes of a Calling" (March 2025) seemed written just for me. Lord, have mercy.

Joshua Davis

POWERFUL

In my opinion, "How High Was the Price?" by Leonard Brand (March 2025) should be marked "The article of the year!"

Erick Were

THEY ARE IMPORTANT

As Gary Blanchard alludes to in "Curing 'Hezekitis' " (March 2025), I think young people don't find identity and belonging in the church because they don't feel important to the church. And it is because some older generations tend to forget how important young people are to the church.

Jay Zira

One of the greatest failures of Adventism is the disobedience of the elders to train the younger people, as the Bible clearly instructs. I see so many senior and retired members with decades of life and spiritual experience simply waiting for God to return while doing nothing. This negligence forces young people to make their own way, making them susceptible to the temptations of Satan.

David Valentin

"Curing 'Hezekitis' " was a very interesting article. The messages Gary Blanchard mentions, that will challenge young people, aren't being preached in many of our churches and institutions. I don't think our young people and new members are hearing what they need to and should hear.

Arliss Schroedermeier Brooks

Gary Blanchard's article was profound. May God help me (and others) to support the youth and be a mentor.

Eric Munene Hanziba

THE ESSENCE OF CHRISTIANITY

In his article "The Healing Touch of Jesus" (January 2025) Mark Mashburn reminded me to ask myself, at every turn, what Jesus would have done. It can be hard, but I think it's the essence of being followers of Christ.

Ann

WHAT THE CHURCH OUGHT TO BE

Sadly, there seem to be many in the church who treat church like a social club, a place to sit on your hands and relax till Jesus comes. Dennis Sellers' testimony "Return of the Prodigal Pastor" (November 2024) powerfully illustrates this problem. I see it in my native New Zealand, but I believe it happens wherever humans are. It's our responsibility to extend grace, mercy, understanding, and care to the stumbling or offended; to whoever may need it! The church should be a hospital for the sick, so perfectionist pharisaical attitudes need to be eradicated.

Toni Kiriona

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.

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"ADRA is more than an organization—it is a movement of compassion, hope, and action."

Paulo Lopes, p. 16



At the Slavic Mission Seventh-day Adventist Church in Cleveland, Ohio, worshippers from Russia and Ukraine kneel side by side and fellowship together. PHOTO: SLAVIC MISSION SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

WAR DIVIDED THEIR HOMELANDS, BUT CHRIST UNITED THEM AT U.S. LOCAL CHURCH

MEMBERS FROM RUSSIA AND UKRAINE HAVE A BOND THAT NO WAR CAN DESTROY.

FRANCIS TUFFOUR, COLUMBIA UNION *VISITOR*, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

In a small Seventh-day Adventist church in Cleveland, Ohio, worshippers from Russia and Ukraine kneel side by side. Peace reigns, defying the war that divides their homelands. This unique congregation sings, prays, studies, and fellowships together, with no trace of the painful divisions or hatred that mark their nations' conflict.

The church's story began after Gennadii Kasap arrived in Cleveland at a challenging time. Before his arrival, there was just a handful of Slavic members in the area—mainly a Ukrainian family that attended a church with only American members. "I arrived in Cleveland on March 10, 2022, just weeks after the war began on February 24," Kasap shared. "Of course, the beginning of the war created certain problems from the very start of my ministry." Having come from Moscow, Russia, Kasap faced initial resistance to forming the Ohio Conference's Slavic Mission church. He believed, however, that the congregation's closeness to God would overcome the surrounding negativity.

Andriy Skitsko, now one of the Ukrainian members at the church, candidly admits that "at first, I was categorically against being part of a church with a Russian-speaking pastor, especially one from Moscow. I had a bad experience being in the same church with Russians. I envisioned myself either as a member of an American church since I live in the U.S. or a Ukrainian church since I am Ukrainian."

Skitsko's perspective, however, changed after a conversation with Kasap. "I saw that the pastor is a truly spiritual person with no imperial superiority," he shared. After consulting with his wife, they

made a pivotal decision. "We decided to support him in his ministry. If this is a human project, it will not succeed, and there will be no Slavic church. But if it is from God, we have no right to refuse to support the pastor. And we were not mistaken."

According to Skitsko, Kasap's selfless ministry has had a profound impact on the congregation. Kasap is learning Ukrainian and Ukrainian songs. This makes it possible to ensure that worship services are conducted in both Ukrainian and Russian. For Skitsko, these gestures of inclusion have made him feel welcome and valued. With just a few core members at the start, the church has since grown to more than 40 believers.

Karina Kolotilina, a Russian church member, consciously maintains a cordial relationship with her Ukrainian fellow worshippers. Acknowledging the language barrier, she shared, "I always try not to hurt the feelings of Ukrainians and show respect for their language, even though I don't understand it very well. I serve in music ministry, and we regularly sing songs in Ukrainian—a vision of our pastor that I fully support. This ensures that all church members can worship in the language closest to their hearts."

The church has remained a place of unity despite the conflict abroad, a testament to their unwavering focus on Jesus.

Tatiana Druzhenkova, whose family recently arrived in the U.S. from Russia, expressed deep gratitude for how the church has supported them. Reflecting on the church's unity, she shared that what is happening in this church is an opportunity to show the world that "God has no nationalities."

The local church's sense of unity is further strengthened through the congregation's initiatives. One such project is a picnic program in which members invite friends to socialize over shared meals, aiming to build friendships and foster connections. The church also actively helps newcomers adapt to their surroundings, regardless of whether they come from Ukraine or Russia.

When Vladislav Kolotilin and his family, Russian Seventh-day Adventists, fled their country, they experienced mixed emotions. Reflecting on their journey, Kolotilin shared, "At the end of August 2023 we were forced to leave our beloved city of St. Petersburg because of persecution by the authorities for publicly expressing our religious views and open anti-war stance. We had to abandon our property and business."

Kasap invited the family to join the Slavic congregation in Cleveland. Kolotilin recalled their initial apprehension: "We felt excitement and anxiety about how we would be received by our spiritual brothers from Ukraine in this congregation. We realized it was hard for some of them to hear Russian spoken." Their fears, however, quickly subsided. "Our acquaintance with the Ukrainian church members exceeded all our expectations. They welcomed us warmly, helped us with food and clothes, and supported us in all our needs." Kolotilin emphasizes the shared history and bonds between Russians and Ukrainians, noting how their countries once coexisted peacefully as neighbors with "similar languages, culture, cuisine, and way of life." While the war has divided their nations, he reflected, "It has not divided us in the church. We have the most important thing in common—our heavenly Father."

Lidiya Zabrecky, another Ukrainian member, reflected with a positive attitude on her experience with the church: "In my church there are people who came from Russia. . . . These people are my brothers and sisters in Christ, children of God in God's big family. I believe that God is the Creator of all people, and He died for everyone."

For Druzhenkov, the church family's motto, "Heaven for All," has been a source of inspiration. He credits this unifying message with helping members foster an atmosphere of "friendliness, kindness, and a prayerful spirit" within the church.

Gregory Arutyunyan, a retired Adventist pastor from Russia and now a church member, expressed his joy at witnessing the unity among the congregation. "It's amazing to see that all members—Ukrainians, Russians, and others—are so united, peaceful, and loving toward one another as if there was never a war," he said. He commends Kasap for his leadership and the good spirit of the members, adding, "I am truly proud to be part of this congregation."



Irish Mission president Adam Keough speaks during the British Union Safeguarding Summit in February. PHOTO: JIMMY BOTHA

UNITED KINGDOM HOSTS FIRST SAFEGUARDING SUMMIT

PARTICIPANTS REFLECT ON HOW TO PROTECT THE VULNERABLE IN OUR CHURCHES.

CATHERINE ANTHONY BOLDEAU, TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Safeguarding is not just a responsibility—it is a reflection of our values and our faith in action." These words from Eglan Brooks, president of the British Union Conference (BUC), set the tone for several meetings of dialogue, sharing of best practices, and strengthening of churches throughout the United Kingdom and Ireland.

From February 21 to 27, more than 130 participants gathered at Newbold College of Higher Education (NCHE) to pray, discuss, debate, and reflect on the issues of safeguarding in faith-based spaces. The term *safeguarding* means protecting the health, well-being, and human rights of individuals, particularly children and vulnerable adults, to ensure they are protected from harm and abuse.

THE THEOLOGY OF SAFEGUARDING

Lee Carmichael kicked off the week with the topic "The Theology of Safeguarding: A Call to Protect the Vulnerable." Carmichael, a part-time helpline practitioner for Thirtyone:eight, an independent Christian organization that seeks to protect vulnerable people, presented a theological case for safeguarding within the church.

Rooted in biblical teaching, safeguarding is not merely a legal or procedural obligation but a divine mandate reflecting how God cares for the most vulnerable members of society.

Anette Williams, safeguarding advisor at Thirtyone:eight, continued this thought from her colleague in her presentations during the week.

Philip Baptiste, secretary and treasurer of Adventist-laymen's Services and Industries for the North American Division, spoke on individuals taking on the responsibility for creating safe churches and spaces.

Throughout the week Baptiste shared several simple acronyms to help participants remember their safeguarding responsibilities. One acronym he shared, for instance, was C.L.E.A.R., which stands for **C**onfront the issues with courage; **L**isten to the victims; **E**mpathize with the wounded; **A**ct to protect and prevent; **R**estore trust and bring healing.

CHALLENGES TO LEADERS

David Defoe, founder of Imara Counseling Services and relationship ministries director of the Allegheny East Conference in the United States, shared that "protecting an institution at the expense of people it serves is not protection—it's corruption." His presentation provided a platform to tackle the topic of the challenge of power and protection and other complex topics that would be presented for the remainder of the conference.

The presentations from the speakers from DRD Partnership, a strategic communications consultancy, provoked conversations and discussions on topics such as leadership, crisis, and obligations for organizations.

Besides speakers, the conference also featured several panel discussions. Reflecting on some of the panels, Leslie Ackie, BUC Possibility Ministries, said, "This summit has further emphasized the enormous challenge and opportunity we have to take our safeguarding provisions to another level to fulfill our biblical mandate to protect the vulnerable."

LISTENING AND BRANDING

The act of listening to the "voiceless" is central to the theme of safeguarding. Several victims and survivors shared their personal stories. These difficult stories and the reality of the narratives brought silence to the room and tears to the eyes.

Conference leaders also announced that in the upcoming months new branding will be rolled out. "Say it. Hear it. Say it. Stop it! Safeguarding is my responsibility, your responsibility, our responsibility."



Three who arrived as refugees pose for a photo by the sign of Pinehill Adventist Academy in Champhai, Mizoram, India. PHOTO: MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

REFUGEE STORIES HIGHLIGHT POTENTIAL OF EDUCATION NEAR MYANMAR'S BORDER

PINEHILL ADVENTIST ACADEMY IN INDIA'S NORTHEAST IS WORKING TO INCREASE ITS FOOTPRINT.

MARCOS PASEGGI, *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

Perched on the top of a hill in an easternmost corner of India, Pinehill Adventist Academy is making a difference in the lives of hundreds of students each year. Lately it has embraced dozens of refugees escaping a deadly civil war in Myanmar.

The Adventist K-10 school, located near Champhai, Mizoram, is not far from the border with Myanmar, where decades-old internal strife has intensified since a successful military coup in 2021. Sometimes, school leaders say, they have seen helicopters in the distance and heard sounds of the fighting. But amid the turmoil and instability, Pinehill is a city of refuge and a supportive community, they say.

WELCOMING REFUGEES

Beyond the border, in Myanmar, the fight between government forces and hundreds of insurgent groups has left thousands of people dead and many more internally or externally displaced.

As government forces close in on militias fighting for self-determination, people living across hundreds of villages have been forced to flee. It is estimated that during the past few years 3.5 million people have been displaced within Myanmar's borders, and an additional 1.1 million have fled to neighboring countries. Many of them escaped to the northeast state of Mizoram in India, which shares a border with Myanmar.

"There were fights in the villages; people lost their homes, and they had to flee," shared Biakzidinga Renthlei, president of the Mizo Conference. "Many crossed the international boundary and fled to Mizoram." Among the many organizations helping those who arrive as refugees, the Adventist Church seeks to feed and shelter them, Renthlei explained.

SOUND CHRISTIAN EDUCATION

As the church seeks to follow in the footsteps of Jesus, they have embraced initiatives to welcome and provide for refugees arriving from Myanmar, Renthlei said. This includes providing them not only physical and spiritual food but a sound Christian education, he added. It is then that the role of Pinehill Adventist Academy, currently with 350 students, has become more prominent, school leaders said.

The school curriculum includes math, English, science, environmental studies, and social science. Also, a class called morals explores ethics from a biblical perspective.

"We learn certainties from the Bible that other schools don't, and that gives us more knowledge about God," shared student Grace Lillalmuanpuii.

Students also attend skill development classes, including sewing, cooking, welding, art, music, soccer, and volleyball, giving them options to support themselves and their families.

BEYOND EDUCATION

Pinehill is currently serving 35 refugees from Myanmar, or 10 percent of the student body. Those refugees live in rented dormitories on a neighboring hilltop, and they eat meals in a temporary cafeteria. These children and teenagers

have fled the violence that has torn their homes apart, but the trauma they experience is harder to leave behind, school leaders said.

Ninth grader Khaisiansang shares his experience. "[In my hometown] there was a constant firing of guns. . . . Civilians and soldiers are constantly firing at each other. Between the battles, the civilians no longer have food to eat. And it's very difficult to travel between villages, but there's nothing we can do about it," he said.

Khaisiansang's physical safety was in danger, but on top of it, many boys are being forced to serve in the military. Some of them were snatched from the street and forced into military training, learning to handle firearms that will be used against their own.

In contrast, Khaisiansang said he appreciates his current school environment and the new friendships he has found at Pinehill. "I had no one before, but [other students] initiated conversations and befriended me. . . . At Pinehill I'm happy because I have many friends."

Khaisiansang, who grew up in an Adventist family, wants to follow in his father's footsteps. "I want to be a pastor," he said with a bashful smile.

A PLACE OF REFUGE

For Hau Sian Len, a tenth-grade student, Pinehill has provided the refuge and support she so desperately needed. "In this school there's no fighting and there is peace," she said. "It is the reason my parents sent me here."

Just one month after Hau Sian Len arrived at Pinehill, her parents were forced to run away, moving from village to village to avoid the armed conflict. Because of their situation and poor cell phone reception, she rarely hears from them. "I really, really miss them," she said, adding that she often wonders if they are still alive.

Friends she made at Pinehill have helped her to settle and adapt to her new environment. While most local students speak the Mizo language, refugees from Myanmar often speak the Chin language. Besides English, learning Mizo helps them to embrace their new place. Hau Sian Len said her friends have been very supportive. They are also there when she gets apprehensive about not getting news from her family. "My friends listen to me and share my joys and moments of sorrow," Hau Sian Len said.

Renthlei said that no one knows how long the fighting will continue. "As the fighting goes on, more and more people are coming in. And once they come, we must give them shelter, especially children, and that's what we are doing now," he said.

GROWING PAINS

Pinehill Adventist Academy growth has brought, however, a different sort of challenge.

"When I came here in 2016, we had only 180 students," Pine Hill principal Zothanzauva (Zova) Pachuau said. "School buildings were inadequate." Things began to change as church leaders and members stepped up to improve learning conditions. But despite major improvements, the school is behind in its efforts to welcome all the students that would love to get sound Christian education.

Pinehill's current infrastructure is severely limiting the students' development, church and school leaders acknowledge. "Classrooms are small and very crowded," Pachuau said.

In September 2024 Maranatha Volunteers International, a supporting ministry of the Adventist Church, broke ground on a project that seeks to solve the school's need for academic space. "The new building will be a great help to accommodate more students," Renthlei said. "We are anxiously waiting for its completion."

The project will significantly expand Pinehill's reach, allowing the school to reach 500 students. "Parents are contacting me," Pachuau said. "They tell me, 'If you finish your building, we will send our kids to your school.' "

According to Maranatha leaders, the new facilities will help the school welcome at least 500 students after completion. They hope the story of Pinehill can inspire supporters and advocates around the world. The love of people who love children and Adventist education can have the power to "preserve the hope that remains and help build a brighter tomorrow," they said.



Elie Henry, Inter-American Division president (third from left), stands next to the newly appointed administrators from the Nicaragua Union Mission.
PHOTO: NICARAGUA UNION MISSION

ADVENTIST LEADERS INAUGURATE OFFICES AND INSTALL LEADERSHIP IN NICARAGUA

NEW HEADQUARTERS MARKS A MILESTONE FOR THE CHURCH'S GROWTH, LEADERS SAY.

DAVID MURILLO AND INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

Seventh-day Adventists in Nicaragua celebrated a momentous occasion as church leaders inaugurated the headquarters of the new Nicaragua Union Mission (NUM) during a special ceremony held in the capital city of Managua on February 7.

"This inauguration of the new church territory marks the beginning of a new chapter for the church," said Elie Henry, president of the Inter-American Division (IAD). The newly organized union territory was approved by the General Conference in 2024 and voted in during IAD's Year-End Executive Committee Meetings in November 2024, when union administrators were also elected. The reorganization of the territory includes Nicaragua's three mission offices, which were previously overseen by the South Central American Union, based in Costa Rica. For years the union had overseen the church's work in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica.

Henry congratulated church leaders and members for their dedication and commitment to expanding the gospel throughout the country. "This is also an occasion to strengthen the wholistic well-being of Nicaraguans."

Newly elected Wilfredo Ruiz, president of NUM, said that the event "was not only a milestone in the history of the Adventist Church in Nicaragua but also a symbol of the growth of God's work." He added, "It also represents the members' commitment to bringing God's message of salvation to every corner of the country."

In addition to celebrating the new space, the inauguration offered an opportunity for church members to gather in gratitude to God for His blessings on the Adventist work in Nicaragua, leaders emphasized. "The ceremony provided a joyful moment, filled with music, prayers, and a strong sense of fellowship and commitment," they said.

Local leaders also expressed their gratitude for the members' support and reaffirmed their commitment to continue working toward the growth of Adventist mission initiatives across the country. The two-story union headquarters includes administrative and staff offices, a conference room, and more.

In addition, church leaders inaugurated the offices of the Central Nicaragua Mission, where the church oversees dozens of churches in Managua, not far from the union headquarters.

Henry encouraged leaders and staff to remain focused on the mission as developments unfold in the region. "This new office is not only a building; it is a testimony of our commitment to God and to His work of sharing His love as we provide a more suitable place to serve His church, learn, and serve others," he said.

"The new mission office facilities are designed to offer more space for activities in this territory," church leaders explained. Designed to provide a warm welcome to visitors, the new mission office includes a small auditorium, several administrative offices, and a board meeting room.

The following day, February 8, church leaders installed the new leadership of NUM. During the special program of thanksgiving and leader installation, more than 300 delegates from local churches, pastors, and special guests gathered to thank God and hear God's Word.

The installation ceremony of church leaders took place with hundreds in attendance. The new leaders of NUM include, in addition to Ruiz, Roberto Dávila Alfaro as secretary and Héctor Alvarado Araúz as treasurer, along with various departmental and ministry directors who will oversee the church in Nicaragua.

Addressing those present at the ceremony, Henry emphasized the importance of being committed to God, sharing hope with the world, and developing a deep and meaningful relationship with the Lord. "I call you to share the gospel wholeheartedly, serving God and others with love and dedication," he said.



Group photo of the volunteers, the Northwest Mission Institute team, and the crew of the *Luzeiro*.
PHOTO: GUSTAVO LEIGHTON

SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION HEADQUARTERS EMPLOYEES GO TO THE AMAZON

MISSION TRIP HELPS CHURCH WORKERS SERVE, CONNECT WITH ISOLATED COMMUNITIES.

IRENE STRONG, SOUTH AMERICAN DIVISION, AND *ADVENTIST REVIEW*

A group of 38 volunteers from the South American Division (SAD) headquarters participated in a mission trip in the communities of Nova Esperança and Nova Canaã, in the Brazilian Amazon. During the 10-day mission trip, volunteers shared hope and support with people living in remote and hard-to-reach regions, leaders behind the initiative shared.

The initiative was driven by SAD's Adventist Volunteers Services (AVS), in partnership with the Northwest Missions Institute, as part of the Amazon Lifeguard project.

THE AMAZON LIFEGUARD PROJECT

The Amazon Lifeguard project offers volunteers the opportunity to live aboard a boat while providing various services to riverside communities. During their recent stay the group of church workers provided services in the education and health areas, with an emphasis on women's care. They also promoted activities that fostered the physical, emotional, and spiritual well-being of residents.

"One of the biggest challenges in these communities is communication, as people live in isolated, hard-to-reach areas," said Eder Oliveira, captain of the *Luzeiro* mission boat. "So the importance of our mission cannot be underestimated. People will remember our visit and work, no matter how small it may seem."

ONE MISSION, SEVERAL POSSIBILITIES

During the mission trip, volunteers carried out various community and social assistance activities, including improvements in basic infrastructure, evangelism programs and spiritual activities, basic health-care initiatives, and seminars on women's care. They also organized community health fairs and held classes and activities for children.

Dieter Bruns, SAD AVS director, explained how much residents valued their service. "Some people approached us to know more about our group and even to assist us," he shared. "We found it rewarding because serving others gives us joy."

Participant Wendy Cisneros said she is already looking forward to the next opportunity to serve. "It is my first mission trip, but I already want to sign up for the next one. I want to give the little that I have to help others. It was a wonderful experience," she said.

Juliana Garrido da Silva, leader of the Nova Esperança community, thanked the volunteers for their service. "We thank you not only for your physical work but also for your spiritual support. Some people in our community don't know God yet, but this visit will prompt us to keep sharing our faith with those around us."



Paulo Lopes has been appointed as the new president of ADRA International, effective April 1. PHOTO: COURTESY OF PAULO LOPES

PAULO LOPES APPOINTED AS NEW PRESIDENT OF ADRA INTERNATIONAL

APPOINTMENT MARKS A NEW CHAPTER IN THE ADVENTIST HUMANITARIAN ORGANIZATION.

JENNIFER STYMIEST, ADRA INTERNATIONAL

Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) International has appointed Paulo Lopes as its new president, effective April 1. Lopes, whose career with ADRA began in 1986, has made a significant contribution to the agency's mission through his service at both the field level in several countries and in global leadership.

He served most recently as the regional director of ADRA in the South American Division, and brings decades of experience in international humanitarian service, leadership, and community development. His appointment marks a new chapter for ADRA as the organization continues its mission to serve humanity so that all may live as God intended.

The announcement follows an extensive search process led by the ADRA International board of directors, who prayerfully considered the next leader to guide the organization through a time of both opportunities and challenges. Geoffrey Mbwana, chair of the ADRA International board, expressed confidence in Lopes's leadership and vision for the future.

"We believe that Paulo Lopes is the right person to lead ADRA International at this critical time," Mbwana said. "His dedication to humanitarian work, his deep commitment to ADRA's mission, and his extensive experience in the field make him uniquely qualified. We trust that God has led in this decision, and we look forward to seeing how ADRA will continue to grow and impact lives under his leadership."

Audrey Andersson, second vice chair of the ADRA International board, highlighted the thorough search process that led to Lopes's selection. "The search committee was prayerful and diligent in seeking God's guidance throughout this process," Andersson said. "We are confident that Paulo Lopes is the right person for the job. His experience, vision, and heart for service align with ADRA's mission, and we are excited to see how he will lead the organization into the future."

Lopes has been an integral part of ADRA's global network, overseeing projects that have transformed communities across South America and beyond. He is recognized for his passion for compassionate ministry, his strategic leadership, and his ability to inspire teams to carry out ADRA's mission effectively.

"I am deeply humbled and honored to serve as the new president of ADRA International," Lopes said. "ADRA is more than an organization—it is a movement of compassion, hope, and action. As we look to the future, we will continue to expand our reach, strengthen our partnerships, and advocate for those in need. Together with our global team and supporters, we will work tirelessly to bring lasting change to the communities we serve."

Paul Douglas, first vice chair of the ADRA International board, expressed his confidence in Lopes's leadership. "Paulo Lopes is the right leader at the right time for ADRA International," he said. "His proven track record of growth, strategic leadership, and commitment to humanitarian service assures us that ADRA will continue to thrive under his guidance. We trust that God has placed him here for this moment, and we are excited for the future of ADRA."

Lopes succeeds Michael Kruger, who served ADRA International for the past decade, the past five years as president. ADRA expresses its deep appreciation for Kruger's leadership and dedication, which has significantly contributed to the organization's growth and impact worldwide.



RIVER PLATE ADVENTIST SANITARIUM OPENS NUEVO TIEMPO SPACE ON FACILITIES. The sanitarium and Nuevo Tiempo Argentina Bible School established a partnership that was launched at the facilities of the medical center, located in Libertador San Martín, Entre Ríos, Argentina. The partnership will provide patients access to educational and spiritual resources on physical, emotional, and spiritual health. "It is a beautiful opportunity to work together. We have resources that focus on what patients need—wholistic health treatments," said Gabriel Darrichón, director of the Bible school.



A VARIETY OF FAITH PROGRAMS EMPOWER CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE. The Children's Ministries Department of the Mongolia Mission has taken a new step in nurturing the spiritual growth of young people by launching a children's baptism class. The program started with 13 enthusiastic participants. Five children have made the decision to be baptized. The ministry also introduced a weekly youth club. This club is a safe and welcoming space where children and young people come together to pray, study the Bible, and support one another through life's challenges.



YOUNG ADVENTISTS PARTICIPATE DURING GLOBAL YOUTH DAY IN VARIOUS WAYS. As part of the annual Global Youth Day on March 15, Adventist young people in Mexico took to the streets to march, share hope, and distribute more than 3 million copies of this year's missionary book, *Living With Hope*, by Marcello Niek and Bruno Raso. The book highlights keys to improving mental health and emotional intelligence. The Cosmos Pathfinder Club in Huixtla, Chiapas, surprisingly came in contact with the president of Mexico, Claudia Sheinbaum Pardo, and shared a book with her.



ADVENTIST SEMINARY STUDENTS EXCEL IN INAUGURAL BIBLICAL LANGUAGES CUP. Students from the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies (AIIAS) and Mountain View College (MVC), based in the Philippines, were among the top contestants in the first-ever Biblical Languages Cup 2025. Organized by the German Bible Society and the Philippine Bible Society, the event assessed participants' knowledge of biblical Hebrew and Greek by means of demanding rounds in vocabulary, morphology, and translation. Contestants attributed their achievements to God's continuous guidance and wisdom.



ALASKAN HISPANIC CHURCH EXPERIENCES REVIVAL. Throughout the years the Anchorage Spanish church has faced a steady decline. An evangelistic series in September 2024 helped revive their local church. The one-week series, "A New Dawn in Alaska," revitalized the church. Approximately 25 visitors attended each night, and by the end of the series 21 people had committed their lives to Christ. With a regular audience of more than 70 people, the available space was maxed out.



LOCAL CHURCHES CELEBRATE INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S DAY. On March 1 churches across the Nepal Section celebrated the International Women's Day of Prayer, a special occasion dedicated to spiritual renewal, unity, and the power of prayer. Women led various church programs, emphasizing their vital role in fostering faith within families and communities. Women from Nepal churches actively participated in the celebrations, leading worship services and engaging in meaningful programs. Leaders recognized their dedication and contributions to the church, as women leaders received gifts as a token of appreciation.

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STRENGTH IN WEAKNESS

Grace in times of vulnerability

ADRIANI MILLI RODRIGUES



PHOTO: TIM BOGDANOV / UNSPLASH

No one likes to feel vulnerable. Vulnerability brings feelings of being defenseless, exposed, unguarded, assailable, and weak. Feeling vulnerable is even worse when we mistakenly think that we can do it, that we are strong enough, and that we can defend ourselves, but then we realize that we are actually unable, weak, and defenseless.

The famous German theologian and pastor Dietrich Bonhoeffer (1906-1945), who experienced the horrors of World War II, expressed feelings of vulnerability in his letters from prison. He highlighted that in times of crisis and vulnerability we become more clearly aware of our weakness and dependence on God. In a letter to his friend (and later biographer) Eberhard Bethge written on January 29-30, 1944, he stated, "When the bombs are crashing down around this building, I can't do otherwise than think of God. . . . It takes a crisis to shake us up and drive us into prayer."[1]

We find important examples in the Bible when, in times of crisis, vulnerability and dependence on God become quite evident. In fact, these critical moments of vulnerability are crucial for a better understanding and appreciation of God's grace. Let's take a closer look at some significant examples in Scripture, beginning with the experiences of Jacob in Genesis 32-33.

GOD'S GRACE AND JACOB'S VULNERABILITY

Before delving into the dramatic narrative of Jacob's emotional meeting with his brother, Esau, we should first recognize that Genesis 32-33 are among the main chapters

about grace in the Old Testament. The Hebrew word for grace (or favor) here is *ḥēn*. Out of the 70 occurrences of this word in the Hebrew Bible (Old Testament), 14 are found in Genesis (more than any other book). In Genesis many of the occurrences of *ḥēn* are found in the narrative of Jacob encountering Esau (appearing four times; see Gen. 32:5; 33:8, 10, 15).

In *Patriarchs and Prophets* Ellen G. White provides a vivid picture of how Jacob initially felt about this encounter. More than 20 years had passed since his last interactions with his older brother. In her words Jacob's "sin in the deception of his father was ever before him. He knew that his long exile was the direct result of that sin, and he pondered over these things day and night, the reproaches of an accusing conscience making his journey very sad."[2] In her further depiction of Jacob's accusing memories, she adds, "All the past rose vividly before him."[3] Besides, there was the concern that his return could lead Esau to think that Jacob was coming "to claim the inheritance" as the blessed firstborn.[4]

Jacob's instructions to the first messengers sent to Esau were intended to brush off the suspicion that he was coming to claim the inheritance, and this is where we find the first occurrence of the term *ḥēn,* or grace/favor. "Speak thus to my *lord* Esau, 'Thus your *servant* Jacob says: "I have dwelt with Laban and stayed there until now. I have oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants; and I have sent to tell my *lord*, that I may find favor [*ḥēn*] in your sight" ' " (Gen. 32:4, 5). Notice that the language of "lord" and "servant" implies that Jacob is not elevating himself to a position of honor and privilege as the blessed firstborn. Instead, he is speaking as a servant to his lord Esau. Moreover, he mentions all the possessions he acquired after he left home (oxen, donkeys, flocks, and male and female servants). In other words, Jacob does not need anything else. He is not coming to claim any inheritance. It is precisely at this point in the narrative that we learn about Jacob's explicit intention with this message to Esau, defined by the language of *ḥēn*. Jacob wants to find favor/grace (*ḥēn*) in the eyes of his brother. In the concrete style of Hebrew thought, grace is something that we can find in the eyes of someone.

Jacob's intentions, however, are frustrated. The messengers return and warn him that Esau is coming with his military force of 400 men (Gen. 32:6). Jacob knows quite well what this means, and his reaction is profoundly emotional. He is "greatly afraid and distressed" (verse 7) and prays for deliverance (verse 11). Despite all his material possessions and planned strategies, he feels vulnerable. He finds himself powerless and unable to purchase grace or favor with all his riches. Shockingly, his abundant financial resources cannot provide him with the only thing he needs now: deliverance.

Jacob's last attempt confirms this somber reality. He sends a generous gift to Esau (verses 13-18), including camels (verse 15), the most expensive animals. Since camels are not mentioned in the initial message to Esau in Genesis 32:5, we could even speculate that Jacob perhaps initially minimized his riches in order to surprise his brother when the gift is received.[5] From the words of Genesis 32:20, we further learn about Jacob's intentions to achieve appeasement with his expensive gift—his last resort: "For he said, 'I will appease him with the present that goes before me, and afterward I will see his face; perhaps he will accept me.' " One literal translation renders this, "I *pacify his face* with the present which is going before me, and afterwards *I see his face*; it *may be he lifteth up my face*" (Gen. 32:20, YLT).[6]

Nevertheless, the next section of the narrative, which portrays Jacob wrestling with God at night (verses 22-26), indicates that he is rather unsure about the efficacy of his gift.

Jacob's wrestling is a profound and paradoxical example of his vulnerability. Physically speaking, Jacob seems to have prevailed in the fight (verse 25), but he was emotionally perplexed and did not behave like a winner. Instead, he kept fighting the entire night and did not let the divine Man go until he was blessed (verses 24-26). In the physical wrestling Jacob seems strong. But in reality Jacob feels powerless and vulnerable as he thinks about the coming encounter with his brother in the morning, which is a fight he cannot win by himself. This is why Jacob anxiously fights and prays for the blessing of deliverance. This is a prayer coming from apparent strength, but ultimate and utter vulnerability.

The story ambiguously points to the presence of the blessing. The one who was hiding his face from

Esau and using the mediatorial role of messengers and gifts to find grace/favor in the eyes of his brother (verses 5, 20) now sees the very face of God at the night of wrestling and surprisingly finds the grace of deliverance, without messengers and gifts but having only a prayer from a powerless and vulnerable heart. The blessing of grace and deliverance coming from God's face is expressed by Jacob himself: "I have seen God face to face, and my life is preserved" (verse 30). This was a very encouraging divine sign of what would happen in the morning, when he would see the face of his brother, Esau.

At night Jacob had physical strength to anxiously persevere in fighting for the blessings of deliverance, but without real victory. In contrast, Jacob was weakened in the morning; the divine Man "touched the socket of his hip; and the socket of Jacob's hip was out of joint as He wrestled with him" (verse 25). At sunrise "he limped on his hip" (verse 31), but he was actually limping toward victory.

Paradoxically, it seems the divine blessing of deliverance should have made Jacob stronger for the expected morning battle with Esau, but God unexpectedly gave him the (disturbing) blessing of being weakened. Instead of removing his vulnerability, God's grace made it even more evident.

This narrative powerfully connects with the experience of the apostle Paul in the New Testament.

GOD'S GRACE AND PAUL'S VULNERABILITY

Paul eloquently captures Jacob's experience of vulnerability in 2 Corinthians 12:9: "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." The Greek word for strength in this passage is *dynamis*, from which the term dynamite is derived, conveying the meaning of power. Moreover, the expression "made perfect" in this verse translates the Greek verb *teléō*, which gives the sense of making something complete or bringing it to its full measure. *The New English Bible* renders this part of our passage: "Power comes to its full strength in weakness."[7] In other words, God's power is brought to full measure precisely in the context of human weakness.

This passage not only aptly describes Jacob's experience of God's grace in Genesis 32, but primarily speaks of Paul's own experience of vulnerability and weakness. In fact,

God's power is brought to full measure precisely in the context of human weakness.



PHOTO: PRIXEL CREATIVE / LIGHTSTOCK

God's answer did not come in the form of unambiguous empowerment, as we usually expect, but as the (disturbing) blessing of weakness.

the language of weakness that appears in 2 Corinthians 12:9 is widely used in 1 and 2 Corinthians in general. They could even be called the letters of weakness. The Greek adjective *asthenēs*, which basically conveys the meaning of weak or sick, is used 11 times in 1 Corinthians, which is the New Testament book in which we find the most occurrences of this adjective. And the Greek noun *asthéneia*, which describes weakness or sickness, occurs six times in 2 Corinthians, which is the New Testament book with the most occurrences of this noun.

To mention a few examples, in 1 Corinthians 1:27 Paul highlights that "God has chosen the weak things [*asthenē*] of the world to put to shame the things which are mighty." In 2 Corinthians 13:4 the apostle uses this language to describe Christ and believers: "For though He was crucified in weakness [*astheneías*], yet He lives by the power of God. For we also are weak [*asthenoumen*] in Him, but we shall live with Him by the power of God toward you." In connection with these examples, the notion of weakness is particularly elaborated in 2 Corinthians 12:7-10:

"So to keep me from becoming conceited because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, a thorn was given me in the flesh, a messenger of Satan to harass me, to keep me from becoming conceited. Three times I pleaded with the Lord about this, that it should leave me. But he said to me, '*My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.*' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my *weaknesses*, so that the *power* of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with *weaknesses*, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am *weak*, then I am *strong*" (ESV).

Paul initially portrays himself as spiritually powerful, considering "the surpassing greatness of the revelations" he receives from God (verse 7). This apparent power is, however, paradoxically followed by his awareness of actual weakness.

It is not clear what Paul's thorn in the flesh is. Perhaps this could metaphorically point to the opposition he faced in ministry, but the reference to his flesh could imply physical illness (see, e.g., Gal. 4:13, 14). Whatever the case, the apostle prayed for deliverance not only once or twice but three times (2 Cor. 12:8). Like Jacob, however, God's answer did not come in the form of unambiguous empowerment, as we usually expect, but as the (disturbing) blessing of weakness.

Indeed, Paul's vulnerability is not taken away, but is emphasized more. It is precisely in this condition of powerlessness that God's strength comes into full measure in the apostle's life. As David Garland comments: "God's grace is not just the unmerited favor that saves us but a force that also sustains us throughout our lives."[8] Put differently, the experiences of Jacob and Paul teach us that God's grace is the power that sustains us, especially in times of weakness and vulnerability.

The touching experiences of Jacob and Paul with vulnerability and grace are not the only places in Scripture in which God brought power to full measure in the lives of weak believers. Hebrews 11:32-34 indicates that "time would fail" us to tell the experience of others in the past who became victorious, not because of their strength or power, but "through faith . . . out of weakness were made strong" (verses 33, 34). Our experiences of vulnerability and grace, of divine strength in our weakness, should be part of this list as well.

[1] Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison*. Dietrich Bonhoeffer Works (Minneapolis: Fortress, 2010), vol. 8, p. 276.

[2] Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), p. 195.

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] See Nahum M. Sarna, *Genesis*, The JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), p. 224.

[6] Texts credited to YLT are from *Young's Literal Translation*.

[7] From *The New English Bible*. © The Delegates of the Oxford University Press and the Syndics of the Cambridge University Press 1961, 1970. Reprinted by permission.

[8] David E. Garland, *2 Corinthians*, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), p. 524.

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ON THE MATTER OF MIND

A truth that turns scientific dogma inside out

What came first, matter or mind? It matters. After all, the dominant scientific/metaphysical shtick—confirmed by nothing less than human-made science itself, and backed up (we are assured) by field studies, experiments, and peer-reviewed papers by Ph.D.s in prestigious journals—is that matter came first, and then, from matter, mind.

OK, let's look first at matter, at simple basic matter itself, the "stuff" that preceded mind and from which mind (we are told) arose. According to the Standard Model of particle physics, matter consists of fermions, the bottom-level building blocks, which themselves are classified into six different quarks, and they combine to form hadrons (protons and neutrons). There are also leptons, which include electrons, muons, and tau particles. Anti-matter particles (positrons, antiprotons, antineutrinos, antineutrons) exist as well. What holds these different particles together are bosons, the force carriers: photons, gluons, and other fundamental particles, so finely tuned in their interaction with fermions that, with the slightest derivation, not only human life but our universe, at least as we know it, could not exist.

And yet all this, prime matter itself—rather complicated and very precisely law-like—arose without any mind behind it at all? It had to, because, remember, matter precedes mind. So—fermions, bosons, quarks, positrons, all 17 fundamental particles (at last count), having been mindlessly created, just mindlessly arranged themselves together with the cross-eyed precision needed to create basic matter itself, which eventually led to mind.

How did *that* happen? First, there was a mindless Big Bang, out of which came mindless space, mindless time, and mindless matter/energy. Then, mindless gravity caused mindless matter to coalesce into mindless molten globules, and one of these globules mindlessly cooled down, and on it mindless chemicals arose that mindlessly formed simple life forms (probably mindless themselves) out of which, mindlessly and unconsciously, mind and consciousness arose.

If it's not far-fetched enough to believe that mindless chemicals could mindlessly morph into "simple life" (an oxymoron because even the "simplest" living entities have complex functions), that's daisies compared to the advent of mind and consciousness. At least living things are "material." But mind and consciousness, though hardly immortal, are, certainly, immaterial.

CLIFF'S EDGE

CLIFFORD GOLDSTEIN



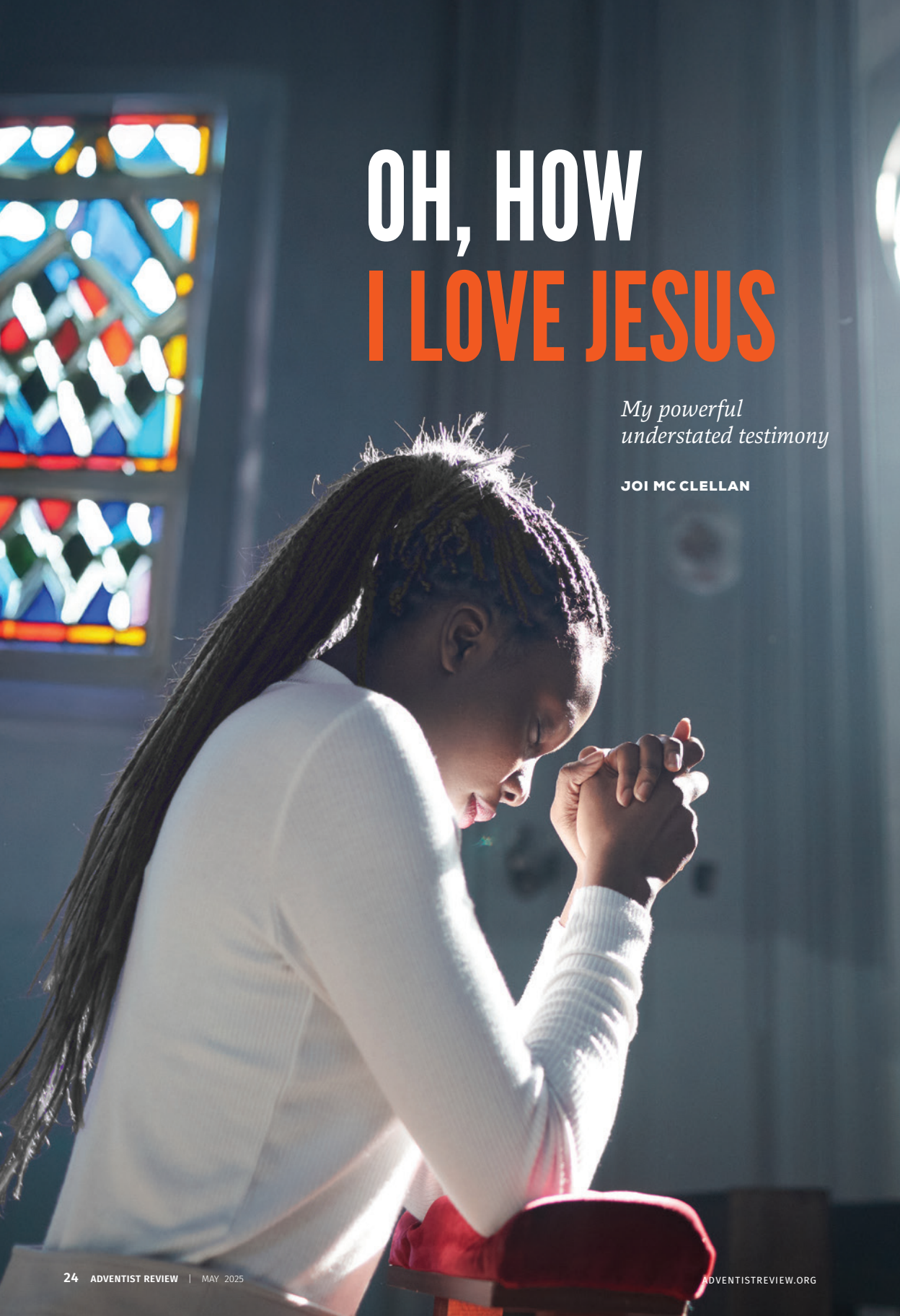
WHAT CAME FIRST, MATTER OR MIND? IT MATTERS.

Otherwise—what's the chemical, or even atomic, composition of thought, any thought? What, for instance, is the chemical or atomic structure of *I want a piece of chocolate?* Not the third-person objective chemical or atomic structure of chocolate (any chemist can tell you that), nor even the third-person and objective chemical and atomic structure of the associated neurons, but the chemical or molecular structure of first-person subjective experience of the thought *I want a piece of chocolate?*

If that sounds like an absurd question, it is, but only because mind and consciousness, whatever they are, are not material, and no more first arose from fermions and bosons than the inspiration for Shakespeare's *Hamlet, Prince of Denmark* arose from the atomic structure of the paper he wrote it on.

So, it was mind, Divine mind first, known as Yahweh—in whom "we live and move and have our being" (Acts 17:28)—and then matter, a truth that turns scientific dogma inside out, mind you.

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



OH, HOW I LOVE JESUS

My powerful understated testimony

JOI MC CLELLAN

I've always shied away from the call-and-response chorus attached to the familiar hymn "Oh, How I Love Jesus."

"Oh, Joi, do you love Jesus? / Are you sure you love Jesus? / And why do you love Jesus?"

Not only is it incredibly embarrassing to croak out a response all alone against a mob of excited songsters, but perhaps even more so, the practice of vocalizing why *I* love Jesus makes me feel exposed. Do I actually have a reason to love Jesus?

For most of my life I did not see much similarity between my plain personal testimony and the more oft-repeated dramatic narratives we enjoy hearing. I was pretty sure my experience was a far cry from Paul's and the other Saul-to-Paul-esque stories during which one meets Jesus and their world flips right side up.

Or was it?

OH, FRIEND, DO YOU LOVE JESUS?

A few years ago I came to the realization that my underwhelming testimony was more similar to Paul's testimony than I had previously conceived. While on the surface my transformation did not convert me from Christian murderer to Christian minister, it came to me that we both, ironically, were good church kids before we found Christ.

Just like Paul, I grew up in church. Well, he grew up in synagogue. But the point is, I am your basic Sabbath School-going, *Your Story Hour*-listening, carob chip-eating good girl. Being that I stayed in church over the years, I assumed I loved Jesus. But why?

We often seek out the "point" or event that flipped the reality in one's existence. We're impressed by the power of exaggerated change. But what of those of us who never left the church? What if, instead of isolated points, our stories formed a positive linear trajectory? What if I am constantly converting rather than being once converted? Mine is a simple, yet perhaps understated, story of an Adventist girl.

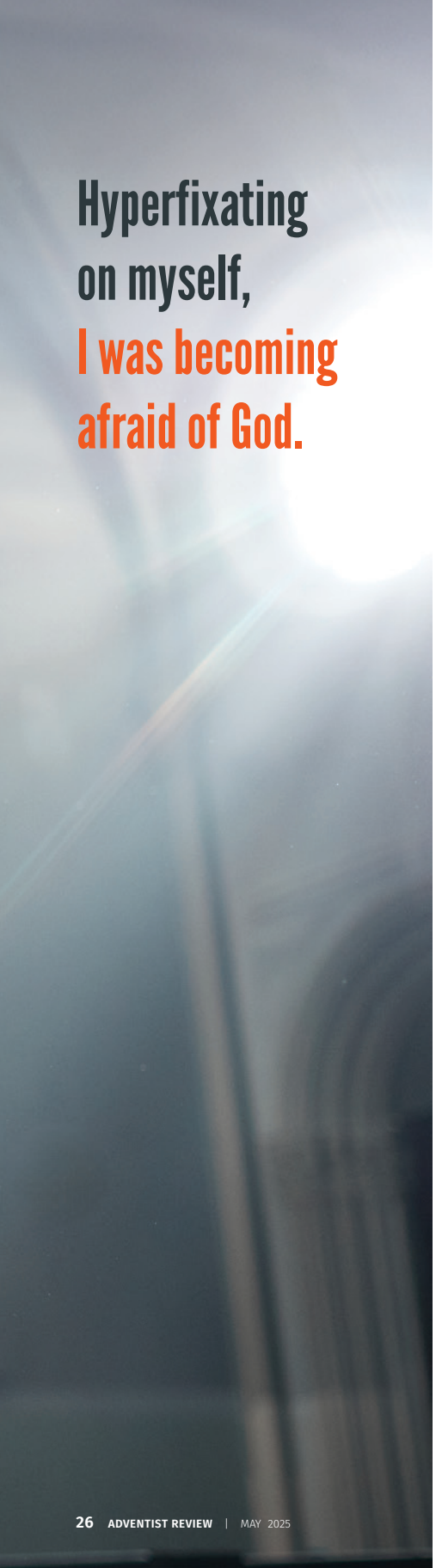
OH, YES! I LOVE JESUS!

When my sister and other young church friends signaled their decision to give their lives to Jesus, my hand also went up! Not yet in the double digits, I was all aboard. Jesus and His love were familiar themes in my young life. I was born into a loving Adventist family who made it their mission to teach me the story of Jesus and of my value to Him. They raised me deeply connected to the Word, worshipping, teaching, and living it out in daily life. For this foundation I am extremely grateful.

Sometimes, however, being raised in such a wonderful environment can make it easy to take the knowledge and exposure to Christ at an early age for granted. I was an easygoing, fun-loving child who simply went along with what I knew. So, baptized I was. Coming up out of the murky Cohutta Springs lake, I had hardly more than a muddled vision of what it meant to choose a life with Jesus. But Jesus knew. And even when I was at that tender age, He began winning my heart.

I continued to grow. I did the normal Adventist things–read my Bible daily, became a Pathfinder. I helped in Sabbath School and got involved in youth ministry. As I moved from childhood to my teenage years, my conscience became more tender, and a deep desire for righteousness took root in my heart.

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What started as a sensitivity toward right and against wrong gradually spiraled into a constantly guilty conscience. I became very afraid of doing wrong, wrestling at night over potential unconfessed sins. Anxiety over how far off I must be from the standard of righteousness filled me. I scrutinized my recreational activities, my wardrobe choices—*everything*. I began looking to those around me to draw out the standard for Christianity that I should be modeling my life after. And through all of this I was most determined to overcome guilt in my pursuit of an upward trajectory toward perfection.

Paul, in Philippians 3, describes his early life similarly: "If anyone else thinks he has reason for confidence in the flesh, I have more: circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless" (Phil. 3:4-6, ESV).

Squeaky clean, Paul had everything nicely in order to reach perfection. Subconsciously I began arranging my own perfect Adventist curriculum vitae too.

I'M [UN]SURE I LOVE JESUS . . .

As I matured in my choice to follow Jesus and simultaneously grew more and more into the person that wanted to always "do things right," perfectionism became my religion of choice. It felt safe, achievable, and structured. Yet I had swapped in *fear* for *Jesus*. I was constantly apologizing, afraid that one unknown or unrepented sin would separate me from Him—or rather my own imagined picture of Him. My unrelenting journey toward perfectionism evolved into an insurmountable mountain, obscuring the God of peace my heart longed for.

I left my Adventist home to attend an Adventist college, where, not only did perfectionism drive me to excel in my academic pursuits, but also I continued to build out my Adventist CV. I got involved in many ministries on campus, canvassed for a summer, and worked at camp during another. Though I was engaged in these ministries out of a heart of love for Jesus and excitement to serve Him, unconsciously I was also trying to impress Jesus with my rightdoing. If Jesus wanted a wholesome Adventist, I was the one for the job.

If others have reason for confidence in their own efforts, I have more. I was born into a Christian home—better yet, I'm a fourth-generation Adventist. I was dedicated as an infant and baptized before the age of 10. I was homeschooled, ate a plant-based diet, and had read through the whole Conflict of the Ages series before the end of high school. I participated in all things Adventist: from Pathfinders, to Youth Rush, to summer

camp. I was taught to have devotions daily, was very strict when it came to health reform, and dress reform, and any other reforms you can think up. I knew how to use a concordance just as well as a dictionary, and could get excited about S. N. Haskell right alongside a seminarian. I was so zealous for right and afraid of wrong that I regularly kept account of my sins and shortcomings. I was highly conscientious. If righteousness, right standing with God, came from right works, I definitely gave it my best shot.

Despite all this, I was, nonetheless, burdened with the guilt that I wasn't doing enough and the fear that I was dishonoring God in some way. Hyperfixating on myself, I was becoming afraid of God.

Years of wrestling with the billowing thoughts in the depths of my conscience, desperately trying to anchor myself to perfectionism in hopes that it was my lifeline to salvation, I failed to realize that perfectionism was rather a weight that was only drowning me in guilt—pulling me under, and away from Jesus. One day, out of the blue, as I was reading through the book of Philippians, I came across Paul's summarized testimony. It stunned me. I had somehow missed this chapter in the Bible all my life. Here Paul records all these things he did right, yet follows it with "But what things were gain to me, those I counted loss for Christ" (Phil. 3:7, KJV). How was it that these good things and Christ were mutually exclusive? I thought I needed both—I thought I had both. This passage shook me to the core. I had clearly missed a big boat: the true ark of safety.

HERE'S WHY I LOVE JESUS

Taking a step back, I realized I had placed my confidence in *good things* rather than in Jesus Himself. I had relied on my own morality and efforts to gain righteousness. But righteousness comes through faith in Christ.

"And be found in him, not having a righteousness of my own that comes from the law, but that which is through faith in Christ—the righteousness that comes from God on the basis of faith" (Phil. 3:9, NIV).

For years I had tried to "give up" my sins but found no victory. Every time I attempted to let go, rage metastasized within me. Why? Because I was trying to be my own inept surgeon, instead of showing up helpless to the operating room and allowing the skilled Surgeon to anesthetize my soul with His love and remove and heal all my deficiencies. I finally found peace when I saw Jesus as both the *end* and the *means*, the *standard* of holiness and the one who makes me holy; when I realized that I am not grasping to reach an impossible standard but giving myself to Jesus, so that through Him, the standard is met; when I saw that true goodness can be found only in Him and that by my resting in Him and choosing to be covered by His righteousness, long-term guilt and anxiety are removed. I have peace with God. This is faith.

I love Jesus because He first loved me.

I love Jesus because my lame perfectionism in juxtaposition to His perfect righteousness is futile.

I love Jesus because His righteousness becomes mine as I rest, daily surrendering myself by faith to Him.

Paul says it best:

"I once thought these things were valuable, but now I consider them worthless because of what Christ has done. Yes, everything else is worthless when compared with the infinite value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For His sake I have discarded everything else, counting it all as garbage, so that I could gain Christ and become one with him. I no longer count on my own righteousness through obeying the law; rather, I become righteous through faith in Christ. For God's way of making us right with himself depends on faith" (Phil. 3:7-9, NLT).*

As a now grown-up Adventist girl, walking with Jesus has a new and truly positive trajectory. It still takes time to deconstruct and reject old ways of thinking, but God has been kind to me. As a recovering perfectionist, I know that as long as I value my own works, I *lose* Jesus. But when I surrender to Jesus, He daily converts and reconverts my heart, giving me rest, peace, and His righteousness.

And that's the reason we all ought to love Him!

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Joi McClellan is a student missionary/DDS candidate at the University of Michigan School of Dentistry in Ann Arbor, Michigan, soon to matriculate through the Loma Linda University Oral and Maxillofacial Surgery Program.



A CALL TO ALL MOTHERS

Training and educating our children to be obedient and faithful in their duties

ELLEN G. WHITE

The cause of God suffers terribly today in every department because of the neglect of mothers properly to train and educate their children to do the common, plain, practical duties of life. This very busy, useful employment is teaching them how to labor with aptness and is also shutting off from them the temptations of Satan which are so strong upon the minds of the young. Mothers who are now bringing up children have no excuse for their neglect of duty. God has laid out the mother's work and duty to her children in repeated testimonies so plain, so clear, there is no need of making a mistake if they desire to know the way and to take up their neglected duties. But the light God has given has not been followed. The day of judgment will reveal that abundant light has been given if there were in the heart of His people a disposition to follow the light. But the heart, the natural heart, does not incline to obedience and to faithful duty because a course of duty calls forth effort, perseverance, and constant watchfulness and prayer. It is thought to be too laborious to be followed out.

THE EFFECTS OF PARENTAL NEGLECT

The greatest number of souls who fail of perfecting Christian character, and therefore fail of heaven, has been ruined through the neglect of parents properly to educate and discipline their children. The greatest number of church trials is the result of the inefficient and grossly neglected work of parents in training and properly educating their children to self-control and correct principles. Many children are not taught how to yield their wills. They only know how to storm it through at any cost. This spirit will ruin any church. And it is a deplorable fact that too many profess to be Christians who have not been converted. Said Christ, "Except ye be converted, and become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom

of heaven" (Matt. 18:3, KJV). He then gives lessons in regard to His church. . . .

The neglect of parents is in not teaching their children from the cradle to submit their wills and their ways. Children are left to grow up self-willed, stubborn, irritable, self-sufficient, and really independently ugly. Bring these spirits together in church capacity, and how can there be peace and unity and the love and patience necessary to the prosperity of the church? Nine tenths of all the church difficulties are attributable to the neglect of parents in disciplining and molding the minds of their children in their childhood. What an account will parents be called to render to God for their sinful neglect? . . .

Indulgence and petting and gratification of children have ruined them not only for this world, but for the better world. Children should be educated to become staunch men of nerve, of self-control, of patience, of self-denial. These qualities of character are highly essential for those who fill important positions in the church and in society as men who can be depended upon, who have mental and moral power. May God roll this burden upon mothers and fathers who are neglecting their work in their families at home. . . .

THE IMPORTANT DUTIES OF A MOTHER

A mother's work is a most solemn and important one. She may not lay it down for any other work, but she may engage in other work if she takes along her home duties, teaching and training her children also. A mother's duties are not half felt or understood. Were the responsible position of mothers felt, how careful would mothers be in the training of their children! Her duty to her children is above the minister's. The mother's work is second only to the work of God. Mothers may do a very great work for this world and the next in properly training their children that they may grow up strong, pure men and women. In order for a mother to be fitted for this great work, she must look well to her own mind and deportment. She needs to be fully developed herself, evenly balanced, calm, not easily excited to give way to feeling. The more perfect the development of the mother, the more even and well balanced her mind, the more calm and unexcited her deportment, the better is she fitted for her motherly duties and the more surely will her labors bring forth the same mold of mind as her own. If the mother is illy developed, if she is hurried and excitable, peevish, dictatorial, and exacting, her children will reflect the same character.

Some mothers dislike the discipline it gives them patiently to teach their children how to do little duties and cultivate in them a love for these duties, which love shall grow up with them. Some think children of seven and eight years old are too young to have their tasks assigned them in sewing, in washing dishes, in mending neatly their own garments, in making beds, and sweeping and dusting. But to let the children grow up unused to these important habits of useful labor, with the thought that they will take to it by and by, is a sad mistake. These duties neglected in childhood will be found in youth and womanhood an irksome task, and the child that with proper training might mature into a pleasant, useful woman will, by occupation, be turned into a drudge.

Any child is happier to be employed. Her well-earned play will be all the sweeter after her task is ended. What can the mother be thinking of to neglect the training of her children? For the mother to do the disagreeable work while the daughter takes a bit of work of no real need makes the daughter selfish, or confirms her in her selfishness. If children are allowed to come up to think that work must be shirked, they will despise industry as a specie of slavery; but the mistaken mother, who in her tenderness has suffered this, will be despised for her neglect when the daughter feels her real need of knowledge in practical life. . . .

Oh, that mothers would open their eyes to see, and their hearts to understand! The seed for good or evil the mother first plants in the soul. The home and the nursery are the first school for children, and the mother is the teacher. Here it is the mother's first duty to teach her children the dignity of work. This will not degrade them, but fit them for any position in life. Our girls need to become thoroughly educated to understand that labor gives dignity and nobility to woman and makes her a queen. Mothers, I saw, were responsible for the inefficient, dawdling women in society, whose daily lives are marked with emptiness.

Seventh-day Adventist believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This excerpt was taken from Manuscript 8, 1875, in *Letters and Manuscripts*, vol. 2, p. 363, pars. 33-36, 41-43, 54.

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REFLECTIONS ON MOTHERHOOD

Motherhood is often not what is imagined or expected, yet these mothers would not trade their experience.



MOST CHALLENGED

LOUISE WOO

Motherhood is the greatest task I have ever undertaken as a woman. I always wanted to be a mother, even from childhood. Growing up as an only child, I felt such loneliness that I determined that, whenever possible, no child should be without a sibling. Naturally, then, I wanted many children. After having my first child, I realized that, despite being in my 30s at the time, I was not as ready to have a child as I thought I was. Then we had our second child and, surprisingly, a third.

Some of my greatest challenges have stemmed from being far away from close family and friends. While I met my husband in America, we moved overseas to start our family, so I did not have a strong support system. Trying to make connections while sleep-deprived and with children in tow was a lonely and challenging journey. Nonetheless, I have grown with my children in love and faith.

Having God at the center of our lives has been the greatest comfort. Being a Seventh-day Adventist with the Bible as our utmost guide and the writings of Ellen White to keep us in line and reassured of the path we're taking has brought encouragement along the way. Moreover, God has added the blessing of incredible friends, both in the faith and outside it. They all, in their own ways, have shown me how to love and love on my children better.

Louise Woo is a stay-at-home mom living in Australia with three children.

I WOULDN'T HAVE IT ANY OTHER WAY

MARVENE THORPE-BAPTISTE

What am I going to do with you, little one? I whispered as I held my precious bundle in my arms for the first time. How were two imperfect beings supposed to take care of this perfect innocent child? With mixed feelings I knew right then that the Lord would have to be our guide.

That was more than 35 years ago, and three more children followed that first birth. As I look back, there seems to have been a never-ending stream of doctor's visits, meal preparation, finding lost socks, shoes, toys, and homework, among many other issues. Constantly trying to meet the many and varied needs of four different individuals was a challenge. But I made it, by God's grace and the immeasurable input and support of a wise and patient husband.

Besides their physical and social well-being, we were responsible for our children's spiritual development. My husband and I were deliberate in introducing them to a loving God through daily family devotions, welcoming and closing the Sabbath together, reading Bible stories, and studying the Sabbath School lesson with them.

Looking back, I often think about what we could have done differently with respect to their spirituality, and I would encourage anyone to be deliberate about demonstrating the joy of loving and serving the Lord. Emphasize God's grace and mercy. Make more time to talk with them and answer questions about spiritual matters. Be flexible, creating more avenues to make participation in spiritual things less of a chore and more of a wonderful experience. If your teenagers want to lounge on the floor during worship, maybe it's not the end of the world—be happy that they choose to be there and are willing to listen.

It was interesting to witness the squabbles among the siblings and then watch them collectively stand up to the neighborhood bully. During their younger years my job as mediator, peacekeeper, and disciplinarian had to be balanced with fairness. And because of their individuality, whatever measure was meted out to one almost certainly could not be applied to the other. Some say parenting gets easier as children grow older. I disagree. The various challenges presented by my preteen and young adult children drove me to my knees more often than I'd have imagined. Talking to God was the only way to guide them and preserve my sanity.



Some say parenting gets easier as children grow older. I disagree.

Coupled with the challenges were the many joyful moments of shared activities, laughter, creative play, observing their antics, and overall enjoyment of interacting with each other. The memories created on the extended family trips and church camping expeditions were precious. Today, even though they are grown with kids of their own, we often spend the Sabbath hours together. I am proud of them, their accomplishments, and their parenting skills.

I'm always thrilled that they would choose to return home to celebrate birthdays and holidays. It's not uncommon to hear familiar strains of "Who said you could take that bedroom?" or "This was my room" ringing through the house. "Why are they here? Don't they have their own homes?" my husband mischievously asks. To which I respond: "They're here because their mama lives here." Truthfully, I wouldn't have it any other way.

Marvene Thorpe-Baptiste is the assessment coordinator at *Adventist Review*.

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I couldn't change my circumstances, but I could, by God's grace, change my mindset.



JOY RETURNS

ARIEL HINKLE

It was yet another one of those days. I was exhausted, burned out, drowning in the mundane tasks and stresses of the day-to-day, and, quite honestly, not enjoying my life. I loved my children deeply, but I was merely going through the motions of motherhood and homemaking without my heart in it. I shook my head wearily. It hadn't always been this way. *How did this happen?*

I've wanted to be a wife and a mother for as long as I can remember. I dreamed about it as a girl, and in academy I prayed for my future husband (whoever he might be) every night. When I was in college, I even told people that although I was studying for a career, my real goal in life was to be a wife and a mother. All the while I envisioned sweet, snuggly babies, a beautiful home, and days filled with books, laughter, fun crafts, and baking cookies together. I would be the perfect, happy mom.

Fast-forward a few years. I was married to a wonderful husband, and we were blessed with four beautiful children. But with endless loads of laundry, piles of dishes, sibling squabbles, pressures of ministry, financial struggles, waking up multiple times a night with our baby, then wrestling a toddler while homeschooling my two oldest children, my reality looked a lot more messy, lived-in, and difficult than the one I had imagined. The always-happy optimist, I was now stressed, grumpy, and overwhelmed.

But that day, when I looked up and saw the overwhelming tasks once again, something shifted inside me. I couldn't change my circumstances, but I could, by God's grace, change my mindset. Right then and there I asked God for help and determined to choose thankfulness and joy in every situation, whether I felt like it or not.

That simple shift in mindset gave me back the joy of mothering. Do I still have hard days? Absolutely! But now, instead of falling into the path of discouragement, I can choose joy. The hard will always be there, but when we look for reasons to be thankful, they are all around us! When we train our minds to choose joy before frustration, thankfulness before complaint, it is truly a gift. Ellen White said it perfectly: "Home must not lack sunshine. . . . The home should be to the children the most attractive place in the world, and the mother's presence should be its greatest attraction."[1] As mothers, we are the proverbial thermostats of our home. Our children will match our attitude. I want my home to be filled with joy, thankfulness, and sunshine. And that starts with me!

Raising tiny humans is truly the most important work on earth. Not only are we raising them to be kind, capable, caring adults who love the Lord, but we are also raising them for eternity. A big challenge? Oh, yes. But not impossible! "If mothers would go to Christ more frequently," Ellen White writes, "if they would trust Him more fully, their burdens would be lighter, and they would find rest. Jesus knows the burden of every mother. He is her best friend in every emergency. His everlasting arms support her."[2] We are not alone! When you feel as if you're overwhelmed and have reached the end of your motherhood means, lean on Jesus. His joy is our strength (Neh. 8:10). He will help you to choose joy and thankfulness in every circumstance. And that simple shift in mindset can change your whole world. It certainly changed mine.

Ariel Hinkle is a stay-at-home mom living in Arkansas with her husband and four children.

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BEHOLD

ISAÍ ALMEIDA MCGRATH

The words patient, gentle, calm, and wise often do not describe my "mothering." I will overreact about a little mess, yell at my kids to stop yelling, and ask my son to be patient with his little sister when minutes before I was not so patient with him. Thankfully, God's work in me is not done, and He has been teaching me an important lesson about His work in my children.

Mothering as a Christian brings a new level of responsibility. Not only are we preparing our children to be civilized adults and valuable members of society, but we are preparing them for an eternal life with God. We must teach them more than arithmetic and reading, more than good hygiene practices, more than how to navigate this world. Our task is to teach them about our all-powerful, loving, Creator God, and foster in them the desire to love Him and to seek to do His will. That is a huge responsibility! Thankfully, with this responsibility comes a promise: "I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go" (Ps. 32:8).

Unfortunately, it's easy to forget His promise and look elsewhere for solutions to our perceived problems. With so many books on parenting and with easy access to a plethora of parenting blogs, we can get lost in a sea of advice from other "experts." I have tried new ways of explaining and reasoning with my children, different consequences that will deter unwanted behavior, a variety of incentives to promote good behavior. Among questions I've asked myself are: *How do I teach them to be happy when doing what they are asked? Why can't they get along? How do I teach my kids to be kind to others? How do I keep them from lying? How do I keep them from sneaking sweets?*

Then I had a realization as we were singing the fruit of the Spirit children's song one day: "If you want to be a mango, you might as well hear it, you can't be the fruit of the Spirit . . ." All the behaviors we were struggling with paralleled the fruit of the Spirit. It dawned on me that no matter how many different ways I found to discipline or offer positive reinforcement, the only One who could truly transform their character and give them love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control was the Holy Spirit. My only responsibility was to bring my children to God. "By beholding we become changed."[3] I had studied 2 Corinthians 3:18 so many times but had failed to see its application with my own children. How many times had I put them to bed after a tough day, skipping over our Bible story and straight to prayer because I was so spent and ready for them to go to sleep, not realizing that it was the time reading God's Word that would ultimately bring about a change in them. "For it is God who works in you both to will and to do for His good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13). Only God can make a real, lasting change in our children, and I can lead them to Him.

I may have some experiential advice on what has worked for my kids in specific parts of our journey, but I am far from an expert, and many times I am a good example of what not to do. But what I can do is remind you that God is the one who works in our children's hearts, and He has promised mothers that He "will renew their strength. They will soar on wings like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint" (Isa. 40:31, NIV). I rely on this promise daily.

Isaí Almeida McGrath is a teacher living in Michigan.

[1] Ellen G. White, The *Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 21.
[2] Ellen G. White, *Daughters of God* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1998), p. 195.
[3] Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1900, 1941), p. 355; see also 2 Cor. 3:18.

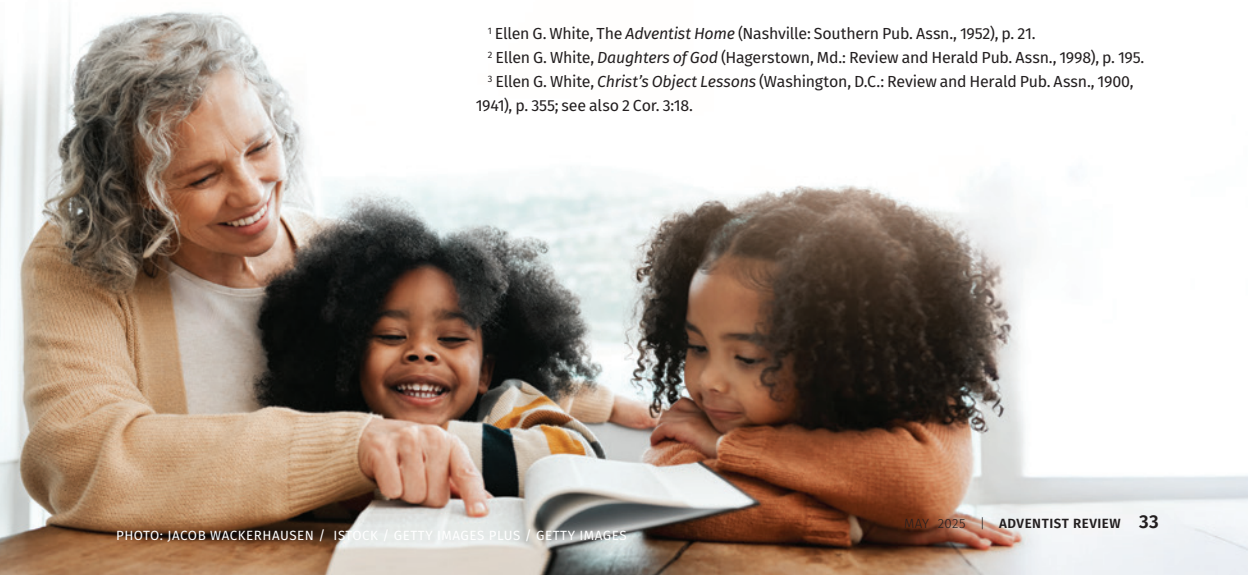
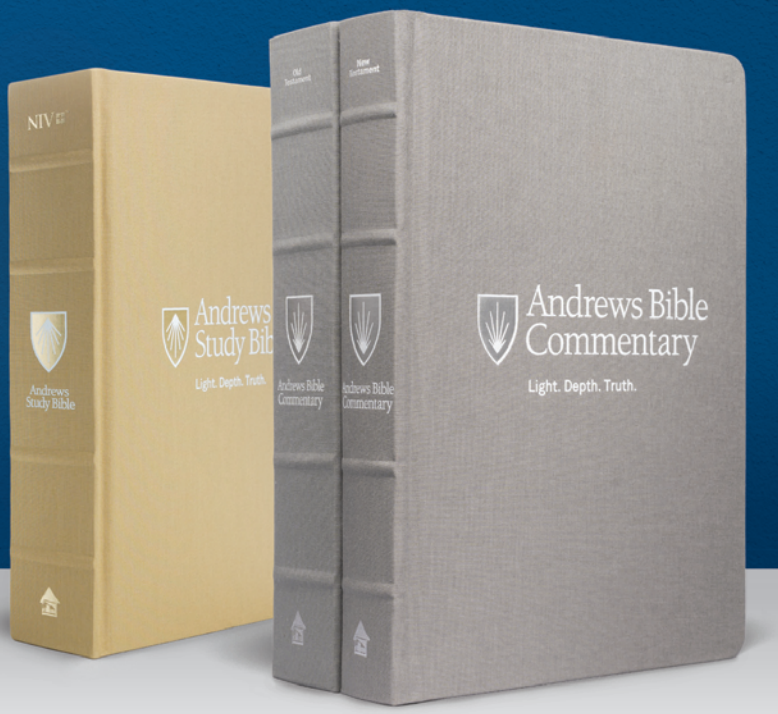


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A "JUST" RELIGION?

The minimization of Christianity

I long ago lost track of how many times I've heard them. And each time I hear them, deep inside I cringe. To what wince-worthy assertions do I refer? The kind that make unfortunate use of the word "just": "God longs to hear your prayers—*just* a few minutes a day will make Him smile!"; "God loves it when we spend time in His Word—*just* a verse or two a day will give us all the strength we need!"; "There's a world to be reached for Christ—*just* a few minutes a week in service to others would turn the tide in God's favor!" I feel nauseated just writing that.

To be clear, what keeps well-intended Christians repeating these "just" statements is that they contain a tiny measure of truth. In the case of a thawing atheist, for instance, God really is thrilled when they pray for just a few seconds. For the child who's just beginning a meaningful relationship with Christ, He really is thrilled if they read just a few verses a day.

But here is where the efficacy of "just" squarely ends. Because for any Christian of experience, a religion built on "just" is not merely inadequate, but profoundly pernicious.

Can you imagine what the early Christian church would have been like if Jesus had called the disciples to spend "just a few minutes a week" in service to others? Can we even remotely conceive of how different our lives today would be had Jesus committed to spend "just a few minutes a day" in prayer with His heavenly Father?

How about the Advent movement? What if James and Ellen White and J. N. Andrews and Uriah Smith and a hundred other Adventist pioneers had sought to give "just a little" to God and His end-time mission? What would the church have become in their day? What would have been the state of the church's ministry and witness to the world?

And what of us today? What if most of us today (unlike our pioneers) were to choose a "just" religion and minimize our commitment to God and His work? Hmm. My guess is that attendance at our churches would probably shrink to half of book membership. Only a small percentage of church members would likely engage in meaningful and regular Bible study, prayer, or sharing Christ with others. A shortage of candidates for pastoral ministry would almost certainly develop. Church schools across the land would likely start struggling for adequate funding. Public evangelism would probably become rare. And our growth rates, were it not for first-generation immigrant ministry, would probably become small or even negative in some locales.

THE PIONEERING PASTOR
SHANE ANDERSON



FULL COMMITMENT TO CHRIST AND HIS CAUSE IS THE ONLY PATH TO TRUE FREEDOM, FULFILLMENT, AND A FINISHED WORK.

Which sounds eerily familiar, doesn't it? Indeed, where found, the tepidness of the church in the West today is all too often the direct result of a "just" religion.

If your heart and schedule are fully God's today, amen! And if not, remember afresh: Full commitment to Christ and His cause is the only path to true freedom, fulfillment, and a finished work. A "just" religion is not worth living. But those who lose their life for Christ's sake will find it, and so much more.

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

ARt

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



MOTHER—QUEEN OF HER HOUSEHOLD

The king upon his throne has no higher work than has the mother. The mother is queen of her household. She has in her power the molding of her children's characters, that they may be fitted for the higher, immortal life. An angel could not ask for a higher mission; for in doing this work she is doing service for God. Let her only realize the high character of her task, and it will inspire her with courage. Let her realize the worth of her work and put on the whole armor of God, that she may resist the temptation to conform to the world's standard. Her work is for time and for eternity."*

"Her children rise up and call her blessed; Her husband also, and he praises her" (Prov. 31:28).

* Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), pp. 231, 232.

ACRYLIC PAINTING

MOTHER'S LOVE

CHILEUWA CHIEMELA CHINAHU (CHI'S ART), 2024

She carries galaxies within her womb,
A universe of hope, a life in bloom.
Stars align where her heartbeat sings,
Cradling dreams on celestial wings.
She stands with strength, soft yet bold,
A story of love in whispers told.
Her touch, a light in midnight skies,
A lullaby where sorrow dies.
Through storms and nights so vast and deep,
She guards her child, no need for sleep.
For in her arms the cosmos sways,
A love unbroken, beyond all days.

Chileuwa Chiemela Chinahu, a Nigerian artist specializing in realistic and surrealistic art, uses various mediums to express emotions and convey powerful messages. Recognized for his talent by Channels Television and multiple exhibitions, he has won awards, created art for notable figures, and continues to inspire through his work and artistic journey. **Instagram:** @chisart_official **Facebook**: Chi's_Art_Official

POEM

PRAYER

BY SARAH GANE BURTON

I am heartsore inside my everyday bones that creak and crack, bent over cartilage frame still fusing together. She is growing at a rate I cannot measure in steps and words and sounds and thoughts she has not uttered or explained. I am heartsore for the infant child who is now toddler child who will never again be a newborn in arms.

I am heartsore knowing she will fall someday and I will not be there to pick her up and kiss her broken skin and soothe her wounded pride.

I am heartsore over the words that will come flying from the mouths of others, missiles of anger and unkindness aimed at her loving heart.

I will myself to live beyond, to transport my soul to all the places I cannot be. But my soul only reaches so far within the confines of my body before it meets the resistance of muscle and bone.

I cannot protect her forever.

Promise me that You will.

Sarah Gane Burton holds an M.A. in Religion from Andrews University. She is a freelance writer based in Berrien Springs, Michigan, where she lives with her husband, Kevin, and their two children.

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.

For more Adventist art, visit **adventistreview.org/category/perspectives/art/.**

REDEFINING THE PATIENCE OF THE SAINTS

The importance of everyday choices

JOHN SIMON

I anticipate some hairs might stand on end in reaction to the title of this article. To anyone who may be inclined to warn me against rewriting Scripture, I assure you I am emphatically uninterested in and unworthy to change anything bestowed to us by the Holy Spirit through the inspired prophets. Instead of redefining, maybe it is more accurate to say I will be rephrasing, or at least reexamining, the profile of the patience of the saints from alternative angles.



THE PATIENCE OF A SAINT?

There is a circumstantial reason for my thoughts going in this direction. When I phased out of standard employment and into freelance editing and writing, I knew one of the issues with which I needed to wrestle was medical insurance. However, I grossly underestimated how much of a hassle it would be. In short, I am thankful that everything was resolved, though it was not before a four-plus-hour phone call with an agent from a particular carrier and, one by one, a multitude of agents from the Marketplace.

It was the latter that roused my ire. The Marketplace kept swapping agents until someone was finally competent enough to figure out my "unique" situation, as if I were the only one who ever made this kind of career transition. It was a completely different matter with the carrier agent. He was a gem of a man and a consummate professional throughout this phone call, prior phone calls, and follow-up phone calls. We had a mutual respect, which he confirmed about halfway through our mini marathon by thanking me for having "the patience of a saint." This was possibly the most mind-stirring compliment I ever received.



We had a mutual respect, which he confirmed about halfway through our mini marathon by thanking me for having "the patience of a saint." This was possibly the most mind-stirring compliment I ever received.

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On the outside, I simply thanked him for the kind sentiment. On the inside, it was a different story; not completely different, for I did genuinely appreciate what he said, though I disagreed with it. As composed as I may have seemed, I was silently boiling. I had so many better things I could do with that much time besides frittering it away with a phone glued to my ear. I definitely did not regard myself as a patient saint.

With that said, beyond thinking, *Thanks, man, but you are* so *wrong*, I did process his comment on another level. I was convinced that this was not an accident but instead an unexpected opportunity for Jesus to teach me a lesson. Perhaps it is time that I—we—devote more prayerful consideration to unpacking the full extent of the meaning of Revelation 14:12, rather than just systematically inserting it into our Bible studies and evangelistic seminars.

FRUITS OF THE SPIRIT

As we know, one of the identifying factors of the end-time saints is that they keep the commandments of God. This is indispensable. In many ways this brief code, which the Lord wrote with His own finger, covers the gamut of what it means to embody and reflect the holiness He originally intended for and labors to achieve in His followers. However, the Bibles we possess do not consist of just Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 5. We have 66 books by approximately three dozen inspired writers, which seems to suggest our heavenly Father deemed it necessary to supply a more expanded blueprint for how we are to live according to His will, especially in these last days.

Along a particular vein, I recommend thinking of the Ten Commandments and the fruits of the Spirit (see Galatians 5:22, 23) as happy marriage partners. Love is the first fruit, and Jesus made it clear that this principle, the essence of His character and identity, is the bedrock from which the two tables of stone were carved (see Matthew 22:37-40; Mark 12:30, 31; Luke 10:26-28). Joy is second on the list. Psalm 1:2 is one of the verses that hinges this fruit to the commandments. James 1:2 also comes to mind.

When we extrapolate the connections we have made so far to Revelation 14:12 and the context in which it is set, it is difficult not to conclude that the end-time saints will, through faith *in* and the faithfulness *of* Christ, and with a lot of practice, cultivate a pedigree of counting all things joy.

The tumult that is about to unfold will be unparalleled by any other event from this planet's historical record. Two ghastly beasts will soon team up to use economical fetters and the threat of death to coerce us into betraying our Savior.

We will need divine vision to see the silver linings that trace those dark clouds. We will need patience, another fruit of the Spirit, which will specifically define those who are sealed instead of marked, to endure the heavy onslaught of the enemy of our souls. More broadly than this, we will need a supernatural supply of agape love flowing from our hearts. The saints will keep the commandments of God because they love God (see John 14:15).

THE GREAT CONTROVERSY MOTIF

Scholars and laypeople have generally agreed that chapters 12-14 constitute the apex of Revelation, for literary and thematic reasons. This passage contains a high concentration of the great controversy motif. Within these short chapters we see a snapshot of the very beginning of this cosmic conflict between Michael and the dragon, as well as the end of the conflict, when their respective followers are unmistakably delineated once and for all.

Something the Holy Spirit has helped me recognize over the years is the sometimes overwhelming ubiquity of the great controversy. It is this backdrop that incorporates every facet of our lives. Though it by no means compares to what will transpire upon the fulfillment of the prophecies of Revelation 13, that four-hour phone call I described earlier was a spiritual mini battle.

If anything, that realization humbles me in a solemn way. That insurance agent's kind, sincere compliment may be even more inaccurate than I initially thought. Will I stand the most titanic test of faith any human has ever encountered if I had so much difficulty putting up with the perceived incompetence of some bureaucratic administrators?

Part of me prefers forgetting that episode because my internally flustered response makes me uncomfortable, but looking back on where we fell short is perhaps our best education. Many positives came from the experience. On a basic level, we sorted out the confusion, and I obtained a really good policy, which is a gift from God. More than that, He taught me some valuable



One of the identifying factors of the end-time saints is that they keep the commandments of God. This is indispensable.

principles I can carry with me moving forward. He also provided what is obviously the springboard for this article, which I pray will benefit my brothers and sisters as they traverse the turbulent yet worthwhile path of faith and strive to reach Eden restored.

There is a reality, related to the pervasiveness of the great controversy, that must continually keep us on our toes. Whether a life event is the size of Pluto the dwarf planet, Pluto the animated dog, or one of his fleas, the devil will use anything, and I mean *anything*, to derail our progress. That insurance call could have been a more significant barrier to my eternal welfare if I had not allowed the Lord to utilize it as a means of fiery refinement. I am as guilty as anyone else is of treating sin in a casual way, though I am grateful that He has quickened my response to its serious import. A snowflake has a minuscule bearing on its own, but an avalanche is a conglomeration of individual flakes that clung to one another before the sun could melt them.

THE IMPORTANCE OF EVERYDAY CHOICES

Please allow me to go back to a phrase I just used a moment ago: "on our toes." Let's quickly reference Judges 7. We will not dissect the whole account, but ponder only one specific detail. God commanded Gideon to reduce the size of his army twice: from 32,000 to 10,000 to 300. He achieved the second reduction through an odd test—drinking water from a brook.

One can ask, "Is there really any significance, moral or otherwise, to lying down in a pond?" In a vacuum, no. However, my foundational argument is that for the Christian, there might not be anything that exists in a vacuum. This account did not occur in a vacuum. These 10,000 soldiers were on the brink of war, and only 300 of them kept themselves in a posture of readiness, while the rest unwittingly placed themselves in a position of unnecessary vulnerability and defeat, thus disqualifying themselves from continuing the march. It behooves us to follow the example of the 300, especially since we are embroiled in a more crucial war than were Gideon and his fellow Israelites. When we are on our bellies and faces, Satan will pounce, but when we are on our knees, he will retreat.

At the outset of this article, I indicated that I was not going to actually rewrite Revelation 14:12. However, I need to honestly assess the times I may have done so in the past, and I challenge

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Ezekiel 36:26 and Romans 12:2 are a couple examples of the biblical evidence that highlight the fact that God's objective is to change us from the inside out.

readers to do the same. It is possible that many of us have, subconsciously at least, formulated our own versions. "Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that" x, y, or z.

It is imperative that we consistently respect one another, understanding that different people reach different convictions, especially lifestyle-related, at different times. With that said, it is just as imperative that we (personally and, within reasonable boundaries, collectively) do not underestimate the ramifications that our choices in day-to-day domains have on our preparation for the final scenes of earth's history and subsequent translation to God's magnificent abode.

Ezekiel 36:26 and Romans 12:2 are a couple examples of the biblical evidence that highlight the fact that God's objective is to change us from the inside out. Since He never makes a mistake, this is certainly the best method. However, it does undergird why, when I do reflect on that phone call or other related incidents, I am prone to focus more on how I did *not* emulate His character than on how I did. The carrier agent expressed appreciation for my poise, and that's fine, but how much does that external display matter if the internal reality did not correspond?

EXPERIENCING VICTORY

Without mentioning names or critiquing every nuance, I own a recording of and have listened to a revival series crafted by a well-respected preacher. He has delivered it countless times across the United States and internationally. I have derived quite a bit of spiritual benefit from it. One of his theological pillars is shaped by 1 John 3:4 and the linguistic and conceptual leaning toward sin as "lawlessness" rather than "the transgression of the law," thus emphasizing that sin and sinfulness are just as much, if not more, matters of condition than of behavior. I would conclude this is reasonable.

However, I became concerned with how far this preacher would sometimes take this premise. During the series he recounted the testimony of a man who, along his voyage to making Jesus his Savior and Lord and signifying it by baptism, labored to put smoking behind him. When conversing with a friend, he stated it had been many months since he last puffed a cigarette, but only about 20 minutes since he wanted one. The preacher deduced that this man had not yet attained victory.

Being a believer in the inside-out dynamic, God does want to take us to the stage where our weaknesses and sinful propensities no longer hold any sway over us. On the other hand, I also believe that that man was experiencing victory as he, through the empowerment of the Holy Spirit, said no to those cancer sticks, even when his cravings screamed yes.

Over the years I have concluded that the Bible has threads of paradox running through it. Jesus is fully human yet fully divine. Not by design, but because of the sin problem, death "begets" life, which is typified in the corn kernel and exemplified on Calvary. Perhaps that is what we are witnessing here. As God is performing His long-term work of transforming us, there is evidence that He is simultaneously executing some short-term work as well.

LEANING ON CHRIST

As I gain more practice in facing situations similar to or much worse than that four-hour phone call, I must lean on Christ and let Him reproduce His nature in the entire me—mind, heart, eyes, ears, mouth, hands, and feet. As mad as I got with those Marketplace agents and their convoluted protocol, the calmness I maintained is still a feather in our High Priest's miter, for I know I would not have been as calm when I was younger. I still need a lot of work, but His work is working.

We must press forward toward the goal of assimilating the profile of Revelation 14:12, and to do so, we must develop a more comprehensive perspective of this profile. That includes not taking the otherwise mundane aspects of daily existence for granted. Let us earnestly pray that the Lord will use all our decisions, reactions, and interactions to mold and shape us into the beautiful vessels He desires us to be; and let us commit to not getting in His way.

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REACHING GENERATION Z WITH THE GOSPEL

Sharing Christ with a digital and diverse generation

RODNEY PALMER

In giving the Great Commission, Jesus charged the disciples to "go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you" (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV). This command has not changed, but every generation presents new challenges in carrying out this gospel mandate. One such generation with which the church must effectively share the gospel is Generation Z (Gen Z), which James Emery White describes as "the most influential religious force in the West and the heart of the missional challenge facing the Christian church."[1]

WHO ARE THEY?

Born roughly between the mid-1990s and early 2010s,[2] Gen Z "is the most racially and ethnically diverse generation of American adults to date. Not only do more identify as Black, Hispanic, or Asian, but there are more multiracial Gen Zers than in any previous generation. Gen Z will likely be the last generation where any one racial group is in the majority in the United States."[3] This generation is described as digital natives because they were exposed to the internet and digital devices from a tender age. Their tech-savvy upbringing has significantly influenced their communication style, learning patterns, and information consumption habits. Unlike previous generations who might have been closely tied to Christian values, Gen Z is less likely to have a Christian background and may not feel strongly connected to traditional religious institutions, such as churches. Gen Z identifies as spiritual, prioritizing a personal relationship with God or a transcendent being over adherence to a structured set of beliefs, practices, rituals, or formalized religion.

REACHING GEN Z WITH THE GOSPEL

Based on the characteristics of Generation Z, there is an obvious need for an intentional strategy to communicate the gospel to them. The church must go beyond traditional methods to reach this generation while maintaining sound biblical principles.

Establish authentic relationships: Gen Z is known for its authenticity-seeking nature, and it's only through genuine relationships and personal connections that the church can build and maintain trust with this generation. These authentic and intentional connections open the door to sharing the gospel in a way that resonates with them. One of the best ways to do this is by creating a space where they feel safe to ask tough questions—without worrying about being judged. Barna advises, "Churches must be a safe haven for wrestling with doubts and difficult questions, a place where the next generation can seek truth and learn together."[4] Furthermore, although Gen Z dedicates much of their time to establishing online connections, they still crave in-person human connections. Many of these young people struggle with questions of meaning, mental health, and purpose, and need spiritual guides who will walk alongside them, offering guidance, support, and encouragement. As Ellen White notes: "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me.' "[5] By following Christ's example, the church can establish authentic relationships with Gen Z and show them that we care, ultimately opening the door for deeper conversations about faith.

Show and tell: Those who seek to share the gospel with Gen Z must practice what they preach. This is in keeping with James's call for believers to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). The trustworthiness of the message is enhanced when Christians are credible witnesses to the gospel they seek to communicate. Gen Z is always watching and can spot hypocrisy a mile away. How we engage with those who hold differing views and respond to challenges as professing Christians will open doors for gospel conversations with Gen Z or close them. Ultimately, your actions speak louder than your words.

Tell stories: Storytelling is a powerful tool for sharing the gospel with Gen Z. This generation is eager to explore how their stories connect with those of others and the grand story of the Bible. Through the art of storytelling, Gen Z will come to understand that the God of the Bible is personal and present and longs to be powerfully active in their lives. The 2024 UCLA Gen Z report reveals that Gen Z prioritizes "uplifting and inspiring content, consistently selecting stories about 'beating the odds' as their favorite storyline. For the third consecutive year, these 'hopeful' and 'inspirational' themes outpaced topics like romance or societal

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In reaching Gen Z for Christ, the church must be willing to adapt its approach without compromising the eternal truths of the gospel.

issues, emphasizing a generational preference for resilience and optimism in storytelling."[6] Based on these findings, there is an excellent opportunity for sharing the gospel by telling stories of faith, perseverance, and transformation that align with Gen Z's desire for hope and inspiration. Use biblical narratives to tell stories of individuals who overcame adversity, such as Joseph, Ruth, and Paul. Here is also a great time to share our personal testimonies of God's ongoing work in our lives.

Contextualize the message: Contextualization of the gospel is essential when sharing the message with Gen Z. We need to understand their worldview, meet them where they are, and share the gospel in authentic and relational ways that connect with their daily experiences. Avoid using complex theological concepts and jargon that they will not readily understand, as this generation has a high rate of biblical illiteracy. In sharing the gospel, use real-life examples and relatable language while emphasizing the present benefits, joy, hope, peace, and purpose of living in a relationship with Jesus. YouTube and TikTok are practical tools for sharing the gospel with Gen Z, who value these social media platforms for their "relatable, unscripted content that aligns with how [they] see themselves and their world."[7] Sound contextualization will serve as a bridge that connects biblical teachings with the contemporary concerns of Gen Z.

Equip them: Churches should provide Gen Z with the necessary resources to support their spiritual growth. Through intentional small group activities, healthy multigenerational connections, and a vibrant discipleship program, this generation will be empowered to take ownership of their faith journeys and, in turn, articulately share their faith with their peers and others. As Ellen White points out: "With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Savior might be carried to the whole world."[8] In the final analysis Gen Zers are best equipped to share the gospel with their peers.

Pray, pray, and pray: The entire process of sharing the gospel with Gen Z must be grounded in prayer. When we pray, we must ask the Lord to open opportunities for us to share the gospel and for the Holy Spirit to bring about conviction in the lives of these adolescents. Ben Jack advises that we must "pray for opportunity, pray for wisdom, pray for clarity, pray for salvation, pray for healing, pray for forgiveness, pray for discernment, pray for compassion, pray for boldness . . . pray for humility. Pray, pray, pray."[9] Such patience and persistence in prayer is essential, as each Gen Zer is at a unique stage in their faith journey. While some will respond quickly to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, others will take longer to commit their lives to Christ.

A FINAL CHALLENGE

Although sharing the gospel with Gen Z presents many challenges, the church has an excellent opportunity to share the gospel with this generation. In reaching Gen Z for Christ, the church must be willing to adapt its approach without compromising the eternal truths of the gospel. Christ is depending on us to pass the baton of faith to Generation Z. We cannot afford to let it fall. May it never be said of us what was said of Israel: "After a while the people of Joshua's generation died, and the next generation did not know the Lord or any of the things he had done for Israel" (Judges 2:10, CEV).[10] Instead, let us prayerfully rise to the challenge of ensuring that Gen Z not only hears the gospel but also experiences the transforming power of Christ in their lives.

[1] James E. White, *Meet Generation Z: Understanding and Reaching the New Post-Christian World* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker, 2017), p. 11.

[2] According to the Barna Research Group, Gen Z includes individuals born between 1999 and 2015, while the Pew Research Center defines the generation as those born between 1997 and 2012.

[3] Jean M. Twenge, *Generations: The Real Differences Between Gen Z, Millennials, Gen X, Boomers, and Silents—and What They Mean for America's Future* (New York: Atria Books, 2023), p. 346.

[4] Barna Group, *Gen Z: Volume 2* (United States, Barna Group, 2021), p. 60.

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

[6] https://www.britopian.com/generation/gen-z-ucla-study/

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 271.

[9] Ben Jack, *If Jesus Is the Answer, What Is the Question?* (Sandycroft, U.K.: Equipping the Church, 2021), p. 5.

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

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CHURCH IN THE DUST

True worship extends beyond comfort and tradition.

We enter church with a cloud of dust. The 70-plus children from our Sabbath School program stampede into church following us, wiggly and giggly, despite our best efforts to remind them to be quiet and respectful. We pack in tight. Flies swarm.

Older kids find sticks to keep the younger kids in line; babies cry and fall in the dust; children chew on unripe mangoes, rice bits, their clothes. I feel a breeze come through the open door and am thankful, knowing that in just a few short weeks hot season will begin, when the air doesn't move, and it will feel hot and heavy in the church.

I allow my mind to wander with the breeze, remembering how church used to be . . . wearing my best outfit, with clean feet in clean shoes, hair curled, smelling nice. Every song is beautifully sung, and the tune is always carried. I am blessed by the sermon, which I can fully understand. Church was restful, comfortable. A child kicking dust into my shoes brings me back to the present.

My feet and shoes are shades darker than they were when I left the house this morning. I can't sing the opening song because I am learning French, the language used only by those who have been educated, and in this congregation few have had that privilege. The song faintly resembles "In the Sweet By and By," though the tune varies and modulates as the song continues.

The kids, who make up more than 90 percent of the congregation, are antsy. Pigs run around outside; a dog wanders in and lies down in the aisle. It feels like another world. There are Sabbath mornings when I wake up and crave going to a church where I can fully understand everything going on and being said, where I know my feet will stay clean for the entire experience, where I can just sit in the pew and be fed and I won't have to struggle to tell Bible stories in a foreign language or decipher the sermon. But these days I am learning what church truly is.

Church is more than going somewhere where I "feel" comfortable or "feel" blessed. Sometimes church means that I am the blessing, whether I feel it or not. Church isn't always restful; here, it is action-packed. Church is getting to tell children Bible stories they've never heard before; it's singing praises to Him in languages other than my mother tongue. Church is hand gesturing with the thin elderly woman who is asking me for food and making a plan to get food to her. Church is recognizing the infected abscess on a child's head, or the impaled foot, or the infected knee, and giving the needed treatment "gratuit," or free of charge, because these people cannot afford basic medical care. Church is bandaging the bloody wound of a member who had a seizure during Sabbath School. Church is about ministering to the body of Christ in a very real and sometimes raw way. Here, church feels almost apostolic; it's stripped of everything extraneous and reveals what truly matters. It's not pretend or pretentious. It's not a show, but a showering of love that can come only from the One who looks beyond the outward appearance and loves us for what we can be in Him.



BEYOND BORDERS
KATIE WATERBROOK

CHURCH IS ABOUT MINISTERING TO THE BODY OF CHRIST IN A VERY REAL AND SOMETIMES RAW WAY.

Katie Waterbrook is serving abroad with her family as a nurse and mom to three.



THE UNSEEN FRUIT OF OUR LABOR



Planting seeds and producing fruit for His kingdom

THORSEN HAUGEN

PHOTO: PIYASET / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

Holding my first-ever evangelistic series, in contrast to any previous public speaking I had done, was drastically more daunting. Intimidated by the prospect, after committing to the series, I made a string of excuses and put it off for a full six months beyond the date I'd originally set. There were bona fide challenges, though—deciding what material to use that would match my personal style, determining the advertising strategy, figuring out how to fit everything into my busy work schedule, and all sorts of other logistical details.

Eventually I realized that unless I committed fully, it would never happen. Accordingly, I set a firm date, took some time off work, and asked a local printing company to mail 10,000 flyers. Backing out became impossible.

Being a head-and-neck surgeon at a 594-bed academic medical center, I worried what my patients and colleagues would think about receiving a religious flyer with my smiling photo on it. Jesus warned us the gospel would bring division, and I didn't know what response I would receive.

I also worried about being prepared, since I'd opted to write my own series. As the date of the evangelistic series approached, I poured myself into the effort. For more than a month I saw patients and operated during the day, then came home and wrote sermons late into the night. My ever-supportive wife worked equally hard. We made every preparation we could think of—a nightly drawing and giveaway; gift Bibles for attendees; free child care with crafts and activities; advertising on social media; and special music arrangements. On closing night, to go along with the sermon topic of health, we even provided a healthy vegan meal.

I also started personally inviting people. A Jewish neurotologist in my department told me he would come, as did several of my patients. The Sabbath afternoon before opening night, my family and I walked through the community, praying for the Holy Spirit to move on hearts.

We had done our best.

MEETING MAGGIE

One notable patient I invited was a cancer patient named Maggie. She was in her 50s, homeless, and looked as if she'd led a hard life. The first time we met, she had just been life-flighted for a

I knew what mattered was that I had done my best to honor God, but it was hard not to be at least a little discouraged.

critical airway. Every breath was a struggle. A CT scan showed her larynx had been replaced by a massive tumor. This was not only making it hard for her to breathe but also making it impossible for her to be intubated or placed under general anesthesia. Unless I quickly performed an awake tracheotomy, she would die.

Maggie had terrible anxiety, so as we rolled straight into the operating room, I held her hand while trying to reassure her. After injecting her neck with lidocaine, I quickly began cutting. Lying on her back made her airway worse. She panicked and, in desperation, grabbed my arms and tried to climb off the operating table. There was no choice but to immediately complete the surgery.

Hold her down! I shouted.

I still have a vivid picture of the relief on her face as I cut into her airway, and she was finally able to fill her lungs with oxygen.

Every time I saw Maggie on rounds, she was effusive about my being her favorite doctor. I later performed a laryngectomy with bilateral neck dissections to remove her cancer. She recovered from surgery and was discharged from the hospital with the expectation that she would be back for radiation, which was an important part of her cancer treatment. Unfortunately, she attended only a couple of sessions with the radiation oncologist before disappearing.

Then she began sporadically showing up at my clinic. To be more accessible, I have the habit of giving patients my personal cell phone number. Giving Maggie my number, however, began to feel like a mistake when she started texting almost daily, multiple times a day. I remember that for a period of about two weeks, I even received a picture of her phlegm each morning.

At one point I determined to tell her to stop texting unnecessarily, but then she showed up again at my clinic with a coloring book she'd colored for me, a small plastic container full of candy, and a card declaring, once again, that I was her favorite doctor. My heart softened, and I relented. Eventually her text messages simply became part of my life.

She wanted to attend my evangelistic series, but lived too far away and couldn't get a ride. "But save me a Bible," she texted.

COUNTING FRUIT

On opening night my nerves were on edge as I waited to see if anyone would show up. My church family was supportive, but only a small number of non-Adventists attended. Nonetheless, I put my heart into it.

True to his word, my Jewish colleague attended faithfully and afterward would speak animatedly with me about whatever topic I'd preached on. I was particularly interested in what he would think about the night entitled "Jesus the Messiah." To my great disappointment, he didn't show.

Another patient, the wife of a local Baptist pastor, attended. My wife her asked what she thought about the Sabbath. She acknowledged the truth of the Sabbath, but continued going to church on Sunday.

It seemed, in some way or another, the story was the same for everyone.

There were a few highlights. A nurse told me she had decided to follow the Bible's dietary instructions, and her 5-year-old daughter, who also attended, was now checking all food packaging to make sure there were no pictures of pigs.

But on closing night, when I made an altar call, there were no baptisms. I knew what mattered was that I had done my best to honor God, but it was hard not to be at least a little discouraged. There had been months of exhausting effort and significant expense. I'd had faith, my family and I had prayed and prepared, but when it was said and done, our efforts seemed fruitless.

Maggie, of course, was still sending her daily text messages. I sent her a link to the evangelistic series on YouTube, and she was delighted. She informed me that she had watched every video repeatedly, and the number of views suggested it was true.

COUNTING AGAIN

Six months passed. The evangelistic series and my disappointment over how it had turned out faded into a memory. It had also now been more

than two years since I'd operated on Maggie, and despite her failing to complete her cancer treatment, she seemed to be doing well. She hadn't shown up at my clinic in a long time, but I still received her regular text messages. Then one day Maggie informed me she felt sick and was going to the Emergency Department. A short time later a text popped up on my phone: "My cancer is back." Maggie had gone to a nearby hospital, but I was able to access her records, and sure enough, her body was riddled with cancer. A few days later she was discharged to home hospice care.

I knew Maggie had only a short time to live, so I decided to visit. She had been my patient for more than two years and had become a part of my life. One Friday afternoon my family and I drove an hour and a half down winding backroads, far into the countryside. Maggie was staying in a trailer park with a sister. When we pulled up, her sister, cigarette in hand, opened the door and led us to Maggie's room.

Maggie was too weak to get up, but her eyes lit up when she saw me. I told her I was sorry her cancer had recurred. Because of her laryngectomy she couldn't speak, but mouthed, "It wasn't your fault." I gave her the promised Bible from the evangelistic series, and asked if she was at peace and if she believed in God. Maggie nodded yes. We took a picture together, just as she had asked me to do at many of her office visits. Then, before leaving, I said a prayer with her.

Three nights later I received a text from Maggie's sister at 2:03 a.m. It simply said, "She's gone." Even though I knew it was coming, it hit me hard. Truthfully, despite Maggie having become such a part of my life, I knew little about the details of her life. I knew only that life had been hard for her, that she was simple, and that she'd departed the world with little fanfare.

"I hope God has a special place in His heart for people like her," I told my wife. "If only I'd done more," I went on. "I wish I'd told Maggie all about Jesus before she died."

"But you did," my wife whispered. Suddenly I realized what she meant, and unexpected tears sprang from my eyes. The truth was that I'd preached my heart out to Maggie. In fact, I'd poured months of effort, my own finances, and all my energy into sharing Jesus with her. She had watched every single video from my evangelistic series dozens of times. Maggie knew about the validity of Scripture, about Bible prophecy, about sin and God's law, and about salvation and what Jesus did for us. She knew about what happens when you die, about the Second Coming and the resurrection, and all the other topics I'd covered. And when I asked her if she believed—only a few nights before her last breath, she had nodded yes.

In that moment, any lingering disappointment over my evangelistic series was transformed into the sort of joy that breaks your heart. Unbeknownst to me, my labors had produced fruit. I saw that God did have a special love for Maggie, and He had sent me.

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UNDER SIEGE

Marriage, family, and the great controversy

JASMINE FRASER

In an age of rapid change, confusing or shifting identity, and apathy to Christian values and commitments, few areas of our lives remain as embattled as that of marriage and the family. As the sanctity and purpose of marriage are being devalued, the nature of the internal dynamics of family relational encounters fluctuates, contributing to mental, emotional, and spiritual instability for individuals. At the same time, external stressors, such as socioeconomic challenges and pressure to keep up or conform to deluding cultural and technological entrapment, often leave many devoid of the resources necessary for wholistic well-being in marriage and family relationships. Both internal and external factors affect the functioning and welfare of individuals and families. While we all struggle to make sense of familial existential nuances, I believe looking beyond the daily visual toil to unseen cause and effect is necessary. Through the lens of the Christian worldview, the struggle individuals experience in marriage and family can be seen as an affront to the image and character of the Creator God.

THE DIVINE-HUMAN ENCOUNTER

Central to the Christian worldview of marriage and family is the belief that "marriage was divinely established in Eden" and is "to be a lifelong union between a man and a woman in loving companionship." This union forms the family unit, and this "marriage commitment is to God as well as to [one another]."[1] In essence, marriage and family are not only at the foundation of human history but also symbolically the foundation of the divine-human encounter. Beginning in the creation narrative, marriage and family are expressions of the image of God, which includes the relational attributes of the Godhead. In the beginning, God introduces Himself as the foundation of family, declaring, "Let Us make man" (Gen. 1:26). We see evidence of God creating both the man and the woman, blessing them, and giving them a purpose (Gen. 1:26-28).

Throughout Scripture familial terms such as "God as parent relating to the children of Israel, Christ as groom in relation to the church as bride, and the Holy Spirit indwelling and empowering believers to be brothers and sisters in the Lord"[2] are used to illustrate the divine-human relationship. The establishment of marriage and the family unit became one of the crowning acts of God's creation. Both the creation of the Sabbath day of rest and the establishment of marriage and family are instituted by God as emblems of His image and Lordship.

LIES AND DECEPTIONS: THE ROOT OF SIN AND BROKENNESS

The embattlement of marriage and family over the years resulted from the Fall. When the first family came under siege by deception, lies, and entanglement in the blame game instituted by the devil, the family unit began to chafe under the burden of sin and brokenness. The institution



of marriage and family was intended to promulgate the relational characteristic of the Godhead, engendering love, intimacy, and empowerment whereby individuals continually thrive and grow in the image of the Creator. But the union and unity of marriage and family were ruptured through devilish insinuations by the enemy of God.

Through distrust, deception, and disobedience, the trajectory of human flourishing disintegrated after the Fall (Gen. 3). The consequence of the Fall causes us, especially Christians, to be painfully aware that "all humanity is now involved in a great controversy between Christ and Satan regarding the character of God, His law, and His sovereignty over the universe."[3] This "conflict originated in heaven when a created being, endowed with freedom of choice, in self-exaltation became Satan, God's adversary, and led into rebellion a portion of the angels."[4] Unfortunately, the great controversy is more than a cosmic saga between good and evil or between God and the devil. Sadly, it has become personally embedded in our hearts and continues in our world today through various encounters, but predominantly in the context of marriage and family relationships.

The devil targets marriages and families as part of his strategy to undermine the Creator's Lordship and plans for His creation.

A RAY OF HOPE FOR MARRIAGE AND FAMILY

In the struggle between good and evil, the devil targets marriages and families as part of his strategy to undermine the Creator's Lordship and plans for His creation. But the promise to put enmity between the arch deceiver and the first family and their offspring (Gen. 3:15) remains a ray of hope and an escape from the ominous clutch and fate of lies and deception. This ray of hope is frequently reiterated in the pages of Scripture (see Isa. 9:6; 56:7, 8; Eze. 34:26, 29-31; John 3:16; 17:17; Eph. 3:9-11; Rev. 21; 22) and throughout the ages and has been the foundation of reparation, reconciliation, and restoration in the midst of familial mayhem.

Now, as we endeavor to live simultaneously in the aftermath of this cosmic delusion, Christ's

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Christ has pronounced His favor and blessing on the institution of marriage and family.

redeeming act, and the promise of restoration, we do well to consider and embody the divine blueprint for marriage and family. Scripture repeatedly tells us that marriage is to reflect the union between Christ and His church. This divine mystery symbolizes the depth of God's love and commitment to us individually and collectively as a church—His body—and is expressed through sacrificial love in His death on the cross. Christ's demonstration of love and commitment is the model to be emulated within the context of marriage. Marriage and family relationships are to mirror the love, holiness, intimacy, and permanence of the relationship between Christ and His church and are to be built on mutual love, honor, respect, and responsibility. Yet, with the repercussions of sin and perpetuated brokenness across generations, this demonstration of Christlike love and commitment is often a challenge for many today.

DECREASE SCREEN TIME, INCREASE FAMILY TIME

Though marriage and family values are continually being diluted by shifting cultural and religious schisms, it is incumbent on us as Christians to unswervingly practice and hold fast to God's ideal for marital and familial relationships. As we are guided by Scripture, we can begin to relinquish the cultural, religious, and spiritual apathy that minimizes or marginalizes the divine mandate for marriage and family. Our response as faithful followers of Jesus is to affirm the sacred embodiment of marriage and family while actively developing resources and contexts in which individuals may grow and thrive.

Despite the challenge to model Christlike love and commitment in marriage and relationships, we all can take hope in Christ's promise to help us in times of need. A man and a woman who desire and endeavor to be committed to each other in marital union can experience loving unity through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and the support and nurture of a caring faith community. Parents may take courage and seek guidance in God's Word as they face the challenge of training their children for the glory of God. Christ has pronounced His favor and blessing on the institution of marriage and family, and He intended for the family unit to be a place in which individuals empower one another to become their best selves for the cause of the kingdom of God. Christ enables and assures us that He "will never leave [us] nor forsake [us]" (Heb. 13:5; Deut. 31:6) and that He will "save to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25) as we continue to turn to Him in times of need.

One way in which individuals can surpass secular influences that minimize the sanctity and value of marriage and family relationships is by endeavoring to reduce screen time and increase family quality time together. We cannot deny that there are benefits tied to increased technology that, if used wisely, contribute positively to our existential well-being. Many individuals and families, however, know the painful effects of the misuse of technology. Family time is an invaluable resource with exponential benefits for healthy and lasting marriages and families, and we should prioritize quality family time.

The hustle and bustle that comes with multiple work assignments can supplant necessary times of family togetherness. But making time for family togetherness and bonding can simply begin during mealtimes. Additionally, parents are encouraged to "deny themselves some slight self-gratification in time and leisure, in order to mingle with [their] children."[5] For some families the moments before bedtime can benefit both parents and children as they take "pajama-bedtime story walks" around the neighborhood. The increased benefit of these moments is that parents get some exercise while nurturing faith and bonding with their children. When individuals and families endeavor to invest their time wisely for the glory of God and the empowerment of one another, the influence of the devil is weakened, the image of the Creator becomes more distinct, and God's kingdom on earth becomes more like it is in heaven.

[1] "Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church," https://www.adventist.org/beliefs/.

[2] Jack O. Balswick, Judith K. Balswick, and Thomas V. Frederick, *The Family: A Christian Perspective on the Contemporary Home*. 5th ed. (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Baker Academic, 2021), p. 6.

[3] "Official Beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church."

[4] *Ibid.*

[5] Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 220.

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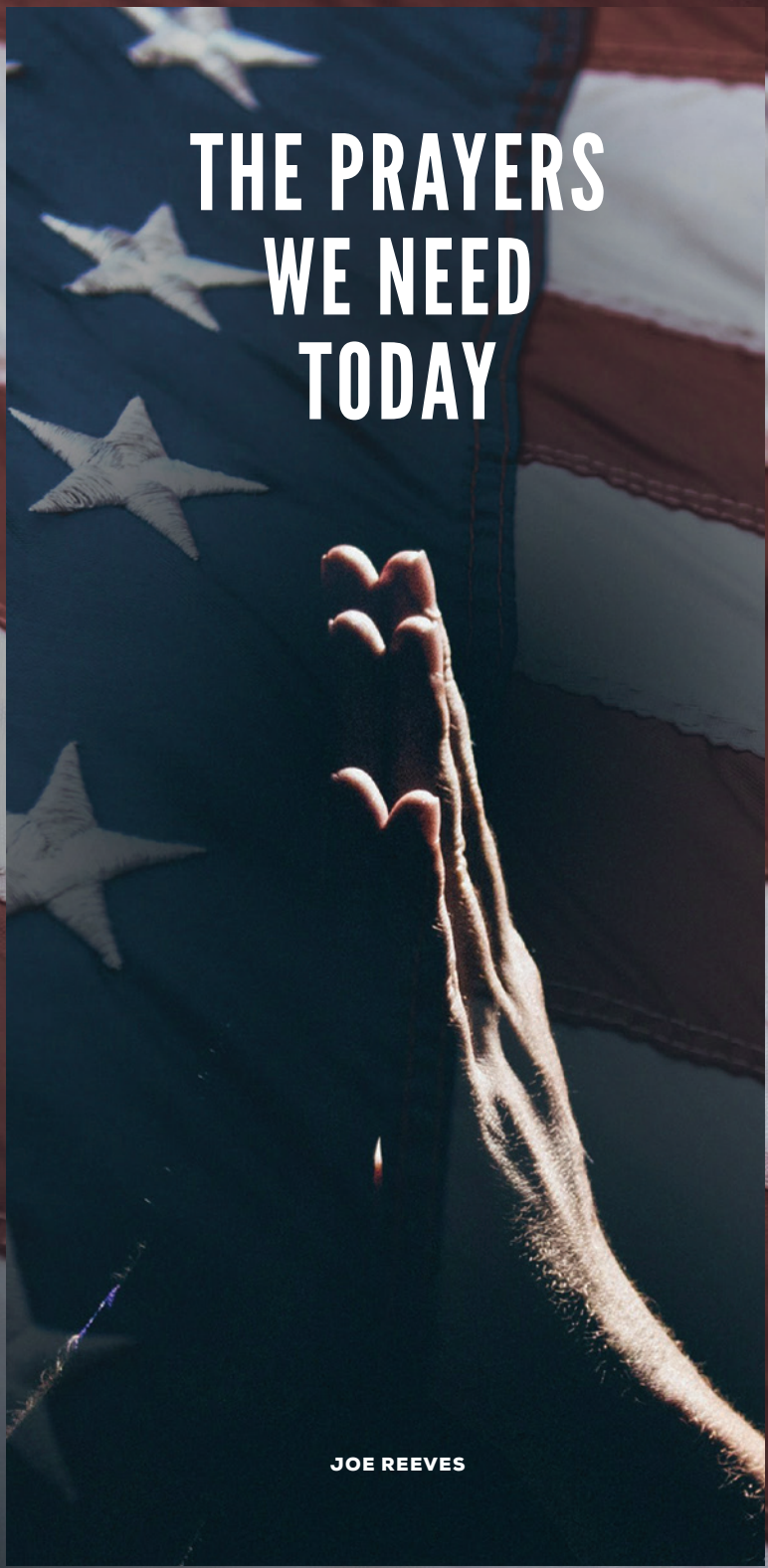

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THE PRAYERS WE NEED TODAY



JOE REEVES

AMAURY GUTIERREZ / TIM MOSSHOLDER

May 1, 2025, marks the seventy-fourth National Day of Prayer in the United States. A day earmarked for the recognition of the power of prayer. A day Americans are encouraged to pray for the nation.

In praying for peace in America, we follow the example of Jeremiah, the Old Testament prophet, who urged God's people to pray for the peace of Babylon. Jeremiah 29:7 says, "And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace."

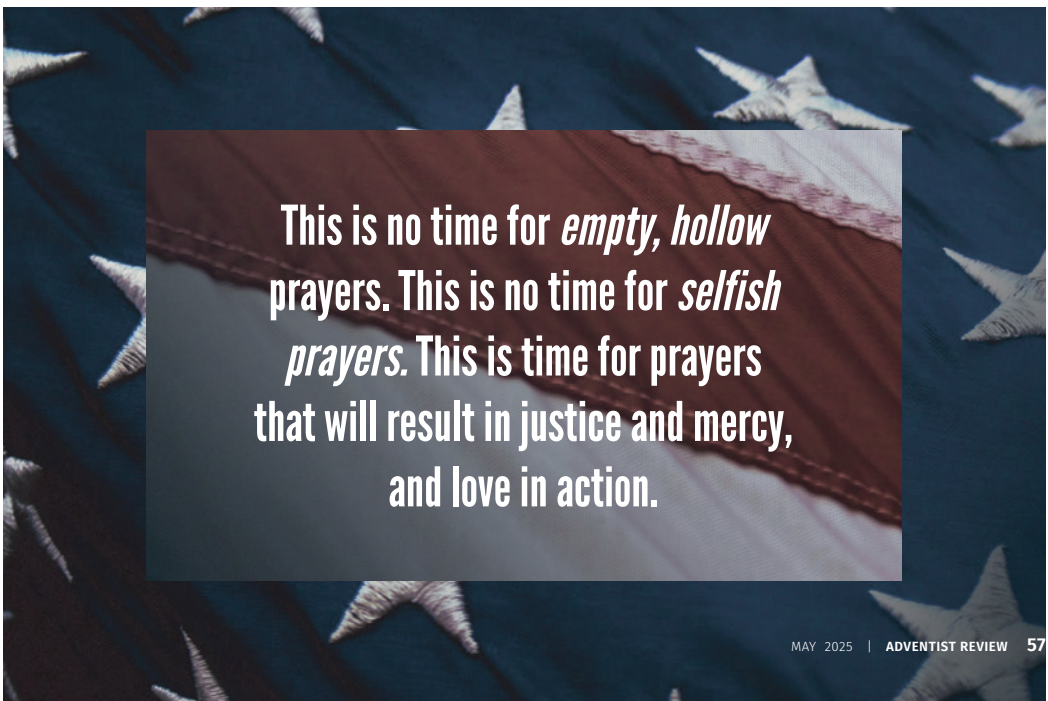
This is an astounding verse given the perverse nature of the Babylonian government. Babylon was a wicked and corrupt heathen government. It was an extremely powerful empire guilty of some of the worst crimes. They pillaged and plundered weaker kingdoms. They abused their position of power and took advantage of the poor (see Dan. 4:27). Babylon split up families and took children away from their parents (Jer. 31:16, 17). The Babylonians publicly executed innocent people (Jer. 52:10, 11) and mutilated the bodies of those who were left, even poking out the eyes of some, such as King Zedekiah (Jer. 52:11). Babylon was filled with pride and was defiant toward the God of heaven (Jer. 50:29; Dan. 5:23). And yet in spite of Babylon's sins God says to pray for Babylon: "And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace" (Jer. 29:7).

If God invited Israel to pray for Babylon, would He not welcome our prayers for America today? In spite of its sullied record, America needs the prayers of God's people today as much as Babylon needed prayer back then. Did you know that some of America's presidents have struggled to know how to pray for America because of its sins? How and what, then, are we to pray for?

IT'S COMPLICATED

On March 4, 1865, only 41 days before his assassination, President Abraham Lincoln gave his second inaugural address. In his speech he acknowledged that during the American Civil War, though both the North and the South prayed to the same God and read from the same Bible, they did not always see eye to eye. "It may seem strange," he said, "that any men should dare to ask a just God's assistance in wringing their bread from the sweat of other men's faces, but let us judge not that we be not judged."[1] Speaking of the Confederates and the Union, he said, "The prayers of both could not be answered—that of neither has been answered fully."[2] He continued later in the speech, "Fondly do we hope—fervently do we pray—that this mighty scourge of war may speedily pass away."[3]

Some of you have read these words carved in stone on the north wall of the Lincoln Memorial.



If you've read the speech to the end, you know that President Lincoln waded into some pretty deep theological waters at the end of his speech; suggesting that God may require that as much blood be spilt by the bullet and the bayonet as had been spilt by the slave whip. This was no boasting speech! Lincoln seemed to recognize that the prayers of both sides were compromised.

He acknowledged the sins of the nation not only in his second inaugural address, but also in 1861, when He proclaimed a National Day of Prayer shortly after the Battle of Bull Run, the first major battle of the war.

In proclaiming August 12, 1861, a National Day of Prayer, Lincoln wrote, "Whereas when our own beloved country, once, by the blessing of God, united, prosperous, and happy, is now afflicted with faction and civil war, it is peculiarly fit for us to recognize the hand of God in this terrible visitation, and in sorrowful remembrance of *our own faults and crimes* as a nation and as individuals to humble ourselves before Him and to pray for His mercy—to pray that we may be spared further punishment, *though most justly deserved*."[4]

Meanwhile, Ellen White was not very happy about this National Day of Prayer. Not because it was wrong for Congress to request a day of prayer, nor because she thought the president was wrong to proclaim a National Day of Prayer. Rather, she expressed disapproval of the hypocrisy of so many congressmen and generals in the North who had supported slavery and were, even at that time, returning slaves to their masters.

She wrote in 1862:

"I saw that these national fasts were an insult to Jehovah. He accepts of no such fasts. The recording angel writes in regard to them: 'Ye fast for strife and debate, and to smite with the fist of wickedness.' I was shown how our leading men have treated the poor slaves who have come to them for protection. Angels have recorded it. Instead of breaking their yoke and letting the oppressed go free, these men have made the yoke *more galling* for them than when in the service of their tyrannical masters."[5]

This is a pretty shocking statement—that the Northerners were treating the slaves worse than the Southern slave owners! She describes their cruelty as such: "Great men, professing to have human hearts, have seen the slaves almost naked and starving, and have abused them, and sent them back to their cruel masters and hopeless bondage, to suffer inhuman cruelty for daring to seek their liberty. Some of this wretched class they thrust into unwholesome dungeons, to live or die, they cared not which. They have deprived them of the liberty and free air which heaven has never denied them, and then left them to suffer for food and clothing. In view of all this, a national fast is proclaimed! *Oh, what an insult to Jehovah!*"[6]

She then quotes from Isaiah 58:6, highlighting the kind of prayers that we need today. "Is not this the fast that I have chosen: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?"

Then she adds, "When our nation observes the fast which God has chosen, then will He accept their prayers as far as the war is concerned; but now they enter not into His ear. He turns from them, they are disgusting to Him."[7]

HOW TO PRAY

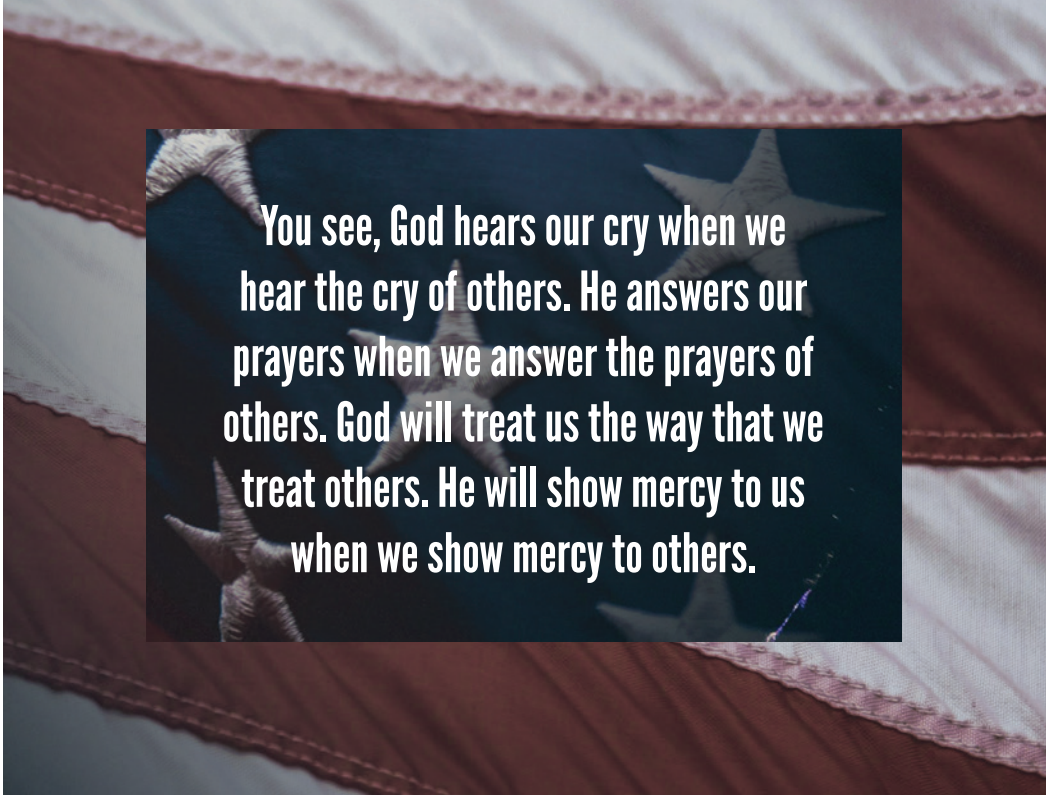
Today we want to utter prayers that God can accept. In the 1860s God was not waiting for America to make a prayer proclamation—He was waiting for America to make an emancipation proclamation (which happened on January 1, 1863).

You see, God hears our cry when we hear the cry of others. He answers our prayers when we answer the prayers of others. God will treat us the way that we treat others. He will show mercy to us when we show mercy to others.

This is not my theology. This is what Jesus Himself taught in the Sermon on the Mount: "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy" (Matt. 5:7).

On April 30, 2024, I had the privilege of attending the North American Division's eighteenth Religious Liberty Dinner in Washington, D.C., where Senator Susan Collins shared some thoughts on religious liberty and the work of Seventh-day Adventists. I never thought I would learn a new Spirit of Prophecy quote from a United States senator. But I did! Senator Collins shared an Ellen White quote that I had not remembered. She quoted from *Christian Service*: "Every act, every deed of justice and mercy and benevolence, makes music in heaven."[8]

I don't know who shared that quote with Senator Collins or how she found it, but if she learned only one quote from Ellen White, I am happy for this to be the one, because today the world is looking for justice, mercy, and benevolence (love



in action). This is no time for *empty*, *hollow* prayers. This is no time for *selfish prayers*. This is time for prayers that will result in justice and mercy, and love in action.

What kind of prayers for America does God need today? The same kind of prayers that were needed in ancient Israel:

"Is this not the fast [or the prayer] that I have chosen:

To loose the bonds of wickedness,
To undo the heavy burdens,
To let the oppressed go free,
And that you break every yoke?
Is it not to share your bread with the hungry,
And that you bring to your house the poor who are cast out;
When you see the naked, that you cover him,
And not hide yourself from your own flesh?
Then your light shall break forth like the morning,
Your healing shall spring forth speedily,
And your righteousness shall go before you;
The glory of the Lord shall be your rear guard.
Then you shall call, and the Lord will answer;
You shall cry, and He will say, 'Here I am' " (Isa. 58:6-9).

This is God's desire for His church, for this country, and for His children around the world.

This is our prayer! This is our cry!

Lord, we thank You for raising up this great country, the United States of America. You have been very merciful and very kind! You have blessed this country, far beyond what we deserve. Help Seventh-day Adventists in America to be discerning people who will defend the truth, not compromising a single inch. But also, help us to have hearts overflowing with love more than ever before! May You protect this country and give us peace to the extent that Your mission may be accomplished through Your people in proclaiming and demonstrating Your character of love to the world. We pray in Jesus' name, amen.

[1] Lincoln's Second Inaugural Address, https://www.nps.gov/linc/learn/historyculture/lincoln-second-inaugural.htm, accessed Feb. 27, 2025.

[2] *Ibid.*

[3] *Ibid.*

[4] Proclamation 85—Proclaiming a Day of National Humiliation, Prayer, and Fasting, https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/proclamation-85-proclaiming-day-national-humiliation-prayer-and-fasting, accessed Mar. 7, 2025. (Emphasis supplied.)

[5] Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1948), vol. 1, p. 257. (Emphasis supplied.)

[6] *Ibid.* (Emphasis supplied.)

[7] *Ibid.*, p. 258.

[8] Ellen G. White, *Christian Service* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1925), p. 268.

Joe Reeves is editor of *inVerse*, the Bible study guide for young adults produced by the General Conference Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department.



BETTER THAN HOME

Abiding in Christ

SILVIA BACCHIOCCHI

MORITZ KNORINGER



"If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our home with him" (John 14:23).

Have you ever felt so homesick that your stomach hurt? After my husband and I married, we moved to New York to start our graduate studies. Having spent most of our lives in the cozy farming town of Berrien Springs, Michigan, our relocation to the bustling heart of Manhattan was startling. On crowded streets and subway platforms people rushed by, their faces often stern and unreadable. Hardly anyone smiled. I longed for the familiar faces and gentle rhythms of home.

There is a world of difference between being surrounded by people and truly *connecting* with someone. There is a difference between a house and a *home*.

HOUSE OR HOME?

Throughout the Gospels we see the Jewish leaders preoccupied with their house—their beloved temple and human-made traditions. Their energies were directed toward building barriers of separation, obsessing over external rituals and, most of all, expecting the promised Messiah they believed would destroy the Roman yoke and restore the glory of Solomon's golden age.

Perhaps that's why, from the start, John's Gospel aims to set the record straight. John depicts Jesus as the living temple who came not to add grandeur to the house of Israel but to reveal a magnificent *home*—a dwelling that greatly surpasses the splendor of Solomon's temple: "Destroy *this* temple," Jesus said, likely pointing to Himself, "and in three days I will raise it up" (John 2:19).

THE INVITATIONAL CHRIST

In his prologue John emphasizes the nature of the abiding Logos: "And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us" (John 1:14). Here, the verb "dwelt" (Greek, *skénoó*) comes from *skēnē,* meaning a "tent" or "tabernacle," prompting some versions to say the Word *tabernacled* among us. In this imagery John heralds back to the Exodus sanctuary, where Yahweh desired to begin restoring the lost Edenic home union: "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them" (Ex. 25:8).

Through the sanctuary priesthood Jesus, the then-preincarnate Logos to whom the priesthood pointed, interceded for Israel and taught them

how to live righteously in light of the final restoration of all things. For more than three years now, the divine Temple has walked alongside them (John 2:19). He had been their teacher, friend, and home. They had learned to hang on His every word. After the heavenly manna discourse, when many disciples left Jesus, He asked the disciples if they also wanted to leave Him. Peter spoke for them all, saying, "Lord, to whom shall we go? *You have the words of eternal life*" (John 6:68).

John's Jesus is the invitational Christ—welcoming us home. The One whose nail-driven arms were outstretched on the cross, drawing all to Him, first extended His arms, saying: "Follow Me" (John 12:26); "Abide in Me" (John 15:4). These two invitations are imperative, meaning they are also essential requirements and quite possibly *the* most urgent demands of the Christian life. Each portrays a different aspect of the relationship Christ desires with His followers—discipleship and intimacy.

FOLLOW ME: DISCIPLESHIP

In John's first chapter the beloved disciple recounts the beginning of Jesus' ministry. We see John the Baptist publicly proclaim Jesus as "the Son of God" (verse 34) and "the Lamb of God who takes away the sin of the world" (verse 29). Upon hearing this, the Baptist's disciples, Andrew and John, quickly head to Jesus. They may feel a bit anxious, so rather than asking Jesus to clarify these grand titles, they engage in small talk and inquire where He is staying. Understanding their intentions, Jesus invites them, likely with a smile and a gesture of his hand, "Come and see" (verse 39). The following day Jesus finds Philip and motions to him as well: "Follow Me" (verse 43).

Jesus's call to "*follow Me*" is directed at each of us. Many of us know *about* Jesus, but following Him involves more than simply agreeing with secondhand information or endorsing an ideology. Following Jesus is the first-source *experience* of embarking on a lifelong journey with Christ, the one who assures us: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).

THE LOVE FACTOR

Following the way of Jesus involves an active journey with Him that encompasses three interrelated actions: listening, sacrifice, and service. The first step, (1) listening to Jesus, gives rise to (a) love for Him and (b) the desire to imitate Him. Consequently, we follow Jesus in performing what He did: (2) sacrifice and (3) service. Both actions stem from the God-given desire to align ourselves with truth and embody it through our actions. (This transformation comes from the Edenic promise in Genesis 3:15—of God's dual action of instilling in the human heart enmity to falsehood/evil and granting us the capacity to desire what is true/good.) As we listen to Jesus, His words invite us into a loving relationship that fuels our desire to imitate Christ in both sacrifice and service.

Listen-Obey. A disciple is a follower who listens intently to their teacher. The term for disciple (Greek, *mathétés*) derives from the Greek root *math-*, which means "mental effort needed to think something through." This suggests careful listening and connecting every scriptural truth claim into a larger picture, corroborating our lived reality. The Greek word for linking the parts to the whole is *suniemi*, which translates to "understanding." Once we grasp the truth as revealed in Jesus, we feel compelled to act upon it. Moreover, the Hebrew and Greek words for listening—*shema* and *hupakoé*—imply not only *listening* but also *obeying*. (This concept originates most powerfully in the Shema of Deuteronomy 6:3-9.) The implication is that if we pay close attention to God's Word, striving to understand Him, it will instill in us the desire to obey—an obedience for which God provides the strength to follow through (Phil. 2:13).

Love-Sacrifice. Walking with Jesus involves following His example of total surrender to the will of the Father, as demonstrated at Gethsemane and on the cross. The cost of discipleship—letting go of our old habits, worldly priorities, and even family and friends (just as the disciples did when they left their boats and families to become fishers of men)—becomes rewarding as we understand what we gain in return: fellowship with Jesus now and forever! For those who selflessly follow Him, Jesus promises "a hundredfold [in value of what they renounce] now in this time . . . and in the age to come, eternal life" (Mark 10:30). Moreover, as we walk with Jesus, He lightens our burdens: "For My yoke is easy and My burden is light" (Matt. 11:30).

Love-Service. To the disciples who were still competing for a prestigious position in the antic-

ipated national revival of Israel, Jesus clarified: "Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many" (Matt. 20:26-28). John is the only Gospel writer to recount that on the night of His betrayal, Jesus bent down like a lowly servant to wash His disciples' feet: "If I then, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also ought to wash one another's feet" (John 13:14).

The potential for disciple burnout is real. Knowing this, Jesus balances *Follow Me* with a second invitation: *Abide in Me*. He knew that after the rigors of service, His disciples needed a haven to come home to, a refuge of peace, a sanctuary of rest.

ABIDE IN ME: INTIMACY

Jesus knows His disciples are unprepared for His crucifixion and upcoming ascension, so on the night before His arrest, He prepares His friends for a new way of being together: "I go to prepare a place for you. . . . And I will pray the Father, and He will give you another Helper, that He may abide with you forever—the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees Him nor knows Him; but you know Him, for He dwells with you and *will be in you*. I will not leave you orphans, I will come to you" (John 14:2-18).

The *How* of In-ness: The Creative Word

Hallelujah! Jesus has promised to be *in* His disciples, including us, through the Spirit! But how? Is it through an infusion of grace via faith? Or is it, as liberal theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher stated, "a feeling of absolute dependence"? Not quite.

Jesus continues: "He [the Holy Spirit] will teach you all things, and bring to your remembrance *all things that I said to you*" (John 14:26). Then, in the next chapter, Jesus invites: "Abide in Me, and I in you. . . . If you abide in Me, and *My words abide in you*, you will ask for what you desire, and it shall be done for you" (John 15:4-7).

Aha! Jesus equates His own abiding with that of His words in us—the words that the Spirit would bring to our remembrance, the words of eternal life His disciples could not bear to leave (John 6:68)!

Ellen White comments on how God's Word unites humans with God: "The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the word of God. This word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God."*

How incredible is this? God's words in Scripture have *the same creative energy* that created the world, animals, and humans! The more we read, memorize, and believe Scripture, the more creative power we gain—the power to think and do creative things for God's kingdom!

THE *WHAT* OF ABIDING

So now that we know the *how* of abiding, *what* exactly *is* abiding? The word "abide" (Greek, *menó*) means to stay, dwell, and endure. There are three ways to abide—in place, in relationship, and in endurance.

Remain in a place. There is a sense in which this abiding in Christ is a place, a home of sorts. The psalmist says: "He who dwells in the secret place of the Most High shall abide under the

Following Jesus is the first-source *experience* of embarking on a lifelong journey with Christ, the one who assures us: "I am the way, the truth, and the life" (John 14:6).



TREVOR GERZEN

shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, 'He is my refuge and my fortress; My God, in Him I will trust' " (Ps. 91:1, 2). Later the psalmist calls Yahweh "your dwelling place" (verse 9). This dwelling place is Yahweh—His thoughts and teachings as revealed in Scripture. This is the secure place from which we gain wisdom to interpret the world and its ideas correctly and derive courage to go into the world and stand for truth.

Remain in relationship. In the immediate context of John 15, Jesus uses the analogy of a vine and branches: "I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit" (John 15:5). If the branch does not receive life nutrients (the words of Jesus) through the vine, it begins to die. Similarly, we need to drink up God's words daily. The beauty of this relationship is that it's mutual. As we drink up the nourishment of Jesus' words, He grows us and makes us fruitful!

Endure/persevere in growing: This is the concept of continuous growing/learning. Earlier Jesus said to the Jews who had believed in him: "If you abide [endure/persevere] in My word, you are My disciples indeed. And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:31). Here we see that having faith in Jesus is not enough; to be true disciples and know the truth, we must persevere in the knowledge of God's Word, trusting that in due time He will fulfill every promise!

Remember that only those disciples who persevere come to know the truth—and are set free!

PAINFUL PRUNING

Earlier in John, during the heavenly manna sermon, many disciples left Jesus, shaken by the idea of eating His flesh. But the twelve remained steadfast. Perhaps you've seen others abandon Jesus or misrepresent Him, tempting you to follow suit. Remember that only those disciples who persevere come to know the truth—and are set free! Or maybe you feel discouraged by the difficult trials you're facing. Remember Jesus' words: "I am the true vine, and my Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit He takes away; and every branch that bears fruit He prunes, that it may bear more fruit" (John 15:1, 2). Those trials and hardships you're experiencing may very well be a *reward* for your faithful perseverance so far—and will lead to even more kingdom fruit! Keep pushing forward!

JESUS' GREATEST DESIRE

After Jesus ascended to heaven, the disciples could no longer physically follow Him. Yet, through the gift of the Holy Spirit, they had Jesus in them, guiding them in an even more intimate way through His words and Spirit. Now their Best Friend was just a thought away!

However, this abiding union was still insufficient. Jesus' final prayer to the Father was that He might be reunited *physically* with all of us, His disciples: "Father, I desire that they also whom You gave Me may be with Me where I am, that they may behold My glory" (John 17:24).

FACE-TO-FACE FOREVER

In Revelation Jesus reveals to His beloved disciple the glorious final dwelling together. Here the verb "to dwell" (Greek, *skénoó*), which first appears in the New Testament in John 1:14, is mentioned three more times in relation to the heavenly dwelling (Rev. 7:15; 12:12; 13:6). John reserves the final use to depict the great climax of redemption history: "And I heard a loud voice from heaven saying, 'Behold, the tabernacle of God is with men, and He will dwell [tabernacle] [*skēnē*] with them, and they shall be His people. God Himself will be with them and be their God' " (Rev. 21:3).

Jesus, our living tabernacle, is now with us on the renewed earth, our glorious home! But it is even better than home. On that day, because of our earthly abiding in Christ, we will also abide in the very presence of God the Father Himself! John says, "I saw no temple in it, for the Lord God Almighty and the Lamb are its temple" (Rev. 21:22). Oh, beautiful words of life that welcome us into the living temple of Jesus, and continually transform us until we are fitted to stand in the presence of God—abiding forever with Jesus and the Father, in face-to-face union for all eternity!

* Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1903), p. 126.

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MISSING THE TRAIN

Beyond methods and projects

Yesterday it happened to me (Chantal) again. When we lived in the United States, we traveled mostly by car. Here in Germany we typically use trains. We live at the end of a metro line that takes us into the heart of Hamburg. At the main station we can easily change to regional trains for longer trips around the country or even internationally. After coming back from a long trip, I quickly made my way from my regional train over several platforms to catch my connecting metro train. Every minute counted. Unfortunately, the escalator wasn't working, and I had to struggle down the flight of stairs with my heavy hand luggage. I could see my train. It was already at the platform. I made a desperate dash for it, only to have the doors slam shut right before I could reach them. As I watched my train leave without me, I felt so frustrated. There's nothing like a missed opportunity, so near and yet so far.

This experience left us thinking about lost opportunities. Wherever we travel and engage with our many churches, there's always this eager anticipation, this desperate longing for growth. Tried and time-tested outreach possibilities or new creative ways of engaging with others are discussed and, although there are some success stories, there often seems to be a sense of frustration that our methods are not working as well as we would like them to—the slamming doors, the feeling of trains we have missed.

While we are concentrating all our energies on the big world of winning souls, it could be that we may overlook the people who are already in our churches or within our sphere of influence—the single mother struggling with small children in the service; the older person who really can't hear too well what's going on and feels left out; the unimpressive shabby visitor that slipped in to the back that we don't bother to connect with; the children who are sometimes seen more as a disturbance than the heartbeat of the church. Perhaps there are opportunities all around us we're just not seeing, as we are fully focused and concentrated on the things we think are our work and mission.

What would it be like if we asked God to open our eyes to see where He is already at work in our churches and in our communities? What if we weren't intent on winning people on our own terms with our own strategies and were ready to connect with what God is already doing? What if we concentrated on creating vibrant communities that were not dominated by a need to be right—places where we could afford to be real and know that we would still be accepted and loved? What if our churches were communities where our youth and children could feel a sense of belonging and not have to stand on the periphery?

These kinds of communities could be open magnets, drawing others into fellowship with us and our God. As we see the God-given opportunities around us, we will stop thinking of people as projects or baptismal goals, but as long-lost family members. That's one train we definitely don't want to miss!

TRANSITIONS
CHANTAL & GERALD KLINGBEIL



WHAT IF WE WEREN'T INTENT ON WINNING PEOPLE ON OUR OWN TERMS WITH OUR OWN STRATEGIES AND WERE READY TO CONNECT WITH WHAT GOD IS ALREADY DOING?

Chantal J. Klingbeil, Ph.D., and **Gerald A. Klingbeil**, D.Litt., have served the Adventist Church for three decades internationally as professors, TV host, editor, and associate director. They now live outside the beautiful city of Hamburg, Germany, where they serve in the Hanseatic Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

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ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL PETER N. LANDLESS

SCENTED SERENITY OR HIDDEN HAZARDS?

Some subtleties of aromatherapy

Q: A friend has convinced my wife that essential oil aromatherapy is a "good-for-everything" natural remedy, and she has gone on this essential oil binge to improve her mood and relieve her anxiety. I'm skeptical and concerned. Is this safe? (We are trying to have our first child and want to be super-healthy!

A: Aromatherapy is defined as "inhalation or bodily application (as by massage) of fragrant essential oils (as from flowers and fruits) for therapeutic purposes."[1] Essential oils from plants, such as lavender or peppermint, are typically added to diffusers or baths, or applied directly to the skin. It is heralded as a natural way to feel better and may be helpful, but it is not without risk.

Multiple studies suggests that lavender essential oil is generally safe, especially when inhaled, and offers a simple, affordable way to promote relaxation.[2] Many essential oils can be irritating to babies' skin and are highly toxic to pets, even in small amounts. To protect children and animals, avoid using essential oils in areas they frequent, and store them safely out of reach. Undiluted essential oils can cause skin irritation for adults as well, especially cinnamon or peppermint. Using a neutral carrier oil, such as coconut oil, can help prevent these reactions. Some oils, such as tea tree and eucalyptus, have strong scents that may trigger headaches or allergic reactions, particularly in individuals with asthma or sensitive airways.

Even when inhaled, essential oils interact with multiple body systems, including the immune and endocrine (hormonal) systems, and may affect pregnancy, fetal development, young children, and people with allergies, autoimmune diseases, and cancer, so please consult your doctor.

Aromatherapy, in general, does not cure illnesses or address underlying health issues, although it often enhances surroundings with pleasant fragrances. Natural remedies have benefits, but some individuals may overly rely on aromatherapy for emotional and spiritual healing instead of praying, seeking professional help, scriptural advice, and God's guidance, shifting focus from faith to physical tools. Also, concerns arise from its ties to mysticism, pagan rituals, and New Age spirituality, blending Eastern beliefs about energy and chakras. While such oils as frankincense and myrrh were used for anointing, worship, and healing under God's guidance, biblical use of oils was rooted, not in mystical energies, but in faith in God (James 5:14). We sincerely hope this helps you. SHALOM!

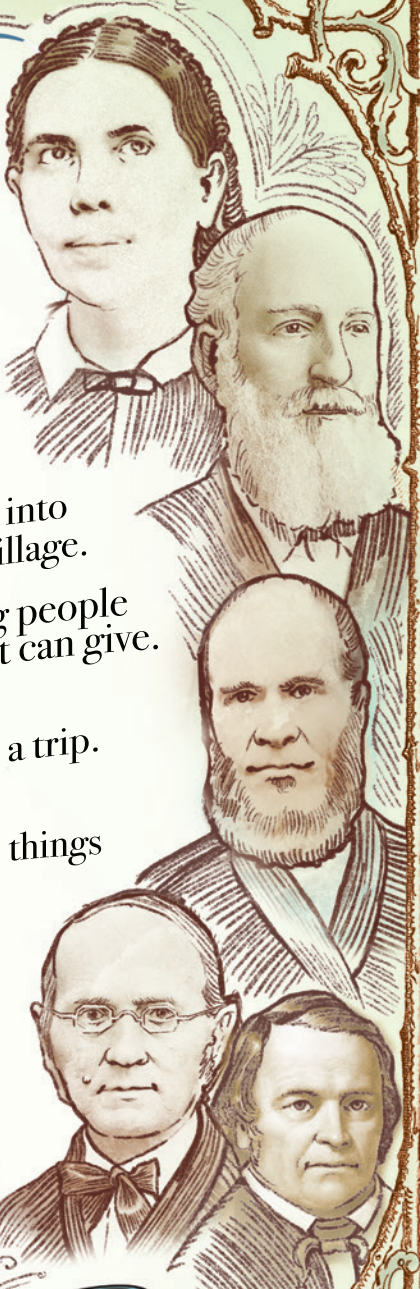
CONDITIONS FOR CAUTION	REASON
Asthma or Respiratory Issues	Airway irritation
Pregnancy	Possible interference with pregnancy and fetal development
Epilepsy or Seizure Disorders	Possible seizure trigger
Skin Sensitivity or Allergies	Rashes, burns, or irritation (especially undiluted)
High Blood Pressure	Exacerbation and interaction with some BP medications
Liver or Kidney Conditions	Possible improper / incomplete detoxification of the inhalant
Children (under 2 years old)	Breathing difficulty, skin irritation, allergic reactions

[1] Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary, s.v. "Aromatherapy," accessed Mar. 10, 2025, https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/aromatherapy.

[2] Davide Donelli et al., "Effects of Lavender on Anxiety: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis," *Phytomedicine: International Journal of Phytotherapy and Phytopharmacology* 65 (2019): 153099, doi: 10.1016/j.phymed.2019.153099.

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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Carol

is 80 and living with gratitude every day.

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CONTINUED FROM P. 72

Spirit of Prophecy serve as our daily source of inspiration and direction."

A cornerstone of their ministry in Tokyo is the Urban Center of Influence (UCI), located in Nakano. The UCI's mission is to promote wholistic health while addressing Japan's escalating social challenges, such as loneliness, social isolation, and an alarming rise in suicide rates. In a society in which many individuals feel disconnected, the center plays a pivotal role in fostering a sense of community and creating a safe haven for meaningful connections. Programs such as NEWSTART and CREATION Life are gently introduced to the neighborhood, providing practical ways for individuals to enhance their physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Nozomu remembers when a 10-month-old baby in the community who had suffered a burn from boiling water came to the UCI. After treating the injury, UCI staff accompanied the family to a medical facility. Thankfully, the child was OK. Later that evening the Obaras visited the family to check on them, expressing their concerns and extending their sympathies for their distress. The parents were deeply moved, remarking, "We are more concerned about our child's health than anything else, and cannot thank you enough for all that you and your team have done for us."

Nozomu views every interaction, steeped in prayer, as an opportunity for the Holy Spirit to work. Despite the fact that many in their Tokyo neighborhood have never heard of Christ, the Obaras see each day as an opportunity to build trust, sow seeds of faith, and reflect God's love in tangible and meaningful ways.

PATIENT FAITHFULNESS

Seven years into their time in Tokyo, the Obaras' work seems just now to be beginning in earnest. "God is teaching us to rely on Him completely," Nozomu says. "It's not about our plans or abilities, but about His power working through us." As they continue their ministry in one of the most densely populated cities in the world, the Obaras welcome both prayers and partnerships for the mission to share the light of Christ across Japan.

To those feeling the gentle call of God stirring in their hearts, Nozomu extends this encouragement: "Step out in faith. Trust that God's plans for you are far greater than anything you could ever imagine. The journey may be fraught with challenges, but the blessings derived from serving Him and witnessing His work in our lives are truly beyond measure."

As the second coming of Christ draws ever nearer, the mission to reach the world with the gospel becomes even more urgent. As Seventh-day Adventists, we are called to be vigilant as we vibrantly share the gospel. The Obaras begin their ministry with prayer, rooted in Scripture. So it is through prayer that we align our hearts with God's will, seek His guidance, and prepare ourselves for the work He has called us to do.

God may call some to return, as have the Obaras, to their native lands, where the gospel faces missional challenges. It can be a difficult decision to return, but God's power will sustain us where His Spirit leads us. The work may seem slow, and we may be tempted to discouragement, but we can trust that the One who called us will fulfill His calling in us. Ours is to remain faithful.

The seeds being planted through the UCI and the Obaras' community involvement, meeting people where they are and addressing their felt needs, will bear precious seed in due season. For now, focusing on wholistic health and fostering connections create a welcoming environment for individuals who may otherwise feel estranged from the church.

So the question comes to us: Are we willing to step out of our comfort zones? It may not be to a distant land, but are we prepared to offer genuine support and love to those in our neighborhoods who are struggling with issues such as loneliness or despair? Every act of kindness, every moment of compassion, can open doors to share the love of Christ.

Ultimately, Nozomu's challenge to us to return to the foundational practices of prayer, Bible study, and Christlike ministry is a message that invigorates our spiritual lives and empowers our mission: "I would like to invite you to join the quest to be faithful witnesses in a rapidly changing world." By prioritizing a life centered on prayer and the Word, we position ourselves to be instruments of God's grace and light. Let this be our collective vision and mission as we seek to follow in the footsteps of our Savior, reaching a world in need.

Nozomu Obara is the assistant director of Mission Unusual Tokyo. The article was originally written in Japanese and was translated with AI assistance.



NOZOMU OBARA

GOING BACK TO GO FORWARD



Nozomu Obara, his wife, Sachiko, and their children in 2021.

MISSION 360, VOLUME 9, NO. 4

After 14 years in the United States, and 10 years of pastoral service to the Japanese-American church in the Southern California Conference, Nozomu Obara, together with his wife, Sachiko, and their three children, sensed God's call to missions. At the prompting of the Holy Spirit, the Obara family made the difficult yet rewarding decision to leave behind their comfortable life and embark on a faith-filled journey of service in Nozomu's native Tokyo.

STEP OUT IN FAITH. TRUST THAT GOD'S PLANS FOR YOU ARE FAR GREATER THAN ANYTHING YOU COULD EVER IMAGINE.

Their transition was not without difficulties. Readapting to life in Japan after many years abroad, navigating the educational needs of their children, and grappling with financial uncertainties were among their challenges. But God gave them a vision for church planting. That vision, however, required patience. Looking back, Nozomu reflects: "I now understand why God had me wait seven years before I started church planting." During this period he immersed himself in ethnographic research, studying Japanese culture, societal nuances, and the specific needs of the Japanese Adventist community.

Nozomu now works as the assistant director of Mission Unusual Tokyo in the heart of Tokyo's dynamic neighborhoods of Nakano and Arai. He collaborates with missionary families and local Adventist pastors and congregations to cultivate vibrant churches and nurture a spirit of discipleship. Together with Yure Gramacho, the program director, the team is fervently working to ignite a nationwide movement of faith across Japan.

THE DAY-TO-DAY

For the Obara family, each day begins with prayer and devotions. "Walking with Christ, listening to His voice, and following God's plan are of utmost importance," Nozomu says. He has learned the lesson of surrendering personal ambitions to fully embrace God's guidance. "Each day I am reminded of Acts 6:4: 'But we will give ourselves continually to prayer and to the ministry of the word.' The Word of God and the

CONTINUED ON PAGE 71



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