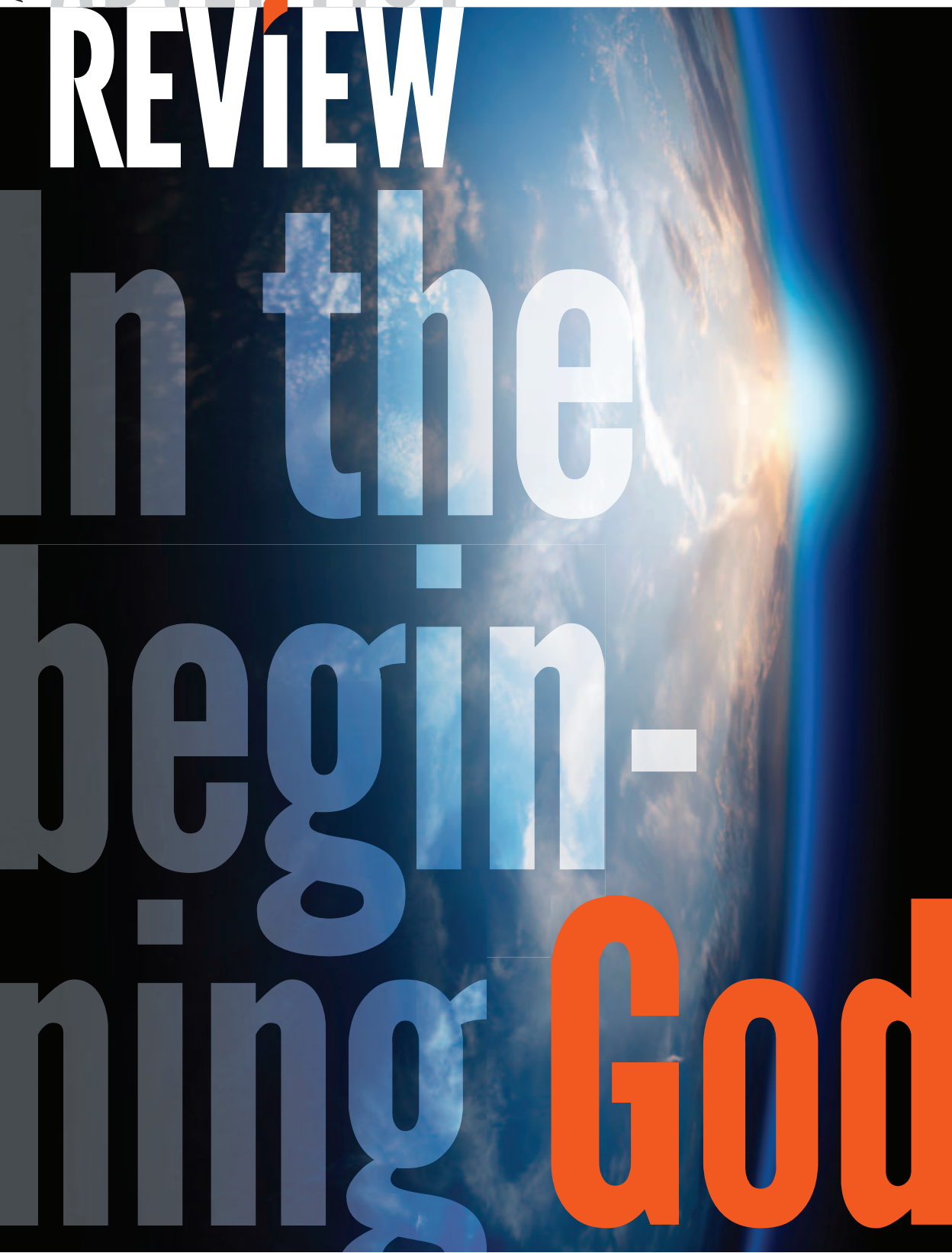


**JANUARY 2022: FROM THE BEGINNING + FAITH
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THE POSITIVE + BETTER DAYS AHEAD?**

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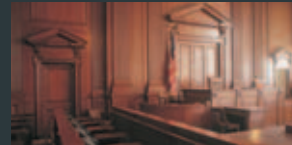
THE MOST SHARED STORIES ON ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG LAST MONTH:

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Wisconsin, Georgia, and Virginia vs. Our Emotions

3



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4



Why Are so Many Leaving the Church?

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Cliff's Edge: Pernicious Enough

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BILL KNOTT



Sacred Realism and Constant Grace

Afamous—and probably apocryphal—story recounts the response of the brilliant Renaissance sculptor Michelangelo Buonarroti to a reverent inquiry about how he had achieved his masterful depiction of David from massive blocks of white marble: “It’s easy,” Michelangelo is supposed to have replied. “You just chip away everything that doesn’t look like David.”

As the grandson of a man named Michael Angelo Galeazzi, I used to secretly imagine as a teenager that some piece of my cultural DNA had empowered me with similar skill and élan. If I could simply remove what is extraneous, I could achieve the masterpiece. Clarity of vision and an exclusive focus on a goal would yield in the success that had eluded others.

And then in the words of Paul, “I put away childish things” (1 Cor. 13:11). Or in the even more honest language of the seventeenth-century poet Thomas Traherne: “So that with much ado I was corrupted, and made to learn the dirty devices of this world.”

Our fantasies of enduring power, clarity, and skill eventually evaporate in the cold reality of discovering how broken both our world and our own lives really are. From inspirational

posters and old US Army recruiting ads we long ago imbibed, “Be all that you can be”—as though the future was an unlimited vista of potential waiting to be realized. This makes for fine sales campaigns, but doesn’t match the persistently messy and painful business of actually living a life.

The selves we were in 2021 undoubtedly fell short—perhaps far short—of even our own expectations, never mind those our God has right to expect of us. We should have known this, for Scripture long ago advised, “The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill” (Eccl. 9:11). Willing ourselves to chip away everything that is not David does not, in fact, always result in a masterpiece. Sometimes—more often than not—we are left at the end of a year with a block of marble that has just some faint scratchings on it, and shows no substantial sculpting.

And yet, for all its disappointing realism, this is actually the course of wisdom, for we are growing practical about the ways we “live and move and have our being” (Acts 17:28). Being all that *we can be* will never meet the standard of our God, or win us heaven, or even let us “preach like Paul,” as the

Make covenants, not resolutions, as you walk into the year.

old gospel song puts it. In fact, it was Paul who pointed us to the way of life that finally brings us greatest joy and an eternal reward: “I have been crucified with Christ; it is no longer I who live, but Christ lives in me; and the life which I now live in the flesh I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave Himself for me” (Gal. 2:20).

This is why I long ago advised myself, and now advise the ones I love as we pass the margin of the year: “Make covenants, not resolutions, as you walk into the year, for covenants give us company in keeping what we pledge. . . . Pledge perseverance, not perfection, for walking with another sinner will reveal how much you both need constant grace” (see “GraceNotes,” p. 61, in this edition).

Lay down the solo chisel, and put on the walking shoes as you move into 2022. Go journeying with those who own their need of grace and faith, and you will see more than mere marble shaped: “You will say to this mountain, ‘Move from here to there,’ and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you” (Matt. 17:20).

¹ Thomas Traherne, *Centuries of Meditations*, Century 3, No. 3 (Grand Rapids: Christian Classics Ethereal Library), p. 79.

ENCOURAGING AND INSPIRING

Andy Nash's column in the November 2021 issue really resonated with me. My parents were in that awkward generation regarding race, but also tried to foster a sense of love and justice for all in their children as Andy's mom did for him. Thank you for this encouraging and inspiring article!

Nila Salsberry
Bayview, Idaho



BALANCED VIEWS

I greatly appreciated the articles in the October 2021 issue reflecting on the theme of vaccines. Conversations on this topic are often polarizing and heated, but the articles in this issue were neither. Jiří Moskala's and each of the subsequent articles were medically balanced, spiritually affirming, and historically enlightening. I came away from reading this issue affirmed in my belief in the health message of my church, and clear on our historical response to medical and community issues like our

current one. Thank you for addressing a very present and relevant topic.

Jean Boonstra
Loveland, Colorado

DIFFICULT TIMES AHEAD

It is high time for us to gird up our loins and to trust implicitly in Jesus for the difficult task ahead. The third angel's message will go forth. It's up to us individually to be willing to enlist (Matt. 9:37, 38). I especially appreciate Elder Wison's ringing call for us to arm ourselves with the needed knowledge for loving, effective witness, putting fear aside. *The Great Controversy* has become my constant companion

in recent years. I first read it in 1959 and was impressed. I was an unbeliever, but was baptized only six years later. Cultivating several Sunday pastors now, I've even urged some of them to preach Revelation 14, and I'm ready to explain why it has vital importance for our times.

Richard Burns
Cleveland, Tennessee

AN IMPORTANT TIME LINE

I found the article "Time Line: Women and Ministry in the Adventist Church" in the July 2021 edition enlightening and encouraging. The history of how God blessed and led out in our church's beginnings gives us direction on how we should move forward into the future to complete the task of the gospel to every individual. Each person, regardless of gender, is called and empowered by our Creator to do the task He calls us to accomplish. "The Saviour ignores both rank and caste. . . . It is character and devotedness of purpose that are of high value with Him" (Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 6, p. 268).

Linda Everhart
Eau Claire, Michigan

I came away from reading this issue affirmed in my belief in the health message of my church, and clear on our historical response to medical and community issues like our current one.

JEAN BOONSTRA, LOVELAND, COLORADO

COMMENTS FROM ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG

WISCONSIN, GEORGIA, AND VIRGINIA VERSUS OUR EMOTIONS

I am very much troubled by what I see as the current situation in the Adventist Church in the United States. In our society as a whole, we are divided with little respectful communication with our fellow citizens who differ from us in our perception of the issues of the day. This division, I find, is reflected to some degree within the church. It results in Adventist members not being able to have courteous conversations with each other. I am unable to suggest that non-Adventists visit some congregations, as they would not be welcomed due to their position on political issues. I wonder how God will be able to use us to accomplish the Great Commission if this situation remains. May the Lord help us in our hour of need as a church.

Gregory Matthews

TED WILSON'S PHILIPPINES TRIP WAS "JUST IN TIME"

What a wonderful, wild story of God's providence!

Connie Dahlke

ADVENTIST HARVARD UNIVERSITY PROFESSOR EXPLAINS WHY VACCINATION IS A GOOD IDEA

Thank you, David Williams, for this presentation. You are correct that each of us must study the data for ourselves. Hopefully, that means reading peer-reviewed scientific literature, not listening to media that seeks ratings by promoting misleading vaccine misinformation, isolated physicians, or even Adventist spiritual leaders without any training in research or statistics. Today my wife and I are mourning the loss of old college friends who died of COVID-19 or are on a ventilator because they listened to really bad theology and science from misguided Adventists. I pray that many will take your advice and get the vaccine to protect themselves and, as you note, the most vulnerable among us. There was a time when Christians obeyed the words of Jesus when He said as we treated the most vulnerable among us, we treated Him. I fear today that

in the name of our liberty, we are willing to increase the probability of using hospital beds when others need them, infecting others who have significant comorbidities, and some even petition the church to endorse this view of selfish liberty. I pray that your words change hearts and minds and that our elected leadership remains fast in their support for the best biblical and Spirit of Prophecy public health principles.

Duane C. McBride

OUR ONLY SAFEGUARD

I read this and I think of the phrase "primitive godliness." This chapter of Mrs. White's, and her constant pointing to Scripture and Scripture only, cuts through all the religious and worldly din that surrounds us. May we never be distracted from God's basic and understandable truths. I pray for wisdom and courage to "do His will" every day.

Les Moyer

YOUR TURN

We welcome your letters, noting, as always, that inclusion of a letter in this section does not imply that the ideas expressed are endorsed by either the editors of the *Adventist Review* or the General Conference. Short, specific, timely letters have the best chance at being published (please include your complete address and phone number—even with e-mail messages). Letters will be edited for space and clarity only. Send correspondence to Letters to the Editor, *Adventist Review*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600; Internet: letters@adventistreview.org.



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“We may have family feuds in the church, in our homes, in our jobs, but I want everyone to know that the blood of Jesus will never lose its power. His blood is going to save us.”

—Carlton Byrd, p. 11

NEWS



The main entrance to the Italian Adventist University Villa Aurora in Florence, Italy.

PHOTO: ITALIAN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY VILLA AURORA

IN ITALY, FLORENCE NAMES A STREET AFTER ELLEN WHITE

THE RENAMED VIA CUTS ACROSS THE CAMPUS OF ITALIAN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY.

BY LINA FERRARA, HOPE MEDIA ITALIA, AND MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

The street names of Florence, Italy, got a surprising addition. On December 10 the city renamed one of its streets “Via Ellen Gould White,” to honor one of the cofounders of the Seventh-day Adventist Church and a remarkable author, church leaders in the country said.

The ceremony marked the last step in a request by Italian Adventist University Villa Aurora presented to city officials. The school asked to name the street in front of the new buildings on campus, which today is known as Viuzzo del Pergolino, with the name of the Adventist pioneer.

After the city of Florence said it accepted the request of a name change, school leaders thanked the

local government “for the sensitivity shown in acknowledging the good intent and how suitable the submitted proposal was.”

The city government said it considered several aspects in granting the request, including the fact that the faith-based institution has been on that property since 1947. In addition to school offices, it has used some of its facilities to lodge families of patients hospitalized in a nearby health-care facility.

The city also explained that only the buildings of the school surround the street of the proposed name change, and, according to a centuries-old custom, the streets of Florence often take their names from the

realities surrounding them. Finally, the city emphasized that the name change will help passersby access the facilities without taking the wrong path. Right now two very similar names that are close to each other—Via del Pergolino and Viuzzo del Pergolino—have proved confusing.

On the day of the street-naming ceremony, the university also inaugurated an Ellen G. White Center of Studies and Documentation inside the school library.

SHARING ELLEN G. WHITE

In preparing for the new center’s opening, the school shared information about the life and work of Ellen White. It communicated to



the general public that White (1827-1915) was “a very special person” for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Along with Joseph Bates and White’s husband, James, she cofounded the religious movement officially formed in 1863 as the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. “Her multifaceted influence as a religious leader, prolific writer, social reformer, but also a wife and a mother, has been felt far beyond confessional boundaries.”

School leaders noted that in 2014, *Smithsonian* magazine included her on its “100 Most Influential Americans of All Time” list.

For Seventh-day Adventists, school leaders said, White is also a special person because “they recognize in her work the manifestation of the biblical prophetic gift.”

After her death, a foundation was created—the Ellen G. White Estate—where readers can access White’s complete work in the original English and many other languages, including Italian, school leaders said. “To further promote knowledge of Ellen G. White’s work and writings, study centers have been created in various regions of the world.” They are usually known as White Estate branch offices, research centers, and study centers.

The center on the Italian Adventist University Villa Aurora campus will be included in the official list of centers managed by the Ellen G. White Estate, school leaders said. It will include a wide selection of White’s published works in English, Italian, and other languages. These works will be included in the school’s library and available to readers and researchers, they said. ▀

Partial view of the Adventist scholars who met for a joint Friday evening Scholars’ Vespers in San Antonio, Texas, on November 19. PHOTO: MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW



SCHOLARS’ WORSHIP HIGHLIGHTS THE UNIFYING POWER OF JESUS

ADVENTIST ACADEMICS GATHER ANNUALLY TO SING, PRAY, AND REFLECT.

BY MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

Once a year a Friday evening worship happens at a Seventh-day Adventist church somewhere in the United States that differs from all the rest.

The worship service draws dozens of distinguished Adventist theologians and scholars for moments of praise, prayer, and reflection. The scholars, most of them professors at Adventist seminaries and universities around the world, are members of the Adventist Society for Religious Studies (ASRS) and the Adventist Theological Society (ATS).

The 2021 Friday joint worship service took place at Laurel Heights Seventh-day Adventist Church in San Antonio, Texas, on November 19.

GATHERING OF SCHOLARS

Every year ATS members gather on the sidelines of the larger Evangelical Theological Society (ETS) annual conference, which in 2021 met in Fort Worth, Texas, November 16-18. With a historical and, to a certain extent, theological affinity to ETS, the ATS event usually uses the same theme ETS has chosen and provides a biblical Adventist approach to it. In 2021 the program theme was “Wealth and Poverty.”

ASRS usually meets in the same or a nearby city as the ATS event and discusses a separate theme its own board has chosen for that particular year. Meetings are typically held around the annual meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature (SBL). In 2021 ASRS met in San Antonio, Texas, November 18-20 under the theme “World Disrupted, World Revealed: Ecology and Theology in an Age of Pandemic.”

ASRS was formally organized in New York City in 1979. Its

stated purpose is “to provide intellectual and social fellowship among its members and encourage scholarly pursuits in all religious studies disciplines, particularly with reference to the Seventh-day Adventist tradition.” ATS was organized in 1988 at Southern Adventist University in Tennessee. According to its website, the society’s “conviction and strong desire is to foster biblical, theological, and historical studies that strengthen the Seventh-day Adventist Church’s message and mission.”

Historically, some observers have described ASRS as “more on the progressive side” and more focused on the intersections between Adventism and culture. ATS seems to favor exegesis and connections to the biblical text, and has described itself as an organization providing “balanced and conservative Adventist theology.” Some scholars, however, think these definitions are too broad, since the distinctions may not be as clear-cut as they seem. There is clear overlap between the two societies; a number of Adventist scholars belong to both, and most have colleagues and friends in both.

JOINT WORSHIP

Beyond any real or perceived differences, however, as the Friday evening shadows descended on the annual worship to mark the beginning of the biblical day of rest, every church member—scholar, seminary student, professor, or lay supporter—as son or daughter of God readied to give Him praise. In San Antonio members of both societies, some local church members, and regional church leaders met to sing, pray, and reflect. Potential differences seemed to be blurred as longtime researchers and doctoral students, male and female, led singing, read Scripture, and prayed together in small groups.

Sponsored by the Ministerial As-

sociation of the North American Division (NAD), the 2021 gathering featured devotional moments and a message by Southwest Region Conference president Carlton Byrd.

The “Scholars’ Vespers,” as the annual service is informally known, included reading selected passages of Scriptures in many languages. Among the Bible passages were excerpts from Psalm 59 in German, Psalm 77:2 in Papua New Guinea Pidgin, and Psalm 89:46 in Mandarin. Additional languages included Chichewa, Korean, Swahili, and Norwegian. Most readers were native speakers of the language used, while several were reading in the second or third language they learned while serving as international missionaries.

which was bothering you,” Gemmell said. “The pieces of paper are gone.”

In his message Byrd reminded those attending the service that even seasoned scholars “who know more than me” about God’s Word “need to remember that Jesus loves us.”

Based on the sobering story of Cain and Abel in Genesis 4, Byrd reminded Adventist scholars that in this world, “family feuds are real and happen in real life.” Feuds can adopt many forms, Byrd noted. “Liberal versus conservative, academic versus practical theologians, and so forth and so on,” he said. “Sometimes those closest to us may be the ones with more potential to hurt us.”

In the case of Cain and Abel, the



A group of participants spends time in prayer at the joint Scholars’ Vespers in San Antonio. PHOTO: MARCOS PASEGGI, ADVENTIST REVIEW

MEANINGFUL CEREMONY

Before partaking in individually sealed cups of grape juice and praying in pairs or small groups, participants were invited to write their grievances and challenges on a small piece of a special paper. “Only the Lord and you will know what is written on the piece of paper,” NAD Ministerial Association associate director Dave Gemmell assured them. Participants were then invited to place their pieces of paper in jars in a warm chemical solution that dissolved them almost instantly. “God has now taken all that

day started with the sacrifice of an animal and ended up with the sacrifice of a man, Byrd said. In a sense, he added, it announced that “the bleeding lamb would be replaced by a bleeding man.”

Jesus would be the bleeding man who would come to save us, Byrd emphasized. “The blood of Jesus is stronger than anything else,” he said. “We may have family feuds in the church, in our homes, in our jobs, but I want everyone to know that the blood of Jesus will never lose its power. His blood is going to save us.”



WHAT HAPPENS WHEN WE GET COVID-19?

ADVENTIST EXPERT DISCUSSES EFFECTS, VACCINES, AND THE IMMUNE SYSTEM.

BY INTER-AMERICAN DIVISION NEWS

As part of the Inter-American Division (IAD) Online Symposium on Freedom of Conscience and the Vaccine Mandate in November 2021, Carlos Casiano, professor of microbiology, molecular genetics, and medicine at Loma Linda University, shared what the COVID-19 virus is doing in infected people and what one can do to prevent infection.

A DEADLY PANDEMIC

Casiano acknowledged that, sadly, the COVID-19 pandemic “is not going away. The virus is spreading fast, particularly among the unvaccinated, and especially in countries with cold climate,” he noted.

At the same time, data shows that more than 95 percent of the hospitalized are unvaccinated, he said. “The common denominator of the pandemic is that it includes viruses that mutate rapidly and evade the immune system,” Casiano said.

He explained that several types of coronaviruses cause the common cold. The one producing

COVID-19 is the SARS-CoV-2, or severe acute respiratory syndrome caused by a coronavirus. “It is very easy to get infected with the SARS-CoV-2, especially in closed spaces,” he explained. “So a person, even asymptomatic, can transmit the virus, and another person can catch it, sometimes even if immunized. It takes only one person to pass the virus to the rest.”

Casiano acknowledged that the COVID variants are the result of too many infections and too little vaccination. Low rates of vaccinations trigger high rates of infections, which contribute to the emergence of variants.

WHAT HAPPENS INSIDE OUR BODIES

But what happens inside your bodies when you get infected with the COVID-19 virus?

Casiano said that the virus gets inside the body’s cells. But to do that, it needs receptors, which do not depend on the immune system. They depend on your genes,

he said. “Some people have a low level of receptors, and others have a high level of receptors. Those who have a low level of receptors tend to express less-severe symptoms of the disease,” he said.

He explained that be it the flu or COVID-19, the T cells and the B cells react to fight the virus. T cells also trigger dendritic and other phagocytic cells to fight the spike in the virus’s protein. In simple terms, the immune system creates antibodies to neutralize the virus. They take care of the infection.

But there are some caveats, Casiano said. “This process is not instantaneous; it takes two to three weeks the first time you are exposed to the virus. The second time you are exposed to the virus, the process is much shorter—three days to a week,” he shared.

THE ROLE OF INFLAMMATION

As part of this process, the body releases what scientists call inflammatory cytokines, Casiano said. “To fight the infection, the immune

“With more immunization, there are fewer particles circulating and fewer variants.”

system has to activate inflammation,” he noted. “It has to allow inflammation, because inflammation allows the white blood cells to work and do their job.”

He explained that the COVID-19 virus promotes a higher activation of inflammation, so the body develops a “cytokine storm,” where the virus is inducing the immune system to inflame the whole body. “Many people who are dying from COVID are dying because of hormonal insufficiency, due to a high state of inflammation, or [because of] damage of other organs due to this cytokine storm,” he acknowledged.

Casiano said that since receptors are androgen-regulated, the reaction is connected to the level of testosterone. Men with high testosterone levels sometimes lose their hair earlier than others (what is known as alopecia). As a consequence, a relationship has been found between alopecia and more severe symptoms of the disease. Women who have high levels of androgen tend to develop cysts in their ovaries. These women also tend to have more severe symptoms. The same with people who are obese, who are immunocompromised, or have untreated diabetes, he said.

Once the virus is inside the cell, it releases genetic material that is released into the body, Casiano said. “Those who are not immunized carry lots of viral particles in their bodies and then pass that to other people who are not immunized, and this creates an incubator for the virus to constantly change,” he said.

“The more human bodies available to infect, the higher the chances of new variants arising.”

HOW TO CONTROL THE INFECTION

How do we control this? Casiano asked rhetorically. “Via immunization. With more immunization, there are fewer particles circulating and fewer variants,” he said.

But how does our immune system respond to a foreign infection agent? Casiano shared that when you get infected with a disease such as tetanus, the body can mount an immune response, but it takes the body three to four weeks to do it. The virus, on the other hand, is much faster and can kill you before your body is ready to respond. It is the reason we need immunization, to help the body mount a defense before the virus attack.

“Vaccines may not prevent attack by bacteria or virus, but do prevent severe disease and death from the infection,” he explained.

According to Casiano, a major problem with COVID-19 is that it starts destroying your internal organs if you get infected. It starts destroying your lungs, liver, kidneys, eyes, and nose, among others. “Perhaps you may say, ‘Well, I had COVID-19 and only mild symptoms.’ Yes, you may have a low level of receptors and a good immune system. But you can also have a good immune system, and the virus can take that to its advantage by enhancing inflammation that can lead to multiple organ failure,” Casiano said.

He explained that COVID-19 might kill you, but if you survive moderate to severe disease, you may still suffer the consequences for a long time. He listed some of those consequences, including acute respiratory distress, pulmonary deficiency, chronic fatigue, autoimmune conditions, brain fog, vascular disease, thrombosis, and heart problems.

THE ROLE OF THE VACCINE

Casiano noted that the COVID-19 vaccine boosts the immune system without causing the cytokine storm. “Studies keep showing that the vaccines are significantly effective in preventing severe disease, hospitalizations, and death,” he said.

Of course, all vaccines have side effects, and the COVID-19 vaccine is no exception, Casiano pointed out. “Side effects of the COVID-19 vaccine include drowsiness, chills, and pain,” he said. He explained that the most severe side effects documented are, among others, anaphylaxis (an allergic reaction; 2-5 per million) and thrombotic events (3-4 per million). But, on the other hand, he said, the chances of dying from COVID is 2 in 100 (2 percent), and more than 50 percent have prolonged side effects.

In his closing remarks, Casiano encouraged church leaders and members to keep informed about the topic and make decisions that benefit us personally and protect others. “Together we can stop COVID-19 suffering and deaths!” Casiano said. “Let’s continue saving lives!”



The people hold up their new radios in their church building. The radios were a donation of Escrito Está, the Spanish-language ministry of It Is Written. PHOTO: IT IS WRITTEN

MINISTRY HELPS INDIGENOUS FAMILIES IN GUATEMALA

ESCRITO ESTÁ IS REACHING OUT IN SOME OF THE HARDEST PLACES.

BY IT IS WRITTEN AND ADVENTIST REVIEW

In October 2021 a small team from *Escrito Está* (EE), the Spanish-language program from media ministry It Is Written, traveled to Guatemala to distribute water filters to a community desperately in need of them.

It Is Written also joined a local radio station to share solar-powered radios with the Kekchi people, giving them access to EE programs translated into their native language.

The project began with a recently baptized young couple who wanted to share the gospel in a small community in southern Guatemala. A friend from a small village near Moyuta told Anthony, “If you want to do service, please remember my town; it needs as much help as it can get.” After visiting a village near Moyuta, Anthony and Angie

realized their friend was right.

Despite government efforts, the people in that area live in extreme poverty. Many work in agriculture and earn only US\$2-4 a day. Anthony and Angie started visiting once a month and invited other young people to come and serve.

The work grew so much that they created a nonprofit organization called *Familias con Futuro* (“Families With a Future”). Now every month a group of young people travels 2.5 hours from Guatemala City to Moyuta to spend time with the families there. They celebrate birthdays, play with the children, bring school supplies, organize health fairs, and help repair homes.

For their most recent project, volunteers decided to provide water filters to local families. They realized people did not have ac-

cess to clean drinking water and were getting sick as a result. High heat and humidity only compounded the issue. Drinking water is essential for people who work under extreme heat and have no air-conditioning in their homes, and for children to avoid illnesses such as cholera. In February 2021 the EE ministry joined forces with the church to support this initiative.

Thanks to recent donations, all 300 families in Moyuta received water filters during the fall. The team helped distribute the water filters and shared a special message: “God loves the people of Moyuta. You have not been forgotten. Every time you drink this water, remember the One who has promised to give you the water of life. If you drink from it, you will

“Thank you for what you have done for our community, for coming all the way here to show us the love of Jesus.”

not thirst again. Trust in the love of Jesus.”

As he received his water filter, one resident of the community said, “Thank you for what you have done for our community, for coming all the way here to show us the love of Jesus.” Another woman stated, “I thought Jesus had forgotten me. This means so much to my family. Thank you!”

The team’s next stop was Chicanutz, a small village in the middle of the mountains populated by the Kekchi, a native community. It was an eight-hour trip north from Guatemala City. Roads are rough, and not all vehicles can enter the area. They traveled with members of Unión Radio Guatemala, a radio station that covers most parts of the country and broadcasts EE programs. The station recently began broadcasting in the central part of the country, where there is a large Kekchi population.

Approximately a half million people speak Kekchi. A local volunteer is translating the daily devotionals, *Una mejor manera de vivir*, and the half-hour EE programs into the Kekchi language for his community. The team called this trip “*Una mejor manera de vivir para los Q’eqchies*” (“A Better Way to Live for the Kekchis”).

The region has no electricity, and the only building with a generator is the small church. Members turn it on only during worship hours on Saturday (Sabbath). Only a few people in the community know how to speak Spanish flu-

ently. Having Christian content that they can understand in their own language is essential for their spiritual growth.

Oscar Cucul is a Bible worker who has been a pastor to the Kekchi community. He is a Kekchi himself and feels that God has called him to find and train new disciples to continue his work. He said, “I wish I had met Jesus when I was younger. Before coming to Christ, I was a homeless man. I learned of the gospel only when I was 39 years old. My dream is to have a school of discipleship to train young Kekchis to share the gospel. I’m getting older, and the day will come when I won’t have the strength to continue. This is the greatest burden in my heart.”

During the worship service Cucul acted as an interpreter. “He played a key role in our connection with the community,” EE team leaders said. “We were received with smiles and a lot of love. *B’antiox* was one of the easiest words to learn, which means ‘thank you.’ Children were shy but curious when they saw our cameras. The congregation proceeded to sing from the Spanish hymnal, many not understanding what they were singing. Can you imagine singing to God without understanding what you are saying to Him?”

The EE team said that the weather was very humid and hot. “We only stayed for a few hours because of the threat of rain, which would cause us to be stuck because of the poor roads. We delivered the

radios and hurried to the next group that lived farther up the mountain,” they explained. “The second group is a growing church, but they meet in someone’s house because they don’t have a church building. There was no air-conditioning, and the room was dark. The local people were very excited to receive us and prepared a delicious soup for us to have for lunch.”

During each short visit, the EE team spoke about the importance of sharing Jesus and learning of His Word, then distributed the solar-powered radios. “Many rushed to unbox them because they wanted to learn how to use them,” team leaders shared. “People were excited to discover that they could listen to sermons in Kekchi and look forward to receiving more content in their native language.”

Farther into the mountains is a third group. “It was starting to rain, so we were not able to visit them,” team leaders explained. “We left Oscar in charge of distributing the remaining solar-powered radios and training people in how to listen to the Christian programs.”

EE leaders said that although this trip was an outstanding achievement, it is only the beginning of an important mission: creating more content that can reach areas that have yet to hear the gospel in their tongue. “Let us continue to pray for people like Oscar who are in a vast mission field. Let us continue to support the creation of more content in different languages,” they said. 🍃



Leaders celebrate the opening of a new oxygen plant in Iquitos, Peru, in October 2021.

PHOTO: ADVENTIST HEALTH NEWS

NEW OXYGEN PLANTS OPEN IN PERU

ADVENTHEALTH AND ADRA SUPPORT INITIATIVE TO FIGHT COVID-19.

BY ADVENTHEALTH NEWS

Peru had, at one point, the world's highest COVID-19 death rate per capita. The pandemic crisis fueled an unprecedented need for oxygen in the mountainous country, where hospitals do not have access to their own oxygen generators and instead depend on external sources.

Clínica Americana de Juliaca and Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl in Iquitos were initially two of those dependent hospitals, but that is no longer the case. Through contributions from AdventHealth, the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Peru, the Rotary Foundation, and other donors, Clínica Americana opened its oxygen plant in spring 2021, and Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl inaugurated its new plant in October.

"Oxygen plants represent security and trust for a health institution, its staff, and its community. It means knowing that we can count on a vital source and that we can effectively serve the community as well," Cesar Valera, finance director of Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl, said.

"We have social and community projects that we actively carry out with local governments, and this plant will help us continue the healing ministry of Jesus as we carry out those projects."

Before installing their plants, staff from Clínica Americana and Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl had to wait in lines at private plants and pay for oxygen by the tankful at prices 10 times the regular cost because of the overwhelming demand. This created a significant challenge for the rural hospitals, particularly the hard-hit Ana Stahl campus, whose doors shut for 30 days because of widespread infection and staffing shortages.

"When Clínica Adventista Ana Stahl closed, people were banging on the gates and climbing over walls in a desperate attempt to get medical attention. Several staff members were gravely ill and were admitted to the ICU and placed on ventilators," Greg Hodgson, director of Global Health Initiatives at Centura Health, a regional partnership of AdventHealth, said. "Now they have a secure supply of oxygen and are

ready to face the challenges ahead. This oxygen plant is a sign of life."

The two oxygen plants cost about US\$500,000 in total and will help the hospitals respond to any future COVID-19 waves and any other respiratory illnesses that may occur.

"The pandemic is far from over. COVID-19 is still devastating communities across the world, and ADRA is committed to providing humanitarian assistance in Peru and globally," Alex Balint, director of corporate and social partnerships for ADRA, said. "ADRA is grateful for its alliance with AdventHealth and other trusted partners to support clinics and hospitals around the world with critical equipment such as the oxygen plants that will help save more lives in Peru.

"ADRA will continue its efforts to mobilize protective gear and essential medical supplies to protect the community and help fight this pandemic," Balint added.

AdventHealth Global Missions is working with ADRA India to put up oxygen plants in India and is also raising funds for one at Haiti Adventist Hospital. ▀



ADVENTIST PRODUCTION WINS TWO AWARDS AT UK CHRISTIAN FILM FESTIVAL. *Rico*, a short film produced by the South American Division of the Adventist Church, and *Fathers*, an award-winning project of the Global Adventist Internet Network in Europe, were recently screened at the UK Christian Film Festival in Brixton, November 15-17. At the end of the festival *Rico* had won two awards, including in the Best Short Film and Best Director categories.



WHITE COAT CEREMONY DEDICATES INAUGURAL CLASS AT SCHOOL OF MEDICINE IN RWANDA. Thirty-four medical students and many guests participated in the first white coat ceremony at the Adventist School of Medicine of East-Central Africa (ASOME) in Kigali, Rwanda, on November 12. ASOME is located on the campus of Adventist University of Central Africa and though the School of Medicine was inaugurated in September 2019, because of the pandemic the school was celebrating the first cohort of medical students in 2021.



KIRIBATI CHURCH REGION MAKES HISTORIC APPOINTMENT OF FIRST FEMALE SECRETARY. Kiribati Mission has appointed Naomi Booia as its new secretary, the first female secretary appointed in the history of the Trans-Pacific Union Mission (TPUM) in the South Pacific Division. Booia, currently a theology lecturer at Fulton Adventist University College in Fiji, will take up her appointment in the middle of next year. Kiribati Mission is one of the nine church fields in TPUM and has 20 churches and more than 3,000 members.



ADVENTIST-RUN WGTS STATION NAMED RELIGIOUS STATION OF THE YEAR. WGTS-FM, Washington, D.C., a radio station run by Seventh-day Adventists, was recently named Religious Station of the Year at the 2021 National Association of Broadcasters' (NAB) Marconi Radio Awards. The awards, which recognize excellence in radio, were announced during the virtual NAB Marconi Radio Awards program on November 10.



MONGOLIAN ADVENTISTS CONNECT DURING ONLINE CAMP MEETING. The Mongolia Adventist Mission (MM) held its first-ever online camp meeting October 15-17. Usually the MM holds its annual nationwide camp meeting during the summer. Because of the pandemic, camp meeting could not be organized the past two years. This year's camp meeting featured seminars centered on women, family, health, children, media, and Sabbath School ministries. Additionally, the event also included a talk show, a movie, kids' time, and physical exercise, which, according to participants, made this event enjoyable.



NAD MINISTERIAL ASSOCIATION FOCUSES ON TRAINING FOR CHURCH REVITALIZATION. The North American Division (NAD) Ministerial Association hosted an inaugural church revitalization boot camp November 4-7 in Washington State. Its goal was to begin unpacking best practices for churches to evaluate their current status, pray through a new vision, and find renewed growth. The event addressed the findings of research conducted by eAdventist membership services, which show church attendance in the pandemic (virtual and in-person) is down 72 percent in North America.



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In the beginning **God**



FROM
THE
BEGINNING

*Anchoring Our
Living in the
Creation Event*

DAVIDE SCHIARABBA

The Bible opens with the emphatic phrase: “In the beginning” (Gen. 1:1). This short sentence (in Hebrew it is just one word: *bere’shith*) introduces the scriptural account of the origins of our beautiful blue planet. When God’s Scriptural word gave life to our world, He established the very foundational landmarks for the history of Planet Earth and its inhabitants.

The Epistle to the Hebrews recalls that the Lord “in the beginning laid the foundation of the earth” (Heb. 1:10). This assertion not only refers to the organization of physical matter, but also implies the establishment of the laws that regulate it. In the beginning God set the principles of His kingdom. In so doing, He affirmed the need,

If we want to keep balanced lives, what happened in the beginning must not be forgotten.

and therefore also the validity, of the moral laws that He would afterward reveal to humanity. This means that the bases for the laws that should govern our life were established for all God's creatures since the beginning.

Thus, in a discussion with the Pharisees on the matter of divorce, Jesus refers to the authority of the Creation account to state which are for Him the only valid criteria for settling this matter: "Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning made them male and female, and said, 'For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh'? So then, they are no longer two but one flesh. Therefore what God has joined together, let not man separate" (Matt. 19:4-6). When the Pharisees replied, "Why then did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" (verse 7, NIV), Jesus reacted with a surprising answer: "Moses, because of the hardness of your hearts, permitted you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so" (verse 8).

WHY IS THE BEGINNING IMPORTANT?

It is interesting to observe that Jesus appeals to the statement "from the beginning" as a basic hermeneutical tool to read the Scriptures when we are looking for answers to our ethical questions. Jesus takes as a historical reference the landmark event of Creation to draw principles for ethical Christian behavior.

For Him the beginning, namely, the historical Creation event as recorded in the Genesis account, is the very source of the principles of moral behavior, which should be the ideals for the believers. When we are struggling trying to understand the Scriptures, we should follow the inspirational example of Jesus of looking further back in history

to the Creation event, to find the foundational principles stated in the revealed Word of God as our guidelines.

With the statement "from the beginning it was not so," Jesus shows to the Pharisees that Creation is also crucial to understand the spirit of the law given by God to Moses for a fallen world. Thus, although God reluctantly gave to fragile fallen humanity the permission for divorce in certain cases as a lesser evil, Jesus reminds us that if we look back to the Creation story we can discover God's ideals, grasp their spirit, and enjoy their benefits for us.

If we understand that in the beginning God not only created the world with all its living creatures, but also stated the standards for moral behavior in His universal kingdom, we also understand why in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus referred to the Creation story, using its imagery to teach us how to behave. He talks about the salt of the earth to encourage us to have a meaningful presence in this world (Matt. 5:13). He reminds us that the birds of the sky, the flowers of the fields, and even the simple grass are permanent reminders of the profound confidence that we should put in the Creator's providence (Matt. 6:26-30).

With the image of the good tree that produces good fruits, Jesus tells us that sooner or later our most hidden thoughts, intentions, and actions will be manifested to all (see Matt. 7:15-20; Luke 8:17). And finally, with the metaphor of the rock, we believers are encouraged to look for solid foundations upon which to build our lives (Matt. 7:24, 25). Thus, by drawing examples from the Creation, Jesus encourages us to aim toward higher ideals, that is, to keep always in mind the standards of His kingdom.

The parables of Jesus built from nature also have the goal to teach humanity important les-

sons of moral behavior. Although creation has been affected by sin, the ideal moral principles rooted in God's laws are still inspiring us. The fertility of the good soil allows the seed (the good news) to produce abundant harvest (Matt. 13:8, 23). The grain of wheat that dies in the soil teaches us that the kingdom of God belongs to those who are willing to renounce themselves to serve God and others (John 12:24, 25). The surprising ongoing growth of the mustard seed shows that God's work in us, even when it not noticed by others, is constant and never finished (Matt. 13:31, 32). In Him we experience eternal growth. As Ellen White observes, His education is everlasting.¹

THE WAY FORWARD

If we want to keep balanced lives, what happened in the beginning must not be forgotten. In looking back at the foundational event of Creation, we are inspired in our moral daily living as followers of Jesus. We want to be citizens of the new earth that God will re-create at the end of this era. Since the beginning, God has been teaching us how to become mature Christians. Although He might use laws adjusted to our fallen situation, He always invites us to look higher, to look at the Creation event for inspiration in order to overcome our limits.

The divine ethics are so deeply engrained in the laws of the universe that "when Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of"² Ellen White adds, "If man had kept the law of God, as given to Adam after his fall, preserved by Noah, and observed by Abraham, there would have been no necessity for the ordinance of circumcision. And if the descendants of Abraham had kept the covenant, of which circumcision was a sign, . . . they would have kept God's law in mind, and there would have been no necessity for it to be proclaimed from Sinai or engraved upon the tables of stone. And had the people practiced the principles of the Ten Commandments, there would have been no need of the additional directions given to Moses."³

Therefore, the commandments expressed with "you shall not steal" or "you shall not commit adultery" are founded on the ethical principles of

the kingdom of God pervading all creation. For this reason Jesus summarizes them with "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37, NIV). And "Love your neighbor as yourself" (verse 39, NIV). As the Creation event is an immense act of love, all moral behavior should flow from this first act of love expressed in the beginning,⁴ and be inspired by it.

The apostle John, writing about love, reminds us that this basic ethical principle comes from the creation event. He says: "Beloved, I am not writing a new commandment to you, but an old commandment which you have had from the beginning; the old commandment is the word which you have heard" (1 John 2:7, NASB).

The Creation event is foundational to teach us that true ethics is neither a human construct nor just a remedy for the fallen world. Everlasting ethics are a transcendent reality, revealed by God not only in His Word! Ethics is rooted and continues to flow from the historical Creation event and from the ongoing creative power of God. Thus, the response of Jesus to the Pharisees, "From the beginning it was not so," teaches us that our daily life, our reading and interpretation of the Scriptures, our moral behavior, should be guided by the ideal principles of the Creation event. In a fallen world our daily options are sometimes not ideal and are limited by negative circumstances. Nevertheless, we can be sure that even if we must choose between a bad or a worse option, knowing that "from the beginning it was not so" will inspire our necessary choices to be coherent with the principles of God's kingdom.

God has called each one of us in the line of service and duty. This work is at times difficult, but we should find inspiration in the opportunity to exemplify Christian moral behavior, rooted in the Creation, while waiting for Jesus' second coming. 🍀

¹ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1954), p. 298.

² Ellen G. White, *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press. Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 109.

³ Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890, 1908), p. 364.

⁴ "Every manifestation of creative power is an expression of infinite love" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 33).

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In the beginning **God**

THE START-UP



How God's choice of one family man would bless the entire world

GERALD A. KLINGBEIL

I grew up in a little town in the Black Forest in southern Germany. It's a region bordering France and Switzerland known for dense fir forests, low mountain ranges, picturesque villages, and meandering rivers.

The famous Danube River, Europe's second-longest river, flowing from west to east and passing through or bordering at least nine countries, has its beginnings in the little town of Donaueschingen, Germany, in the Black Forest.¹ The famed *Donauquelle* ("Danube source") doesn't look that impressive, with a flow of only 4 to 18 gallons (15 to 70 liters) per second—and yet it grows to become one of Europe's most significant rivers, navigable by large boats and barges for 1,501 miles (2,415 kilometers) of its 1,700 miles (2,735 kilometers).²

GOD SPEAKS

Small beginnings do not mean insignificant beginnings. Like so many beginnings in Scripture, Abraham's call began with a word from God.³ Stephen tells us in Acts 7:2 that this conversation between Abraham and the Lord had started already in Mesopotamia, before Abraham's family had moved to Haran in Syria (Gen. 11:31). God's specific message to Abraham found in Genesis 12:1-3 sounded like this:

"The Lord had said to Abram, 'Go from your country, your people and your father's household to the land I will show you.

I will make you into a great nation, and I will bless you; I will make your name great, and you will be a blessing.

I will bless those who bless you, and whoever curses you I will curse;

and all peoples on earth will be blessed through you.'"⁴

We hear the encouraging cadence of new beginnings in God's call to Abraham. God reaches out to one family following the Flood—and yet His call is designed to affect the entire world. Abraham must leave familiar places, people with whom he shared kinship ties, and even close family relations, and begin a journey to an unknown country. But it's not his obedience or even his faith that will make him great.

Along the way there are many ups and downs. God's



offer of a new beginning and His covenant renewal with humanity is a reminder of His sovereignty and grace. The promises included in Abraham's call of becoming a great nation, obtaining a great name (or fame), and being a blessing to all the peoples of the "earth"—shortcut for the entire world—reach far beyond the all-too-familiar lore of successful families. Abraham's call reminds us that new beginnings are God's specialty and domain.

Abraham's response is immediate and to the point. He leaves the familiar and sets out to—well, he doesn't really know (cf. Heb. 11:8). While the call is specific and unambiguous, the fulfillment of God's covenant promises takes a long time to become tangible.

Abraham also doesn't leave alone. He has a large family, comprising not only his wife, Sarah, and the family of his nephew, Lot, but also includes—at least—318 "trained men" born in his household (Gen. 14:14).⁵ Three hundred eighteen fighting men comprised a formidable military force in the second millennium B.C. We need to imagine a large encampment comprising many tents that make up Abraham's camp. But there is no son or daughter—yet. How can Abraham become a great nation if there is not even *one* child? How will God's promise of descendants as numerous as the stars, visible on a clear night unencumbered by city lights, ever become a reality (Gen. 15:5)? How will "all peoples" be blessed by Abraham's descendants if Sarah hasn't even borne one?

Both Abraham and Sarah must have asked themselves similar questions as they lived God's call for the next 25 years until the much-prayed-for birth of Isaac (Gen. 21:1-5).

THE FUTURE IS HERE

The arrival of Isaac turned tears into laughter, for *nomen est omen*.⁶ Later Jacob and Esau are born to Isaac and Rebekah, and their children and grandchildren find refuge in Egypt during a devastating famine affecting many regions of the ancient Near East. We can see the faint outline of the fulfillment of God's promise of many descendants, but where is the blessing promised by God in His initial call to Abraham?

God uses Joseph to deliver a first blessing to Egypt and those affected by the famine (Gen. 41). His meteoric rise from imprisoned slave to second-in-command of Egypt is mind-boggling and anticipates God's special blessing to His people, now called "the children of Israel." When Joseph's family finally reaches Egypt, they are given the royal treatment and get settled "in the best part of the land" (Gen. 47:11). They grow and thrive and flourish so much so that hundreds of years later another pharaoh and his people are afraid of their numbers and devise plans to

Israel's election was not based on abilities, size, importance, or even faithfulness, but rather on God's mission to bless all peoples of the earth.



oppress Israel (Ex. 1:6-14). Scripture states that the Egyptians “worked them ruthlessly. They made their lives bitter with harsh labor” (verses 13, 14).

Where are God’s blessings now? we wonder. And how can God use a people to bless the world if they are living in abject slavery?

LIBERATION

Israel’s deliverance from bondage in Egypt becomes a backdrop for God’s deliverance of people throughout the ages. His promise of a “land flowing with milk and honey” is metaphor for a good and safe and plentiful land. The Promised Land is strategically placed to connect north and south and the powerful Mesopotamian empires to the Egyptian and northern African kingdoms. Israel’s location was chosen because of Israel’s mission.

Moses reminds his audience in Deuteronomy 7:6-11 that Israel’s call (as given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob) was not based on its numbers or even its goodness. No, writes Moses, “it was because the Lord loved you and kept the oath he swore to your ancestors” (verse 8). God’s love for Israel, His firstborn (Ex. 4:22), is foundational to His covenant and implies also His concern for all the other “sons” and “daughters” of the earth. The coinage of God’s election of Israel and His covenant with Abraham’s descendants was *light*—light that was to point directly back to the Creator and Redeemer (cf. Isa. 42:6; also 49:6).

THE PLAN

Israel’s role as light and witness to God’s grace, righteousness, holiness, and compassion is deeply embedded in the prophetic witness of the Old Testament (cf. Isa. 43:10; 44:8). Moses had already anticipated this element in the blessings of the covenant: “God will set you high above all the nations on earth,” he had declared to his audience (Deut. 28:1). When the other people groups would observe Israel, they would recognize God’s special relationship with Israel (Jer. 16:20, 21) and would affirm “that they are a people the Lord has blessed” (Isa. 61:9). God’s blessings would be seen in Israel’s prosperity (Deut. 8:17, 18), their skills in animal husbandry and agriculture (Isa. 51:3), their superior craftsmanship (Ex. 31:2-6; 35:33, 35), their blessings of health (Ex. 15:26), their superior intellect, and, above all, their holiness of character reflecting God’s character (Lev. 19:2).⁷

God’s gifting of Israel was never meant for selfish

reasons. Israel’s election was not based on abilities, size, importance, or even faithfulness, but rather on God’s mission to bless all peoples of the earth. Messiah’s coming was part of this blessing, but Israel’s mission was not just to produce a Messiah. They had been called to use all the gifts bestowed on them to bless the nations and draw in those seeking righteousness and grace.

BACK TO THE BEGINNINGS

Their frequent and consistent failure to live according to the principles of God’s covenant resulted in disappointment, death, and exile. When we lose sight of the content and become enamored with the trimmings, we will always miss the goal. The prophets’ repeated calls to authentic living versus ritualized traditions is well expressed in Micah 6:8: “He has showed you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”

That’s the place where we come back to small beginnings. God’s call to Israel had always been a personal call. He is not primarily interested in structures and programs and organizations. God wants our heart—and He pursues us through blessings and curses right to the point where we finally hear His gentle voice whispering into our hearts: “You are My cherished daughter; you are My beloved son. Come and let Me save you so that you, too, may become a blessing for those surrounding you.”⁸

¹ Two municipalities in southern Germany have claimed the source of the Danube, i.e., Furtwangen (the source of the river Breg) and Donaueschingen (the source of the river Brigach). In 1981 the government of the state of Baden-Württemberg granted Donaueschingen’s request to be recognized as the “source of the Danube” in official maps. See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Source_of_the_Danube.

² See <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Danube>.

³ I am using Abraham instead of the earlier Abram for the sake of simplicity.

⁴ Unless otherwise noted, all Scripture quotes in this article are from the New International Version.


⁵ The Hebrew term translated “trained men” is found only here in the Old Testament. A related Semitic term, used in texts from the nineteenth to the fifteenth centuries B.C., suggests “armed retainers.”

⁶ The Latin proverb *nomen est omen* can be translated as “the name is a sign” and reminds us of the fact that the meaning of Isaac’s name is “he laughs.”

⁷ For more references, both from Scripture and Ellen White, see “The Role of Israel in Old Testament Prophecy,” in *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, ed. F. D. Nichol, rev. ed. (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1977), vol. 4, pp. 25-38.

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

In the beginning **God**



HOW THE
CHURCH
BEGAN

The four crucial steps Jesus took.

THOMAS R. SHEPHERD

And the Word became flesh and dwelt among us, and we have seen his glory, glory as of the only Son from the Father, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).¹

The church begins with Jesus. He is its source, the center of its life and its goal. The incarnation of the Son of God described here in John 1, however, has roots in the Old Testament people of God. In the phrase "dwelt among us" the word "dwelt" comes from a verb that means "to pitch a tent."² It is reminiscent of the sanctuary set up at Sinai: "And let them make me a sanctuary, that I may dwell in their midst" (Ex. 25:8). The tabernacle was set up in the middle of the camp, symbolizing that God would dwell in the midst of His people. So Christ, becoming human, came to dwell in our midst. Just as the Israelites saw the glory of God in the fiery pillar above the sanctuary, so we see the glory of God in the face of Jesus our Lord (2 Cor. 4:6).

UNLIKELY BEGINNINGS

If you and I were tasked with creating an organization that would have a small beginning (Mark 4:30-32) but with a worldwide mission extending to the end of time (Matt. 28:18-20), we would probably think long and hard about whom we would choose as the key initial players. We would most likely search for deeply talented, far-sighted, enthusiastic, stable people.

This does not seem to be the pattern that Jesus chose in establishing the church. His followers were a somewhat motley crew, ranging from tax collector (Matthew), a despised group in Jesus' culture, to Zealot (Simon the Zealot), at the opposite end of the spectrum and haters of sell-out tax collectors. The Twelve were certainly ambitious, but for the

wrong reasons, wanting positions of power next to Jesus (Mark 10:35-40), whom they were ready to crown king (John 6:13-15). Like so many Keystone Kops, they seem to bumble and blunder through the Gospel stories. Jesus always is correcting them, sometimes with sharp rebuke. Are these the foundational leaders of the Christian church? They are (1 Cor. 12:28).

CHURCH BUILDING STEPS

How did these men go from proud, ambitious, mixed-up followers to the stable, courageous, outgoing foundational leaders of the early Christian church? There is only one reasonable explanation, and it is one that others noticed: "Now when they saw the boldness of Peter and John, and perceived that they were uneducated, common men, they were astonished. And they recognized that they had been with Jesus" (Acts 4:13). It was contact with Jesus that changed these men for the rest of their lives. They never again went back to their old trades.³ Their whole perspective on the world changed, and it produced a silent revolution that spread throughout the world.

But what did Jesus do that brought this about?

Step 1: He started by calling these men to be with Him and to watch what He did (Mark 4:13). They saw Him preach, probably memorizing His messages. They saw the amazing miracles that He performed and noticed the way He especially welcomed the people who were outsiders rejected by others (Luke 15:1, 2). He resisted and spoke against the religious leaders who tried to trap Him, uncovering their hypocrisy and departure from the will of God (Mark 7:6-8). When His

own family came to take charge of Him because they thought Him insane, He parried their request and pointed out that it was the people who did the will of God who were His true family (Mark 3:31-35). These types of events over a three-year period changed the outlook of these men, as if they were coming up out of a valley fog onto a mountaintop in the sunlight.

But Jesus was not done training them.

Step 2: They must have their own experience of preaching, teaching, and healing while He was still with them. He sent them out two by two on a mission of their own. He gave them specific instructions on what to do, where to go, how to proceed in their mission, whether welcomed or rejected (Matt. 10). He gave them authority to heal the sick, cast out demons, cleanse lepers, raise the dead. It was a heady experience, as you can imagine. They went out and returned reporting what had happened. Jesus saw their need for rest and took them away where they could rest awhile (Mark 6:30, 31; Luke 9:10). All this was central to the establishment of the church.

But there was another crucial ingredient—in fact, the most important—for them yet to learn.

Step 3: It was the cross. After being with Jesus several years, seeing His miracles, learning His message, having their own success in mission with Jesus giving them instruction, they needed to also see where His mission was headed. When they were completely convinced that He was the Messiah (Mark 8:29), He told them, “The Son of Man must suffer many things and be rejected by the elders and the chief priests and scribes, and be killed, and on the third day be raised” (Luke 9:22).

It was impossible. They could not see it, would not see it, and Peter voiced their objection: “Far be it from you, Lord! This shall never happen to you” (Matt. 16:22). Peter and his companions just could not accept the cross. But Jesus would not be deterred: “Get behind me, Satan! You are a hindrance to me. For you are not setting your mind on the things of God, but on the things of man.” “If anyone would come after Me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow Me” (verses 23, 24). This reality is what became the center of Christianity, the central truth establishing the church. The Master would die upon a cross, and every true

disciple must do the same. As Dietrich Bonhoeffer put it so succinctly: “When Christ calls a man, he bids him come and die.”⁴ One more step sealed the beginning of the Christian church.

Step 4: It was the resurrection and ascension to glory of Jesus our Lord. This fact is emphasized again and again throughout the New Testament. Paul puts it in poetic language: “And being found in human form, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to the point of death, even death on a cross. Therefore God has highly exalted him and bestowed on him the name that is above every name, so that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:8-11).

From this exalted position Jesus bestowed on the church the power and authority to take His message of grace and forgiveness throughout the world. “He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And he gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the shepherds and teachers, to equip the saints for the work of ministry, for building up the body of Christ, until we all attain to the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God, to mature manhood, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ” (Eph. 4:10-13).

From those seemingly humble beginnings the church continues to grow throughout the world. Its mission is the same as at the start—to herald our Lord’s grace, mercy, truth, and sacrifice to the ends of the world until He returns. Experiencing this grace, we are transformed, lifted up from mundane existence into the sunlight of His love, given a purpose in life that far exceeds anything the world around us offers.

I am glad to be part of this mission. Aren’t you? 

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²*Skēnoō*: “to pitch a tent, dwell, settle, take up residence.”

³John 21 does tell us of the disciples going fishing after the resurrection, probably to raise some funds. But from that point forward, after that resurrection meeting with Jesus on the shore of the Sea of Galilee, there is no record of them ever turning back.

⁴Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *The Cost of Discipleship* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1995), p. 89.

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THE DREAM MAKER

Once walked into the General Conference cafeteria, and, seeing the wife of a colleague, blurted, “Sally—I had a dream about you last night!”*

Having a dream that you forget, only to see someone whose appearance triggers your memory of that dream? Who hasn’t experienced this?

What you haven’t experienced, however, was someone approaching you and declaring, “Hey, I know what you dreamed last night,” which you yourself didn’t remember until they reported it.

This scenario happened in Daniel 2. The Babylonian king had a dream that he couldn’t remember, and demanded that his wise men tell him the dream and its interpretation—or else (Dan. 2:1-13). Reporting the contents of a dream that the dreamer himself couldn’t remember? No wonder his wise men, befuddled, declared: “It is a difficult thing that the king requests, and there is no other who can tell it to the king except the gods, whose dwelling is not with flesh” (verse 11).

Facing death, Daniel prays, the Lord answers, and Daniel then stands before the king. After rubbing it in that the other wise men cannot give the king what he asks (verse 27), Daniel declares, “But there is a God in heaven who reveals secrets, and He has made known to King Nebuchadnezzar what will be in the latter days” (verse 28).

After Daniel tells the king the dream and interpretation, the world’s most powerful man “fell on his face, prostrate before Daniel, and commanded that they should present an offering and incense to him” (verse 46). This is conclusive evidence the dreamer recalled the

dream—and that he realized that Daniel had gifts that would make it foolish to resist Daniel’s interpretation.

Why believe this story? Because the interpretation itself—which describes a sequence of nations, beginning with ancient Babylon and progressing to modern Europe and beyond—validates it. How could Daniel have so accurately depicted modern Europe? These nations will, he wrote, be “partly strong and partly fragile. As you saw iron mixed with ceramic clay, they will mingle with the seed of men; but they will not adhere to one another, just as iron does not mix with clay” (verses 42, 43).

Some strong, some fragile? That’s always been the story of Europe. Germany remains a behemoth while Luxembourg—well, not so much. Mingle themselves with the seed of men? Europeans, commoners and royalty, have intermarried for centuries, and yet how many times in the past century alone have they made war on each other? You can’t even use the same electric socket from one country to the next. Europe remains as divided as ever—just as Daniel predicted.

I defy anyone—even someone holding the unsustainable Maccabean hypothesis (which dates Daniel to the middle of the second century B.C.)—to explain Daniel 2 apart from a God who knows and controls the future.

God is so close, in our heads even; and so transcendent that He stands over the fate of empires—and Daniel 2 proves it. ♣

* not her real name

Clifford Goldstein is editor of the *Adult Bible Study Guide*. His latest book is *Risen: Finding Hope in the Empty Tomb*.



**CLIFF'S
EDGE**
**CLIFFORD
GOLDSTEIN**

**WHY BELIEVE
THIS STORY?
BECAUSE THE
INTERPRETATION
ITSELF
VALIDATES IT.**

In the beginning **God**

NEW BEGINNING: ETERNITY WITH GOD



We will see Him as He is.

EKKEHARDT MUELLER

Beginnings can be exciting and may be eagerly anticipated: A new company is founded. A new medication is produced that can reduce suffering. The new job offer looks promising and may provide much-needed financial resources. A marriage takes place, and two people promise each other to share their lives and love all life long. A baby is born, and a child learns to walk and detect new things. A church is started with people who have learned about Jesus and have begun to love Him.

But not all beginnings are great. Some we encounter with apprehension: Will we succeed with the difficult and straining classwork? Will we be able to make friends in a new environment? Some we encounter with great fear: What will we do after a divorce or the death of a spouse? What will a new beginning be like after having been fired? How do we deal with the situation when told that our life will come to an end soon?

Life on earth has many beginnings, good ones and bad ones. Some affect humanity as a whole; some affect us primarily as believers, and some are of an individual nature.

THE OLD: OUR PRESENT SITUATION

A look at human history can be insightful and, simultaneously, appalling. We had a good beginning when God created us. But when we turned against Him, life became mostly misery for the majority of us—even the well-to-do. We get sick. We get hurt. Life may seem to be meaningless. Eventually we will die. None of us has eternal life automatically. The saying that humans are humanity's worst enemies is still true. We take advantage of each other, oppress each other, amass money without end while others have nothing to survive. We try to enlarge our turf and our countries at the expenses of others. Has there ever been a long period in history when there was no war on earth? We call people "great" who have built themselves empires by killing millions of fellow humans. And things are not getting better, as we are told it

The new beginning at the end of human history—brought about by God Himself—shines brighter than any other human hope.

would be: an evolution to a better kind of humanity without God just does not take place.

Against this background, the new beginning at the end of human history—brought about by God Himself—shines brighter than any other human hope. The Old Testament already pointed to a new beginning of some kind for the Israel of old, which never became fully true. But the books of Daniel and Revelation point to a final new beginning, the kingdom of God in glory. While Daniel heralds this kingdom, the last book of Scripture describes its nature; and this is more and better than what we could ever hope for. But it has become possible only through Jesus' incarnation, His life among us, and, especially, His death on the cross for our salvation, toppling all forces of evil and turning upside down all human approaches to life that at the end leave us hopeless, unfulfilled, and sick.

Revelation repeatedly narrates human history from the time of John to the end of time. This story line is in no way pleasant. Think about the four apocalyptic horsemen, the martyrs under the altar, and suicidal humanity at the Day of the Lord in the seven seals (Rev. 6-8). Think about the culminating judgments of the seven trumpets (Rev. 8-11). Think about the dragon's intense war through his minions against God's people (Rev. 12-13). What lies ahead of us is conflict, plagues, and Armageddon. But there is more, much more. God is still in charge, and He changes all our games, all our fabrications of evil, injustice, and oppression, and all the onslaughts of evil powers.

THE NEW: REVELATION 21-22

The last two chapters of the Bible return indirectly to the lost Paradise of Genesis 1-2. The original beginning of human life, recorded in the first two chapters of Scripture, is matched by a new beginning of human life at a new level at the end of Scripture: the first creation is matched by a new creation.

THE NEW: JOHN'S VISION

Revelation 21 starts with John seeing a vision of a new heaven, a new earth, and the Holy City, the New Jerusalem. This general statement will be unpacked later when an angel shows John the Holy City as a bride, the throne of God, the river of the city, and the tree of life.

THE NEW: A VOICE FROM THE THRONE

In conjunction with his vision, John hears a great and unidentified voice from God's throne declaring that God's tabernacle (*skēnē*) will be with humanity and that He will "tabernacle"/dwell (*skēnoō*) with them and take away all tears, death, mourning, crying, and pain (Rev. 21:3, 4). Revelation describes the new beginning already from the perspective of the old eon having come to an end, and a new and supreme beginning having been made.

The message of Revelation 21:3, 4 explains the presence of God among the redeemed with sanctuary language. God "tabernacles" among his people as He did in the Garden of Eden, in the earthly sanctuary, and as He did when Jesus "tabernacled" among us after His first coming (John 1:14). Revelation 21-22 is all about the presence of God among His people. This is the major point and is repeated with different phrases and different imagery. God will be with us—not as an occasional visitor, but permanently, intimately, and directly! He and we will belong together in a totally unique way.

The wonderful result of God's presence is then described with the positive affirmation that in fatherly love God will take care of all tears of His children. In tenderness He personally will remove what has created hurt and harm, and He will undo—in an exemplary way—four detrimental aspects of our present life: crying, pain, death, and mourning. This surpasses all our present understanding and experience: We know what suffering and death mean and fear them. We know these better than any created being in the universe. But we do not

know resurrection yet. Only Jesus can understand us fully: only He has encountered evil in the most intense way, and He has risen from the dead.

The promise of removal of the former things, including death, implies that the resurrection of the believers at the Second Coming will have taken place (Rev. 19:11–20:6). This resurrection is the beginning of the final beginning. Throughout the New Testament, resurrection is a major theme. The apostles could not stop preaching Jesus' death on the cross and His resurrection from the dead. Because Jesus was raised, His followers will also be resurrected.

The resurrection is the great hope of believers and the ultimate threat to the enemies of the gospel. First, though the latter were able to harm and even kill Christ's followers, they cannot hinder them from coming back to life! They do not have ultimate power over life and death. Second, they too will experience a resurrection, even if they do not want it, the "resurrection of judgment" (John 5:29, ESV).¹ Issues of life and death are in the hand of God the Father and the hands of Christ, the "firstborn from the dead" (Rev. 1:5) and the one who is life personified (John 14:6).

THE NEW: THE VOICE OF GOD THE FATHER

Following the "great voice" of Revelation 21:3 (KJV), the voice of God the Father is heard (verse 5), affirming that everything will be made new and that the promise is "true and faithful." While Jesus speaks repeatedly in the Apocalypse—for instance, all the messages to the seven churches come from Him—God the Father, the Creator and the "Alpha and Omega," utters only two direct speeches, the one found here and the other one in the prologue of the Apocalypse (Rev. 1:8). When God breaks His silence, we had better listen. Both times He is portrayed as Creator, as "the Beginning and the End" (Rev. 21:6) and as He who is and was and is to come, the Almighty (Rev. 1:8). As He states: "It is done!" (Rev. 21:6): salvation (John 19:30), sanctuary, and new creation are connected. The crucial aspect in the new creation, not present in the original creation, is the gift of eternal salvation.

THE NEW: AN ANGEL GUIDE

Starting with Revelation 21, one of the angels charged with carrying the bowls in Revelation 15-16 speaks and explains the new creation in more detail (Rev. 21:9–22:5). He shows John the New Jerusalem,

the river of the water of life from the throne of God—the sanctuary—and from the Lamb (Rev. 22:1), and the tree of life (verse 2). The New Jerusalem is a bride (people), a temple city (Rev. 21:22) (God's presence), and a garden city (Paradise). The angel's imagery points to protection and peace (walls), access (the open gates), sufficiency (size), inhabitants as faithful people of God (12 gates/tribes and 12 foundation stones/apostles), beauty and durability (building materials), and security (the nature with the river and the fruits).

The major point of the new creation is not golden streets, strawberries as big as watermelons, leisure, and pleasure. The angel ends his portrayal of the garden city by returning to God's presence with humankind. The intimate fellowship between God and humanity that existed in original Eden will be restored. Redeemed humanity will see the Creator and Savior face to face, will serve Him, and reign forever (Rev. 22:3-5): "God and humans share the same address."²

CONCLUSION

The original creation and the new creation have a lot in common. But the new beginning surpasses the old one in several aspects: A tempter (serpent) will no longer be present. The danger of falling into sin is practically excluded. Jesus is not only Creator but now also Savior and one of us, while also being part of the Godhead. His incarnation and death for our sake has changed His nature permanently and therefore has changed the Godhead permanently. The plan of salvation has brought Godhead and humanity much closer to each other than they ever were. This new dimension can probably be best described as "God with us" and we with Him in an ever deeper and fuller growth experience, with new vistas into every aspect of life and into God's grace and wonderful character throughout eternity, with profound satisfaction and ever-increasing love of the Lord of life on our part. This is truly *the* beginning for which we long. "Amen. Even so, come, Lord Jesus!" (Rev. 22:20). ▀

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² Sigve K. Tonstad, *God of Sense and Traditions of Non-Sense* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock, 2016), p. 386.

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ROSHANQUI / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES

FAITH ON FIRE!

We are called to let our lights shine for Jesus.

This article is condensed from a worship talk presented to the Biblical Research Institute Committee on October 19, 2021. It retains elements of the oral style of the original presentation.—Editors.

We find, scattered through the pages of history, the accounts of great men and great women who contributed to the community in which they lived and to the larger world around them.

These great men and great women, who have been immortalized in our consciousness, are nothing more than ordinary people who had a purpose, prepared for that purpose, and committed to persevere no matter what the

cost or condition. These ordinary people became great not because they had a purpose, not because they were prepared, and not because they persevered. These ordinary people became great because they were willing to ignite their purpose, for which they were prepared and for which they were committed to persevere, thereby setting themselves on fire with action.

It was this fire in Nelson Mandela that brought apartheid in

South Africa to an end. It was this fire in Sister Teresa of Calcutta that dutifully served the poor. It was this fire in Florence Nightingale that brought relief to the sick. It was this fire in Sir Winston Churchill that helped win a world war.

This fire that was ablaze in these great men and great women captured and consumed the admiration and allegiance of those that were around—and they themselves were caught on fire!

The pages of history could very well have included legions of ordinary people with their signature of greatness had they only ignited a purpose into action. There is so much that the citizens of this world have in common that the difference in those who are considered great is they *did* something with what they had.

If they had time, they prized it. If they had a skill, they perfected it. If they had a vision, they proclaimed it. If they had an opportunity, they pursued it.

A FAMILIAR STORY

This morning I invite you to explore with me a familiar parable of Jesus found in Matthew 25:1-13. This parable offers us insights into the time period that surrounds our anticipation of the second coming of Christ.

The parable opens a window into the lives of 10 women—and if we spend some time at this window, we soon realize that these 10 women had a lot in common. My time at the window revealed that they were all virgins; they were all invited to a wedding; they all had lamps; they all fell asleep; they all heard the announcement—“the bridegroom comes!”—and they all saw the bridegroom.

Looking through the window, I could not help noticing that even with all that these 10 women had in common, it was the failure of five of them to do *one* thing that made the difference. Someone who does not have much time to spend looking through the window may see only the obvious: Half of the women took no oil for their lamps. However, someone who takes the time to examine the scenery that presents itself at this window would recognize that the difference was that half of the women *did* something with what they had. They all had lamps, but only half of the women did what was necessary to ensure that their lamps would produce light.

This parable is set in a culture in which the bridegroom, not the bride, is the focus of attention—a culture in which the bride is ready and waiting while the bridegroom has no set time to arrive. The marriage supper is held in the evening at the home of the groom. The house is given up for the day to the women, who busy themselves robbing the bride and adorning the house.

As the night wears on, and the duties of robbing the bride and adorning the house are all done, a period of relaxing and drowsy waiting sets in; thus, as in the parable, all 10 women were overcome with sleep.

When the bridegroom begins his procession through the streets, a cry is heard all along the route that gives warning to those waiting with the bride that it's time to arise and prepare a corridor of light to welcome the bridegroom with honor.

As Jesus presented this parable to His disciples, He conspicuously provided them with His assessment of these 10 women before outlining the events that took place that was the basis of His assessment. He declared that “five of them were wise, and five were foolish” (Matt. 25:2).

This approach in presenting the parable suggests to me that Jesus was serving notice to His audience and to us today that if we learn from the experience of these 10 women, we would be well advised to take the appropriate action to be considered wise when our own assessment is made.

They all had lamps, but it was those that were wise who could *do* something with their lamp. The lamp of the wise had purpose, not posture. The lamp of the wise had preparation, not presumption. The lamp of the wise had perseverance, not paralysis. The lamp of the wise had power, not pretense.

As I was looking through the window and seeing the lives of these 10 women in the parable, I realized that there was another window nearby, and in my curiosity, I also looked through this other window. To my amazement, I saw myself among many people and could not help noticing how much we had in common. We all go to church. We all are baptized. We all return a faithful tithe and offering. We all have the Spirit of Prophecy. We all have this faith in Jesus. We all believe and accept Jesus' sacrifice on our behalf at Calvary. We all believe in His resurrection. We all believe in His ascension to prepare for us a place, and we all

This world needs more love than it needs literature.

This world needs more volunteers than it needs vegetarians.

This world needs more givers than it needs gossipers.

believe that He is coming back again!

All that I found common to us as I looked through the other window is the very basis of our indictment. *For though we have much in common, we often do nothing with what we have.* Our lives provide no evidence of what we have. Our lives provide no evidence of what we believe. Our lives provide no evidence of what we have accepted to be true. Yes, we have much in common, but no one can tell or feel the power of what we have!

Some may say this morning that my window gazing has no basis in reality. But I would say the contrary is true. The question for each of us today is "What am I doing with this faith that I have?"

AN INTRODUCTION TO "LAMPOLOGY"

Growing up in the country of Jamaica meant that having a lamp in the home was a necessity. The utility company would choose the most inopportune times to leave us in darkness, and this was done without warning. So our lamps had to be always ready. As I reflected on my years with our lamps at home, I realized that the whole process of a lamp giving light is so germane to the life of a Christian.

Let me take a moment and share with you a few insights gained from my reflection about our lamps at home in Jamaica. Let me give you a little course in "lampology": Each person or room should have its own lamp. You must know where to buy oil; you must buy oil; you must buy your oil before you need it (prices are higher in a time of crisis!); each lamp must be filled with its own supply of oil; you must continually monitor your supply of oil; the wick must be immersed in the oil; the wick is difficult to light without oil; the wick will burn out quickly without oil, and what-

ever light is produced is minimal; the wick should be trimmed periodically so there is no impediment to oil being ignited into light. The lampshade must be clean, or else the light will not be seen; and you must light the lamp.

Now that you have successfully completed that introductory lesson in lampology, let me give you the advanced lesson. The question is "How does the oil in the lamp make it up the wick so that it can be ignited into light?" Well, here is the answer. The process is known as capillarity—the elevation or the depression of a liquid where it comes in contact with a solid, such as the side of a glass. *If* the liquid can wet the side of the glass faster than the liquid is able to bond to itself, *then* the liquid will rise.

So then, *if* our faith in Jesus is of such that it wets our souls faster than our desire to have faith in ourselves, *then* our faith in Jesus can only rise to the top and all that is left for us to do is ignite that faith into a living fire so that our light can so shine before men that we may see our good works and glorify our Father which is in heaven!

WHAT IS NEEDED?

We live in a dark and cold world, and we need more people who are willing to put their faith on fire. This world needs more love than it needs literature. This world needs more volunteers than it needs vegetarians. This world needs more givers than it needs gossipers. This world is looking for and needs to see Jesus in you and in me. This world needs our faith on fire so ablaze that it will capture and consume those around us and they themselves can be caught on fire.

The monotony of waiting caused the 10 women to fall asleep. At such a moment of excitement

and expectation I wonder how someone—anyone—could fall asleep. Maybe it was the certainty that the bridegroom would come. Maybe it was the certainty that they would hear the call in the distance. Maybe it was the certainty that they were already inside the house.

No matter what may have been the certainty, it's clear that not everybody was ready for the bridegroom to come. In that time of waiting, some lamps were *on* while some lamps were *out*. In that time of waiting, some were sleeping in certainty while some were sleeping in carelessness.

We who are waiting for Jesus to come are living in a period of monotony—a continuous monotony of disasters, crime, violence, war, famine, sickness, and death. In this monotony we are waiting for Jesus to come, but we feel weary. All we can do is rest in the assurance that “he that shall come will come” (Heb. 10:37, KJV).

As we wait, is there a purpose to our faith? As we wait, is there a preparation for our faith? As we wait, is there a perseverance to our faith? As we wait, is our faith on fire?

It was at the midnight hour that they heard the call. The time of waiting was soon to come to an end. The bridegroom had not yet arrived at the house, but he was closer now than he had been before. Those who were sleeping in certainty arose to find their lamps with light. Those who were sleeping in carelessness arose to find their lamps in darkness.

In this moment of crisis, the wise recommended to the foolish to go and buy oil from those that sell oil. The passage does not tell us if they indeed were able to buy oil, but my guess is that it would have been very unlikely at that hour.

It's not a matter of selfishness, but each lamp must have its own oil. Each person must know Christ for themselves. Each person must have their own faith in Jesus. It's this knowledge of Christ and faith in Him that is the source of light in our lives.

When the bridegroom finally arrived, he found five women there with their lamps providing a corridor of light to the door of the marriage supper. All who were with the bridegroom and the five women who were stationed at their post of duty went in, and the door was shut.

When Christ returns, He will recognize us by the light of our lives, which is produced by our

faith in Him. Our faith on fire will reflect Christ, and as He sees His reflection in us, He will say: “I know who you are—come in with Me. I know who you are because you loved Me. I know who you are because you fed Me. I know who you are because you visited Me. I know who you are because you spoke of Me. I know who you are—come in with Me!”

The five women, who in their hour of crisis went to buy oil, returned to a closed door, and petitioned the bridegroom to let them in. The bridegroom came to the door, but his response was “I don't know you!” This declaration is quite astonishing considering that these five women had been invited to the wedding.

In my sanctified imagination here is what I believe happened. When the bridegroom came to the door there was darkness on the outside and light on the inside. You see, I don't believe that they were able to buy oil at that hour of the night. I am sure you have experienced it, given those two conditions of darkness outside and light inside. The person on the outside can see the person on the inside, but the person on the inside cannot see or clearly distinguish the person on the outside. So the five women could see the bridegroom, but as far as the bridegroom was concerned, He was unable to recognize those who were standing at the door in darkness! How could he let them in? In the darkness they could provide no proof of who they were and why they should be able to come inside.

“Good works can never purchase salvation,” writes Ellen White, “but they are the evidence of the faith that acts by love and purifies the soul. And though the eternal reward is not bestowed because of our merit, yet it will be in proportion to the work that has been done through the grace of Christ.”*

Let me conclude with a paraphrase of some famous words of Sir Winston Churchill: “Let us therefore brace ourselves to our duty, and so bear ourselves that when Christ shall come and through the ceaseless ages of eternity He will still say: ‘Well done, thou good and faithful servant.’”

* Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1898, 1940), p. 314.

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BEING SALT IN THESE DARK DAYS

Thank God for the new year and new beginnings.

“You are the salt of the earth,” declared Jesus (Matt. 5:13). If we’ve ever needed these compliments before, we sure do need them now in these dark, uncertain days, dominated by a relentless pandemic.

To boost the self-confidence of the marginalized for being the poor multitude, Jesus immediately addressed them saying, “Happy are the poor in spirit [not the Holy Spirit, but the breath they breathed]: for the kingdom of heaven is theirs” (verse 3, BBE).^{*} Then He added emphatically, assertively: “You are the salt of the earth.”

Since then, whenever we want to pay tribute to the solid worth and usefulness of someone, we say they are the salt of the earth. Regrettably, this saying doesn’t have the same impact today as it did then, because we’re bombarded with warnings that salt isn’t good for human consumption. These warnings weren’t warranted back then because they didn’t use the highly refined, overprocessed substance.

Ancient Jews treasured salt, which symbolized new beginnings and separation from the past. By the time of Jesus, salt was permanently connected with a variety of uses, particularly three special qualities: purity, pungency, and preservative.

Salt was connected with “purity,” a word derived from *pur*, meaning “fire.” While baptizing in the Jordan River, John the Baptist declared: “I baptize you with water for repentance, but He who is coming after me is mightier than I . . . He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and fire” (Matt. 3:11, NASB). In biblical and early Christian references, baptism by fire described unexpected transitions, martyrdom of self or others, and reception of extraordinary spir-

itual gifts (Acts 2:1-4). Since then, a Christian’s purity is often experienced through baptism in the fire of adversity as well as receiving powerful spiritual gifts.

Salt was also connected with pungency, or taste and flavor. This taste or flavor must be carefully balanced, because food that’s too salty is sickening and without salt is insipid. Since Christianity is to life what salt is to food, we whom Jesus designated as the salt of the earth are to bring flavor to life wherever we are sprinkled or placed.

Despite its purity and pungency, the preservative power of salt was the most obvious quality connected in the minds of the multitude. The curing, preservative practices from ancient Egypt had already spread throughout Israel. Thus, when Jesus mentioned salt, everyone knew its primary role as a preservative to keep things from going bad or rotting in a world where the weather was extremely hot, where little or no refrigeration existed and ice was very scarce.

Without the preservative presence of real Christians, the stench of rotteness from spiritually dead folk will reach the nostrils of God and kindle His wrath to the point of destroying the world as He did Sodom and Gomorrah.

Authentic Christians are the salt of the earth, a desperately needed commodity this new year. We’re agents of preservation in this culture, time, moment, slice of human history, to preserve and powerfully present the life and teachings of Jesus Christ. 🍴


^{*} Texts credited to BBE are from *The Bible in Basic English*. Published in the United States by E. P. Dutton & Co., New York. First printed 1949.

CURE FOR THE COMMON LIFE
HYVETH WILLIAMS



WE WHOM JESUS DESIGNATED AS THE SALT OF THE EARTH ARE TO BRING FLAVOR TO LIFE WHEREVER WE ARE SPRINKLED OR PLACED.

Hyveth Williams is a professor of homiletics at the Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary at Andrews University.



PASSING ON A LEGACY OF FAITH

*It's the greatest gift
you can give
to your children.*

**S. JOSEPH KIDDER AND
KATELYN CAMPBELL WEAKLEY**

A parent's role in the faith development of their children is extremely important. God says, "Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever!" (Deut. 5:29). Here we can see that by one generation choosing to follow God and to keep His commandments, both those parents and their next generation of children will reap the benefits and leave a legacy of influence for eternity.

If you're a parent, perhaps you've spent some time considering what you'll pass on to your children. After you're gone, what will you leave for your sons and daughters? Perhaps their childhood home or a sum of money or a prized family heirloom? The greatest gift you can give them, though, is the legacy of faith. Money, heirlooms, and property will eventually all be destroyed, but the legacy of faith is eternal.

Here are three ways you can leave a legacy of faith for your children.

CONTINUALLY TEACH FAITH TO YOUR CHILDREN

To build your child's faith, several primary elements should be kept in mind. First, the caregiver must pay attention to the instruction that God gave to the Israelites in Deuteronomy 6. In the years and centuries that followed, all Israelites memorized this command, known as the Shema; and it's a command that we would do well to follow today:

"Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one! You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. And these words which I command you today shall be in your heart. You shall teach them diligently to your children, and shall talk of them when you sit in your house, when you walk by the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up. You shall bind them as a sign on your hand, and they shall be as frontlets between your eyes. You shall write them on the doorposts of your house and on your gates" (Deut. 6:4-9).

A key implication of the Shema is the ongoing experience of educating children. The Lord instructs parents to teach their children about Him at all times: from morning until night, at home and while in the marketplace, in the field or at school—at every given opportunity. God's love for us and our love for Him must continually be on our lips, passed along to our children.

"I will open my mouth in a parable," writes the psalmist. "I will utter dark sayings of old, which we have heard and known, and our fathers have told us. We will not hide them from their children, telling to the generation to come the praises of the Lord, and His strength and His wonderful works that He has done" (Ps. 78:2-4).

How can parents possibly spend *all* their time teaching their children? When we begin to look through the lens of daily instruction, we can begin to see lessons about God throughout all our daily experiences.

Nature can be an effective way to teach your children about God. The Psalms are filled with examples of ways to connect creation to the Creator.

"The heavens declare the glory of God;

And the firmament shows His handiwork.

Day unto day utters speech,

And night unto night reveals knowledge" (Ps. 19:1, 2).

In their article entitled "Best Practices in Children's Faith Formation," John Roberto and Katie Pfiffner state that "effective faith formation with children respects the ways children learn today by offering learning activities that are experiential, image-rich, multisensory, interactive, engaging, and varied in learn-

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ing.”¹ There are lessons to be learned throughout everyday life. As events transpire, as your family experiences life together, see what connections to Scripture you can find. What lessons of morality can be learned? What aspects of God’s character can be seen?

Pray that God will open your eyes to see what lessons you can bring out of everyday life, and then simply begin sharing with your children. Ask them questions about what they see and experience. Ask them how it connects to what they know of God and the Bible. Point out Christian values and morals. As you practice having these conversations with your children, it will gradually become part of your daily routine, and your children will eagerly engage.

CONTINUALLY MODEL CHRISTLIKE CHARACTER FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Another element to consider is what the caregiver is modeling to the child. “Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). The light that we shine for our children will direct them to the source of all light, meaning that the actions we choose to take have the potential of teaching them about God.

If you don’t buy into your faith, your children will not buy into it either. Vern Bengtson notes that parents who are active in living out their faith produce children who are more likely to stay committed to Christ; however, “if the parents are not themselves involved in religious activities, if their actions are not consistent with what they preach, children are rarely motivated to follow in their parents’ religious footsteps.”² Parents need to demonstrate godly values in their own lives; otherwise the lessons they would teach will be but empty words. This nonverbally explicit teaching is as important as intentional lessons you give your child.³ It’s in watching your behavior that your child learns what’s right and what’s wrong.

The apostle Paul writes to Timothy, “Don’t let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in conduct, in love, in faith and in purity” (1 Tim. 4:12, NIV). There are five key aspects of modeling that Paul touches on in this single verse, and although he’s speaking to a young person, these

are universal principles of modeling.⁴

Speech: Our conversations should be kind and helpful to others, building one another up. It is both *what* you say and *how* you say it that makes a difference. As you communicate with others, do so lovingly. Your children will see and learn that this is the Christlike way to engage with other people.

Conduct: From the books that you read to your reaction when someone cuts you off in traffic, conduct yourself in a manner worthy of God’s heavenly kingdom. The ways your children see you behave will guide them in their own behavior and teach them what’s appropriate for a follower of Christ.

Love: Demonstrating authentic and unselfish love as the basis for everything you do and say will give your child a picture of what their heavenly Father’s love is like. Love others well, and your child will do the same.

Faith: Put your trust in your heavenly Father. When times are tough, turn to God and demonstrate your faith to your child. If your reaction is to put your faith in God, your child will learn that He is trustworthy and will do the same.

Purity: Devote yourself wholly to God and allow Him to cleanse you of your sinful tendencies. As God works within you, He will purify you and give your child a better picture of the life He wants to give us.

Your children are always watching and listening, observing all that you say and do. You’re the one who gives them cues of what’s right and wrong, and it doesn’t always involve words.

CONTINUALLY PRAY FOR YOUR CHILDREN

Spend devoted time in prayer for your children. In everything, every day, bring your child to the throne room of God in prayer.⁵ This is an important part of your child’s faith development. As you pray for your child, remember to pray for these key areas:⁶

Their Salvation. “Therefore I endure all things for the sake of the elect, that they also may obtain the salvation which is in Christ Jesus with eternal glory” (2 Tim. 2:10).

God’s Direction in Their Lives. “Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge Him, and He shall direct your paths” (Prov. 3:5, 6).

Compassion. “And be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God in

Christ forgave you” (Eph. 4:32).

Physical and Spiritual Protection. “The Lord is my rock and my fortress and my deliverer; the God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior, you save me from violence” (2 Sam. 22:2, 3).

Character Development. “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58).

Joyful Spirit. “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the Lord is your strength” (Neh. 8:10).

A New Heart. “I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; I will take the heart of stone out of your flesh and give you a heart of flesh” (Eze. 36:26).

God’s Love. “For this reason I bow my knees to the Father of our Lord Jesus Christ . . . that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the width and length and depth and height—to know the love of Christ which passes knowledge; that you may be filled with all the fullness of God” (Eph. 3:14-19).

God’s Word. “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105).

A Servant’s Attitude. “Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not people” (Eph. 6:7, NIV).

Prayer is a powerful tool. Continually pour out your prayers to God on behalf of your children, and He will hear and answer your prayers. Parents who are consistent in praying for their children may have the joy of seeing their sons and daughters grow and remain in the faith.

“Your compassionate Redeemer is watching you with love and sympathy, ready to hear your prayers and to render you the assistance which you need,” Ellen White writes.⁷ The prayers of a mother, father, or caregiver seeking God’s intervention in the life of a child will not be ignored.

IMPRESS UPON YOUR CHILDREN THE IMAGE OF THE DIVINE

It’s God’s desire and command that mothers and fathers train up their children to follow Christ. Ellen White writes, “You must instruct, warn, and counsel, ever remembering that your looks, words,

IT IS BOTH *WHAT YOU SAY* AND *HOW YOU SAY IT* THAT MAKES A DIFFERENCE.

and actions have a direct bearing upon the future course of your dear ones. Your work is not done to paint a form of beauty upon canvas or to chisel it from marble, but to impress upon a human soul the image of the Divine.”⁸ Everything that is done—every word spoken, action taken, and prayer prayed—should be Christ-centered and biblically based for the sake of your children.

In Genesis 18:19 God speaks of Abraham, saying, “For I have known him, in order that he may command his children and his household after him, that they keep the way of the Lord, to do righteousness and justice.” This is what parents are called to do: grow and instruct their children in the way of the Lord through teaching, modeling, and prayer. 📌

¹ John Roberto and Katie Pfflner, “Best Practices in Children’s Faith Formation,” *Lifelong Faith*, Fall/Winter 2007, https://faithformation-learningexchange.net/uploads/5/2/4/6/5246709/best_practices_-_children_faith_formation.pdf.

² Vern L. Bengtson, *Families and Faith: How Religion Is Passed Down Across Generations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013).

³ For more discussion on different types of teaching—nonverbal, situational, and planned teaching—see Dorothy Bertolet Fritz, *The Child and the Christian Faith* (Richmond, Va.: CLC Press, 1964), pp. 61-97.

⁴ See also the following verses, which discuss each of these five aspects: Ephesians 4:29; 1 Corinthians 10:31; John 13:35; 1 Corinthians 2:5; Proverbs 16:2.

⁵ See 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18.

⁶ For more ideas of what to pray for your children, see Lisa Jacobson, “12 Powerful Verses to Pray Over Our Children,” <https://club31women.com/12-powerful-verses-pray-children/>; Nancy Jergins, “10 Ways to Pray for Your Child,” <https://www.imom.com/10-ways-to-pray-for-your-child/#.XIGTx2hKhPY>.

⁷ Ellen G. White, *The Adventist Home* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1952), p. 204.

⁸ Ellen G. White, *Child Guidance* (Nashville: Southern Pub. Assn., 1954), pp. 219, 220.

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EARTH'S BEAUTIFUL BEGINNINGS

Honoring a God who thought of everything

ELLEN G. WHITE

By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." "For he spake, and it was;" "He commanded, and it stood fast." Psalm 33:6, 9. He "laid the foundations of the earth, that it should not be removed forever." Psalm 104:5.

EARTH—BREATH TAKING!

As the earth came forth from the hand of its Maker, it was exceedingly beautiful. Its surface was diversified with mountains, hills, and plains, interspersed with noble rivers and lovely lakes; but the hills and mountains were not abrupt and rugged, abounding in terrific steeps and frightful chasms, as they now do; the sharp, ragged edges of earth's rocky framework were buried beneath the fruitful soil, which everywhere produced a luxuriant growth of verdure. There were no loathsome swamps or barren deserts. Graceful shrubs and delicate flowers greeted the eye at every turn. The heights were crowned with trees more majestic than any that now exist. The air, untainted by foul miasma, was clear and healthful. The entire landscape outvied in beauty the decorated grounds of the proudest palace. The angelic host viewed the scene with delight, and rejoiced at the wonderful works of God.

MAN—HIS CROWNING GLORY

After the earth with its teeming animal and vegetable life had been called into existence, man, the crowning work of the Creator, and the one for whom the beautiful earth had been fitted up, was brought upon the stage of action. To him was given dominion over all that his eye could behold; for "God said, Let us make man in our image, after our likeness: and let them have dominion over . . . all the earth. . . . So God created man in his own image; . . . male and female created he them." Here is clearly set forth the origin of the human race; and the divine record is so plainly stated that there is no occasion for erroneous conclusions. God created man in His own image. Here is no mys-

tery. There is no ground for the supposition that man was evolved by slow degrees of development from the lower forms of animal or vegetable life. Such teaching lowers the great work of the Creator to the level of man's narrow, earthly conceptions. Men are so intent upon excluding God from the sovereignty of the universe that they degrade man and defraud him of the dignity of his origin. He who set the starry worlds on high and tinted with delicate skill the flowers of the field, who filled the earth and the heavens with the wonders of His power, when He came to crown His glorious work, to place one in the midst to stand as ruler of the fair earth, did not fail to create a being worthy of the hand that gave him life. The genealogy of our race, as given by inspiration, traces back its origin, not to a line of developing germs, mollusks, and quadrupeds, but to the great Creator. Though formed from the dust, Adam was "the son of God."

He was placed, as God's representative, over the lower orders of being. They cannot understand or acknowledge the sovereignty of God, yet they were made capable of loving and serving man. The psalmist says, "Thou madest him to have dominion over the works of thy hands; thou hast put all things under his feet: . . . the beasts of the field; the fowl of the air, . . . and whatsoever passeth through the paths of the seas." Psalm 8:6-8.

MADE IN GOD'S IMAGE

Man was to bear God's image, both in outward resemblance and in character. Christ alone is "the express image" (Hebrews 1:3) of the Father; but man was formed in the likeness of God. His nature was in harmony with the will of God. His mind was capable of comprehending divine things. His affections were pure; his appetites and passions were under the control of reason. He was holy and happy in bearing the image of God and in perfect obedience to His will.

As man came forth from the hand of his Creator, he was of lofty stature and perfect symmetry. His countenance bore the ruddy tint of health and glowed with the light of life and joy. Adam's height was much greater than that of men who now inhabit the earth. Eve was somewhat less in stature; yet her form was noble, and full of beauty. The sinless pair wore no artificial garments; they were clothed with a covering of light and glory, such as the angels wear. So long as they lived in obedience to God, this robe of light continued to enshroud them.

After the creation of Adam every living creature was brought before him to receive its name; he saw that to each had been given a companion, but among them "there was not found an help meet for him." Among all the creatures that God had made on the earth, there was not one equal to man. And God said, "It is not good that the man should be alone; I will make him an help meet for him." Man was not made to dwell in solitude; he was to be a social being. Without companionship the beautiful scenes and delightful employments of Eden would have failed to yield perfect happiness. Even communion with angels could not have satisfied his desire for sympathy and companionship. There was none of the same nature to love and to be loved. . . .

CREATED TO PERFECTION

"And the Lord God planted a garden eastward in Eden; and there he put the man whom he had formed." Everything that God had made was the perfection of beauty, and nothing seemed wanting that could contribute to the happiness of the holy pair; yet the Creator gave them still another token of His love, by preparing a garden especially for their home. In this garden were trees of every variety, many of them laden with fragrant and delicious fruit. There were lovely vines, growing upright, yet presenting a most graceful appearance, with their branches drooping under their load of tempting fruit of the richest and most varied hues. It was the work of Adam and Eve to train the branches of the vine to form bowers, thus making for themselves a dwelling from living trees covered with foliage and fruit. There were fragrant flowers of every hue in rich profusion. In the midst of the garden stood the tree of life, surpassing in glory all other trees. Its fruit appeared like apples of gold and silver, and had the power to perpetuate life.

The creation was now complete. "The heavens and the earth were finished, and all the host of them." "And God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good." Eden bloomed on earth. Adam and Eve had free access to the tree of life. No taint of sin or shadow of death marred the fair creation "The morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy." Job 38:7. ♣

Seventh-day Adventists believe that **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry. This selection was taken from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44-47.

GUILTY AND



CAMERON L. JOHNSTON

Life has its unexpected and surprising moments. I had been pulled over by police before, but this was the most memorable. The police officer pushed his head through the open window of my car and, in my face—eyeball to eyeball—repeated in a loud, exasperated voice, “Do you have any idea how fast you were going? The minimum fine is one thousand dollars and nine of your 10 driving points.”

I was guilty. Caught red-handed. There was no escape. This is my story of redemption from an enormous traffic violation by grace alone, a gift from an infuriated Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) officer in 100 Mile House, British Columbia. I had recently accepted an assignment to pastor two churches in central British Columbia. It would be three months before we could actually move. Therefore, twice a month I drove the six hours and spent several days ministering in these communities.

It was rugged and unusual terrain. Driving through scenic, mostly rural countryside, from southern to northern British Columbia, you must pass through the small town of 100 Mile House. The unique name comes from the Cariboo Gold Rush days when a boardinghouse serving miners was there

160 kilometers (100 miles) north of where the miners left water and walked or rode horseback to the mine fields another 320 kilometers (200 miles) beyond.

Today, as you drive into 100 Mile House you come down a long steep hill where the speed limit is 100 kilometers (60 miles) per hour until you get to the edge of town. There is an extremely short space to heed the warning and slow down to 50 kilometers (30 miles) per hour through town. If you are not alert, you will not slow down. Thus, the police are extremely vigilant.

It was early evening on a Friday in late November; it was dark; and I was running late. With many things on my mind, we came down that hill and into town. I was new to the area, and my brain had not yet received the memo to slow down well in advance of town. I came into town at full speed, maybe faster. Immediately I saw in my mirror the dreaded police lights flashing and pulled over.

The police officer slowly and carefully approached my car, and when he got to my window, he asked, “Do you have any idea how fast you were going? The minimum fine is one thousand dollars and nine points.”

My heart sank, and I was speechless. He looked in the car and then, suddenly, poked his head through the window, squarely in my face, and asked again, in a loud, exasperated voice, “Do you have any idea how fast you were going? The fine at minimum is one thousand dollars and nine points.” This was the second time he said this. Then, pulling his head out of the car, he repeated himself again. I had taken in the point, but he was not done.

He asked for my driver’s license and vehicle registration, which I had ready. Looking briefly at it, he again said, still exasperated, “Do you have any idea how fast you were going? The minimum fine is one thousand dollars and nine points; you were way over the limit.” I humbly said, “I know now.”

Then he asked, “What are you doing up here, anyway?” I told him I was one of the new pastors in Williams Lake and was just coming up for the weekend. “You’re a pastor? You’re a pastor and driving that fast!” He exclaimed with shock and alarm and repeated, for the fifth time, the thousand-dollar penalty.

As he turned to go back to his car, I said, “Sir, it is clear, I am guilty. I hope you have some grace.”

FREE

*How does
that happen?*

“Do you have any idea how fast you were going? The fine at minimum is one thousand dollars and nine points.”

For some reason, when police officers return to their car, they take a long time checking you out, phoning and writing the ticket. My wife and I just looked at each other in shock and wondered if we would eat for the next month.

Finally the officer returned. He immediately stuck his head fully into the car in front of my face, looked over to my wife, and asked, “Who is this?”

“My wife, Shirley,” I responded.

He said, “Shirley, do you realize how fast your husband was going? The minimum fine is one thousand dollars and nine points.” She quietly said, “Yes.”

Then he continued, “Shirley, what would you think if, instead of giving your husband a one-thousand-dollar fine and taking nine points off his license, I tell him that he must take you out this evening and buy you dinner?”

Stunned, she said, “I think that would be great.”

Then he turned his head and right in front of my face asked, “What do you think about that?”

I responded, “Happy to do it.”

He backed out of the window, gave me a written warning, and said, “Take her out to dinner, slow down, and drive carefully,” and he was gone. What an incredible illustration of our undeserved deliverance by our Lord Jesus Christ by grace alone from the power of sin and death.

I EXPERIENCED GRACE

We sat there in shock for a few minutes. I am sure that officer smiled as he got back into his car, feeling good. He had seriously disciplined a pastor who needed it. I would not recognize him if we met again, nor do I know if he is a Christian, but that night he gave an illustration of salvation by grace.

The law declared the penalty, but having all the power at his discretion, he let me go free, releasing me from the penalty: “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (John 1:17, NIV).

OBEDIENCE, INSPIRED BY GRACE

I drove the remaining 100 kilometers (60 miles) differently that Friday night. I never came close to exceeding the speed limit. I gratefully took my wife out to dinner. And having come down that hill into

100 Mile House hundreds of times during the past 12 years, I remember every time, with thankfulness and joy, that police officer, the reduced speed limit coming up, and the grace I was shown.

Deliverance by grace brings joy and changes lives. In this case it impacted my driving for the better. Punishment would no doubt have made me angry, resentful, and fretting at the unfairness of the huge fine. Instead, grace made me a better and more careful driver.

GRACE FOR ALL HUMANITY

Long ago the human race rebelled against God’s law of love and brought death on ourselves: “For the wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord” (Rom. 6:23, NIV). “Nothing you did could ever earn this salvation, for it was the love gift from God that brought us to Christ!” (Eph. 2:8, TPT).^{*} My grace was undeserved that night. So is God’s grace for fallen humanity, providing, through the death of Jesus, undeserved and unearned forgiveness, freely given to all who will accept it. And grace does more than forgive: it brings with it the desire and power to do better. It creates within us a love response for God Himself. We are guilty lawbreakers deserving our death penalty. But grace forgives us; grace transforms us; and grace empowers us to obey.

I did not argue with the officer that night; I joyously took his gift. But God’s gift of freedom and pardon is both more available and more rewarding, contrary to any slanderous lie the enemy—or your wickedness—will tell you. So rather than argue, accept. Rejoice in the gift of forgiveness, and celebrate your liberation from sin and death: “For God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have everlasting life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but that the world through Him might be saved” (John 3:16, 17).[✚]

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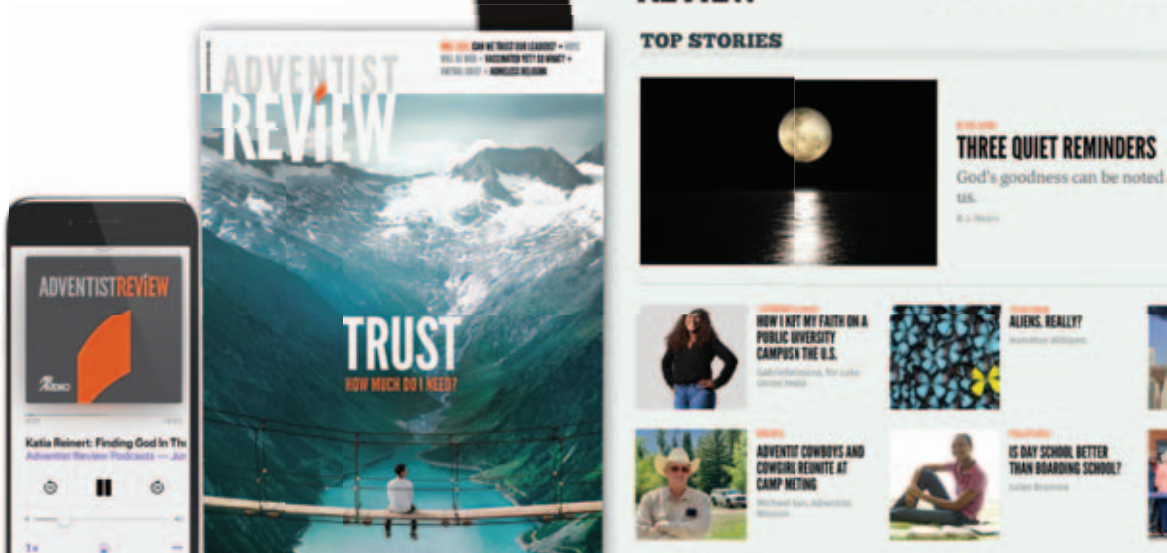
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HE IS **AHEAD OF YOU**

JOANNE CORTES

There is something beautiful, something thrilling, about every new year, which inspires to seek a better future, to try again, to envision how great the year can be.

But what happens when last year was filled with so many fears and failures that you hardly have hope left for 2022?

I FAILED. NOW WHAT?

Peter, one of Jesus' 12 disciples, walked with Him for about three years, seeing and experiencing many miracles up close; even bragging about walking on water, though it lasted only a brief while and wasn't done very well. He saw a touch heal his mother-in-law, and witnessed a boy's lunch multiplied to feed thousands. Peter experienced so many things that many would have said those were his best years.

But then, before you knew it, Peter failed: failed to stand up for what he believed in when it was time to do so; failed to speak up when he had the chance; failed to defend Someone who was innocent; failed to accomplish what he had promised; failed himself and failed his Master, Jesus, multiple times!

Have you ever done something that made you feel defeated, or led you to make a decision you wish you had never made?

Failure does not have to be fatal. Failure does not mean that you cannot triumph. A bad decision need not define who you are. No matter what we are going through, how many mistakes we have made, or how much of a failure we think we are, God thinks very differently about us. As He says: "My thoughts are not your thoughts" (Isa. 55:8).*

JESUS LOVES YOU

Jesus loves you and will never, ever stop, because His love is not based on your behavior: "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8).

A few years ago my family and I were walking toward a restaurant. I was holding the hand of our younger child, Joel. He was so excited that we were going to eat together as a family: he was jumping, moving, and skipping away, full of energy, when suddenly he tripped and fell flat on his face. He almost made me fall too. Joel started crying loudly—the "loud" that makes everyone turn and look at you to see what bad thing you had done to your child.

I grabbed his hand tightly and picked him up. I confess that this was not my finest mommy moment. The first words out of my mouth were: "Shhhh. People are looking." "Why aren't you looking where you're walking?" "See what happens when you don't pay attention?"

Then I saw the tears in my son's eyes, and saw my own blunder as well: I had just failed as a mom. I felt like the worst mom ever. Everyone may have their own failures. This was mine. I had failed because I was upset that he had fallen; upset that he had almost made me fall; upset that I had put the perceptions of others before the hurt of my child; upset because I had shown more concern about personal dignity than about the hurt my child was feeling. It may have been simple. But it was also terrible. In fact, it was simply terrible.

I apologized to my son for my behavior, asked him if he was OK, cleaned his knee, wrapped him in a big hug, and smacked him a great mommy kiss. His crying stopped, and we continued walking toward the restaurant together. We talked about how, in the past, he had fallen and gotten right back up. I mentioned the many times I had fallen, tripped, scraped my knee, and got through it OK. I assured him that it was not his fault. We all fall down at times. But getting up and knowing that everything will be OK helps us get through it.

When we fall, God's concern is about much more than "people are looking." He may ask questions similar to those I had asked my son. In Eden He asked Eve: "What is this you have done?" (Gen. 3:13). And to Adam before that: "Have you eaten from the tree that I commanded you not to eat from?" (verse 11).

But God does not worry as we do about "people are looking." He is the father in the parable about the prodigal, spreading out His arms and running down the road to meet us (Luke 15:20). When humanity fell into sin, He told the devil right away, while the man and woman were listening, how our tragic fall would end: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15). Gospel 101: God loves you and me more than we could ever love ourselves. His compassion toward us will never fail (Lam. 3:23).

Picture Peter thrown on the floor, just lying there, hopeless, crying like a child, sad and depressed, and at times angry with himself and questioning why.

Loving people in their mistakes frees them to run to us rather than running from us.

Why did he do such a thing? Peter, who always had something to say, now speechless and not wanting to talk with anyone or even eat anything, and finding it hard to move forward.

Until his name was called. Mark tells us that when the women went to the tomb, two angels appeared to them and said, “But go, tell his disciples and Peter” (Mark 16:7).

Jesus left a personal message for Peter, for the one who deserved it, for the one who had just betrayed Him multiple times. Jesus wanted to make sure that Peter knew that regardless of his mistakes and failures, He loved him. And when he heard what the women saw and were told, “Peter . . . got up and ran to the tomb” (Luke 24:12).

As soon as Peter heard his name he was energized. Rather than hiding from Jesus, he ran to look for Him.

Instead of staying in his room crying, he got up and ran toward the tomb because he needed to see Jesus.

He wanted to talk to Him, hug Him, and be in His presence again.

Peter reminds us that loving people in their mistakes frees them to run to us rather than running from us.

In the midst of your failures, mistakes, and sin, Jesus loves you.

HE IS AHEAD OF YOU

The message to “go, tell his disciples and Peter, ‘He is going ahead of you into Galilee. There you will see him, just as he told you’” (Mark 16:7) shows not only Jesus’ love to Peter, but also that He wanted Peter to know He would be ahead of him, just as He had promised. Jesus wanted Peter to look to the future, to look forward to what was in front of him with anticipation and hope, rather than looking back, to his past failures, burdened down with regret. Jesus wanted to assure him that nothing he would go through would catch Jesus by surprise, because Jesus was ahead of Him.

The same applies to us today.

As we enter the unknown of new year 2022, Jesus wants us to look forward to the future with anticipation and hope rather than focusing on last year’s failures.

Yes, we all faced challenges in 2021.

Yes, we all made mistakes—let down someone, or our church, or ourselves.

Whatever you did, know that you can get back up again and run to Jesus.

So don’t let what’s behind you cause you to miss what’s before you.

Jesus can’t wait to share with you all the blessings He has in store for you—an exciting, transforming life, a life filled with His unconditional love and faithfulness.

Peter made many mistakes, but those mistakes did not define him. Instead, he went on to be the preacher at Pentecost, filled with the Holy Spirit, baptizing thousands; to be one of the founders of the Christian church; to be known for all the miracles he performed as “people brought the sick into the streets and laid them on beds and mats so that at least Peter’s shadow might fall on some of them as he passed by” (Acts 5:15).

This man who denied knowing Jesus, the one who had failed, was now being used by God to do great things. Peter discovered that Jesus loved him regardless of his behavior. He realized that Jesus was ahead of him and that he had nothing to fear. It filled him with purpose, impelling him to live his best life ever.

Today, you may feel like a failure, and that there is nothing special about you. I want you to know that you haven’t seen anything yet! God is not done with you. He still has so many great things He wants to do through you. Just as He used Peter, who failed him many times, He wants to use you to change your sphere, your community, your world: The best is yet to come.

So don’t let past failures dictate who you are and what God can do through you next.

Don’t let yesterday’s storm cloud the vision God has for you in 2022 and beyond.

Let go of your guilt and let Jesus love you. Get up and run toward Jesus, who is ahead of you, waiting for you with arms open wide, waiting to take you into a glorious future.

* Scripture citations are from the New International Version.

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READ THROUGH YOUR BIBLE IN A MONTH

Years ago, as a young dad and journalism professor, I experienced a spiritual system shock.

My friend Gary told me about something he did every January—he read through the Bible in a month. I was astounded by this: the entire Bible in a month? But as I assessed my 1,200-page Bible, I realized it would mean reading only 40 pages a day. True, this method wouldn't allow for deep, careful study of God's Word, but it would fly me over the windswept peaks of Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, tree of life to tree of life. The key, said Gary, was to read without stopping. I resolved to try it.

Day after day, through the January rain, I immersed myself in Scripture. I read before dawn, between classes I taught, over lunch at Subway, in the car-rider line at school, and after our daughters had gone to bed. Chapter after chapter, I couldn't believe how swiftly I was moving. In just five days I was through the books of Moses (Leviticus took only half a day!) and on to Joshua and Judges, Ruth and Samuel. Verse by verse, the story of redemption unfolded before me.

With my mind stuffed with Scripture, I didn't have time for anything else—media, sports news, life's worries and wonderings. As I joined kings David and Solomon in Jerusalem, and Daniel and Esther in exile, I felt all the dynamics of the Hebrews' relationship with God. By the time I reached the old prophet Haggai, the young prophet Zechariah, and the seemingly final prophet, Malachi, whose book closed painfully with the word

“curse,” I felt a deep longing for a Messiah who would save us all. The sunlit morning I reached the Gospel of Matthew was one of the best moments of my life.

As I read through my Bible, I not only put a star by the verses but whole books that made a particular impact on me: Deuteronomy, Ezra, and Isaiah in the Old Testament; and John, Hebrews, and James in the New Testament. The book that spoke most powerfully to me was Ephesians and its invitation to “walk worthy of the calling with which you were called” (Eph. 4:1).

That same life-changing year I traveled to Israel, baptizing our daughters in the Jordan and returning home to a surprising invitation to pastoral ministry. Afraid of failure, I hesitated to accept until I got an out-of-the-blue phone call from a friend I hadn't seen in 17 years telling me that God told her to tell me “to walk in the fullness of God's blessings.”

This was my experience reading through the Bible in a month. What could yours be?

How about we do it together this January? And share experiences on a new Facebook page I've set up called “Meet at the Text” ([facebook.com/meetatthetext](https://www.facebook.com/meetatthetext)). Don't worry if you're starting late. We'll cheer each other on as we drink from the Living Water together.


Let's start the year right. Let's meet at the text. 🍷

Andy Nash (andynash5@gmail.com) is an Adventist author and speaker who leads study tours to the Holy Land.

**THE LIFE
OF FAITH
ANDY
NASH**



**WITH MY MIND
STUFFED WITH
SCRIPTURE, I DIDN'T
HAVE TIME FOR
ANYTHING ELSE—
MEDIA, SPORTS
NEWS, LIFE'S
WORRIES AND
WONDERINGS.**



MORNING MEDITATIONS ON THE MISSION

*I serve,
therefore
I bless.*

CATHLYNN DORÉ LAW

Itighten my bootlaces. One more glance out the window at the frosty morning makes me snug up the headband around my ears.

Snagging two plastic grocery bags, I head out on my mission.

KIMBER, LINDA, MISSION

The morning rush to school and work is over. A gleam of reflected light catches my eye. Ah-ha! I nearly pounce on a shiny aluminum can and slip my first recycle prize into a bag with a sense of satisfaction.

Approaching Barbara and Mark's place, their black Lab comes roaring around the corner and up to the chain-link fence, all bark.



“Kimber, how are you this morning?” I coo at her. She looks back to see if her master is watching. “What are you doing today?” I persist in keeping up my pace. As always, my chatter sabotages her purpose of running off an intruder. She ignores me.

It is my friend Linda who first inspired me to accept this mission. We met occasionally on the road as she stabbed the offending trash with her pole. She faithfully fulfilled her personal commitment—until her condition of imbalance worsened. After a few falls, she had to quit.

“Now you’ll have to keep the road clean,” she teased, passing the de-littering torch on to me.

WALLY, MARY, MISSION

As I pass their home, I wave to Wally, who is headed out to his shop. “How’s Mary?” I call from across the street. I pause as he pauses.

“She is down with her fibromyalgia today,” he says.

I walk across the street, and we chat.

“Hey,” I say as I prepare to go, “let me know if I can do anything. Dishes? Cleaning?”

He hesitates. “Can you wait just a minute? I’ll go get a notepad to get your number.” Wally hurries into the house and comes out with a notepad and pencil. I jot down my phone number. *Hope it turns into a phone call*, I think to myself.

The trash bag is bulging now—scrunched-up cardboard pizza box, candy wrappers, a paper cup, another plastic bag. The recycle bag is heavier—soda and beer cans.

Hearing an engine slowing behind me, I step further to the side, wondering if I am in the way. A white truck rolls up beside me.

Before I can apologize, the driver says, “Thank you—for doing this.”

“Oh, uh, you’re welcome,” I stammer as his window rolls up and he drives on.

Suddenly I rouse with delayed reaction to his words of appreciation. Waving after the truck, I call out, “Thank *you!* And have a nice day!”

Day by day cars and trucks have passed me. I usually feel invisible. But not today. Picking up litter is not important, but today I have evidence that the roadside is cleaner because I walked here. That man is glad I’m pursuing my mission. In spite of herself, Kimber looks forward to barking at me. Feeling the weight of my bags, I know Linda would smile.

MARY, MISSION

Passing Mary and Wally’s home on my return, I note the shades are pulled.

Dear Father in heaven, ease Mary’s pain today. Heal her if it is Your will, and may she know You as her Friend and Savior. Amen. Then an afterthought occurs: *Lord, would You give me just the right idea of how to minister to her?*

Banana bread and cinnamon rolls are a go-to idea when I don’t know what else to do. *Maybe Mary would like zucchini muffins.*

As I turn the knob of my front door, the grandness of the Great Commission echoes in my mind: “Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost” (Matt. 28:19, KJV).

My sphere may be small, but I am committed to the mission. ♣

Cathlynn Doré Law is an author and homemaker and lives with her husband, Mark, in, Idaho.



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PETER N. LANDLESS ZENO L. CHARLES-MARCEL

ACCENTUATE THE POSITIVE

It's healthier!

Q: There's so much negativity these days that it's affecting even our children. Can you give us and our church family some happy news?

A: Yes, we can! Like you, we're pained to see the mood of our biological and church families become poisoned by toxic attitudes and actions regardless of the justification. Studies about the ill effects of negative emotional states abound, but there's strong evidence that happiness, optimism, gratitude, hopefulness, contentment, and other positive states don't just make us *feel* good—they *are* good for us individually and collectively. God knew all along that a joyful heart is good medicine! (Prov. 17:22).

The longest-running "happiness" study revealed that close relationships—more than money or fame—keep people happy throughout their lives. Just like eating healthfully, exercising regularly, and getting adequate sleep, tending to our relationships is a form of self-care. Healthy marriages and social ties protect us from life's curveballs and disappointments, increase our resilience, and help to delay mental and physical decline. Having robust social linkages is a better predictor of a long, happy life than social class, education, or family history.

Here are some ways to increase positive emotions:

- Create or join a group of happy, godly people. Happiness and true godliness are contagious.
- Develop and cherish close, loving relationships. Loneliness is as toxic as alcohol or tobacco.
- Keep a clean, clear conscience. Tell yourself the truth to eliminate self-deception.
- Intentionally perform acts of kindness. Doing good and volunteering have health and social benefits.
- Engage in wholesome activities that brought you joy when you were younger.

- Satisfy God's conditions, claim His promises, and give Him praise.
- Learn to value people, and practice putting people above things.
- Find reasons to laugh *with* people rather than *at* people. Esteem others better than yourself.
- Spend time outdoors and in nature, especially in green spaces, and create green spaces around you, such as windows, porches, terraces, and even corners of the room.
- Smile!
- Spend time and money on people rather than on gadgets.
- Invest in experiences (e.g., family vacations; visits to relatives and friends). Acquiring "things" can make you happy temporarily, but experiences bring greater, lasting joy.
- Count your blessings; cultivate an attitude of gratitude. Every night as you prayerfully review your day, mentally or physically make a short list of things you're thankful for.
- Deeply breathe the air in the forest, at the seashore, or after a thunderstorm for mood and immune benefits.
- Don't share or receive gossip.
- Take care of a pet or plant.
- Memorize Scripture and be inspired.
- Play or listen to uplifting music; sing songs of joy and hope.
- Seek to be an inspiration to others.

Happiness protects the body and the brain. Close social interaction increases joy. Negativity is like cancer or a plague. Invite the Holy Spirit to take over; yield to Him and really get to know Him, whom to know is life eternal. And "be of good cheer, [Christ has] overcome the world" (John 16:33). 📌

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



GraceNotes

EXPRESSIONS OF FAITH IN
THE RENEWING POWER OF
GRACE, AND SYMBOLS OF
HOPE IN A HURTING WORLD

It began as a Sabbath morning text message to 50 friends, most of whom were pastors known to *Adventist Review* editor Bill Knott. Word quickly spread: the text list grew to 600.

Soon tens of thousands around the globe were receiving an email version of the weekly GraceNote—some of them translating it—and forwarding it to friends who needed encouragement, and those with whom they share their faith.

Today hundreds of thousands of people access GraceNotes each week—by text, email, Facebook, Instagram, Twitter, LinkedIn, Messenger, and Signal, and at www.moregracenotes.com. Audio versions in English, French, and Mandarin are aired on hundreds of radio stations worldwide, adding millions to the audience. New versions in Spanish and Portuguese are expected within weeks.

Here's a sampling of GraceNotes from the last seven years, each written for the start of a new year. See the information at the close of this feature for subscribing to these short, inspiring messages that bring hope to you and those you love.

The gospel promises that
Christ forgets what
Christ forgives.

A GRACE-FILLED RESOLUTION

Only a lingering belief in God's persistent grace explains our optimism that our lives can be happier in the new year.

If there were no such thing as grace—if we were forced to drag the chains of sin and brokenness behind us for all time—we'd see nothing in the first of January beyond another gray-grim calendar page.

But 2019 offers light and hope because the gospel promises that Christ forgets what Christ forgives—that all our foolishness and spite is gently washed away when we believe in Him. Through grace, this new year can become that season of humility, deep peace, and reconciled relationships of which we're always dreaming.

There's just one resolution worth making this—and every—New Year's Eve: "By grace, I'll stay in grace."

2022

A COVENANT FOR WANDERERS

Make covenants, not resolutions, as you walk into the year, for covenants give us company in keeping what we pledge. A resolution with no witness is too often just a wish, a good intention with nothing but our declining willpower to make the vital difference.

The covenants we really need are bigger than our diets and more urgent than our visits to the gym. We need companions to whom we'll make the most important promises of all: to tell each other just the truth; to remind each other of how good the gospel is; to continue walking side by side through any guilt or fear the new year brings.

Agree with someone in your life—a spouse, a friend, another sinner saved by grace—with whom you'll travel in days ahead—by phone, by app, by real steps on real roads. Pledge perseverance, not perfection, for walking with another sinner will reveal how much you both need constant grace.

And when you stumble, as you will, a hand will lift you up, and brush you off, and help you keep on walking.

As this year starts, invite some other to what Jesus now invites you: “Come walk with me: keep covenant.”

That's how you'll stay in grace.

When you stumble,
as you will,

a hand will
lift you up.





Grace renews what Grace began.

RENEWAL IN THE RUINS

At every rounding of the year, we realize how much we need renewal.

On New Year's Eve, we want to slam the door on the departing year, or banish memories of 2020's pain and grief. But there are—and must be—great ties between the old year and the new.

We live in the same bodies: we inhabit the same homes. We remain related to the same family: we work at the same jobs. We worship with the same believers: we study the same Word.

It's renewal, then, and not a clean break from the past, that offers us our greatest hope in 2021. How can our bodies be renewed? Will this year be the one when we're transformed by the renewing of our minds? (Rom. 12:2). How does a weary marriage find new sources of resilience and of laughter? Can dry and broken friendships be restored? We crave the ageless source of all renewal—the grace and mercy of our Lord revealed in the pages of His Word.

Yes, grace renews what grace began.

“That is why we never give up. Though our bodies are dying, our spirits are being renewed every day. For our present troubles are small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us a glory that vastly outweighs them and will last forever!” (2 Cor. 4:16-17).

So here's to growing deeper, stronger, wiser, kinder in 2021.

Stay in grace.



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OPEN DOOR OF GRACE


Grace is the gift of Christ that lets us close the door on a year of failures and regrets. We needn't cringe for fear our sins will be discovered or our reputations tarnished. In Jesus, all is known, and yet all has been redeemed.

When we choose Jesus as Substitute and Saviour, we confess the fundamental brokenness of our lives: we're freed from constantly defending ourselves. When caught by grace, we stop acting to impress each other, and build the candid, caring relationships for which we were created.

Grace heals the past, and offers us a new year rich with love and joy. So stay in grace.



In Jesus,
all is known,
and yet
all has been
redeemed.



The grace of Jesus
makes the
new year
safe.

WALKING ACROSS THE LINE

The waning days of this old year remind us we ought never walk alone. We need three things to end December: forgiveness for the wrongs we've done; the healing of our wounded memories; assurances that we will have safe company in days and miles ahead.

The gospel tells us we have all of these in Jesus. His blood alone removes our shame and stains. His reconciliation shields us from hard-earned, high-priced bitterness. His promise to stay with us—in every hour, in every age—

gives courage on dark nights, and lifts our hearts when we can't know the future.

By grace, we walk away from sins—our sins, and those done to us through the pettiness or animus of others. By grace, we lose the need to sanctify our scars, or grimly tell our tales of injury. By grace, we stretch a hand into the as-yet-unknown future—and discover, to our joy, that we are grasped and held and loved and valued by the Lord who walks beside us.

We dare not make this crossing by ourselves, for we will either fall back into what has been, or hide in fear of what may be. The grace of Jesus makes the new year safe for pilgrims walking homeward. "I will never leave you or forsake you," (Heb. 13:5) Jesus says to all who journey with Him.

And for this moment, month, or year, our hearts are light, our spirits high. The road ahead is rich with kindness and companions.

So stay in grace.

LOOKING BACK TO LOOK FORWARD

Does the saying “The more things change, the more they stay the same” still apply?

The other day my friend and I were talking about state-of-the-world issues. We ran through the pandemic, more virus mutations, climate change, violence, politics, etc. He shook his head and said something along the lines of how one has to think the end is surely very soon. I agreed with him. But then I brought up the point that many Adventists in generations before us have likely thought the same thing. Take, for example, the World War II years and all we have learned about it since. How would

LIGHT IN THEIR DWELLINGS

By Frederick Lee, Associate Editor

As we enter the new year we face a black-out of moral values. Another plague of Egyptian darkness has settled down upon the earth. Among those nations which express the highest admiration for Christian principles, we find immorality and debauchery being flaunted in the “best” society, and expediency and cynicism dominating political policy. Even the high hopes of a better world to come, which were so evident a year ago, have been blighted by the happenings of recent months.

Apparently many care little for the future and think only in terms of the moment. Boys in their teens who have been taken from their homes, never to return, perhaps feeling themselves cut off from both the past and the future, are throwing off all restraints while the public condones their abandonment. The people back home, sensing a certain frustration, are breaking over the established conventions and are taking a toboggan slide down into the pit of drunkenness, blasphemy, and vice.

AN INIQUITOUS GENERATION

The world is in a state of flux not only as regards national boundaries but as regards the matter of right and wrong. The desire of the moment has become the law of life for untold millions who recognize no higher law. While we talk of a religious revival, boys and girls all over the land are taking their first drink and their parents apparently are unconcerned, and the lads who have gone off to war are becoming steeped in a vile atmosphere filled with curses and smut.

The moral standards not only have been lowered but have been all but obliterated by many of those who lead in the affairs of men today. How a better world can be built on such foundations is a mystery that will never be revealed.

Voices are beginning to rise in protest against this black-out of morals and many are demanding that the lights be turned on again. They declare that civilization is doomed unless the present tide of license and hate is curbed. It is folly, they say, to attempt to create a new world when we have no moral foundations upon which to build it.

One writer says, “What seems desperately lacking is the old-time emphasis on personal and civic morality. . . . Drunkenness increases by leaps and bounds, and immorality spreads like a prairie fire.” Another says, “From all across the land come evidence in abundance showing that in public decency, taste, manners, and morals the American people are in a slump. . . . One cannot mingle long with the modern crowd without having the feeling that ours is a shoddy generation.”

Regarding plans for a world peace organization, Carl A. Berendsen, minister of New Zealand to the United States, said recently in a broadcast, “It is a moral problem the world has to solve.”

The prophets, looking down to our day, saw this great moral decline and warned God’s people against it. Christ declared that iniquity would abound in the last days, and Paul said, “Perilous times shall come,” because men would care more

anyone witness the dropping of atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, for example, and not think that with that kind of firepower available, the world surely wouldn't last to 1960? Yet here we are. On that thought, I went to the stacks of the Adventist Review archives to discover what our publication was printing in January 1945. The war had yet to be called in favor of the Allies, but the tide was surely turning. The atomic bombs wouldn't materialize until the summer, and the horrors of

Europe's death camps were just being uncovered. But in this excerpted editorial from January 18, 1945, associate editor Frederick Lee addressed issues brought on by the wartime trauma of the day that interestingly enough, isn't that far off from problems faced in 2021. What do you think? Does this editorial speak to us today?

—Wilona Karimabadi

Wilona Karimabadi is an assistant editor for Adventist Review Ministries.



for pleasure than for God. Christ called upon His followers to be the light of the world and not hide their light under a bushel. The prophet Isaiah spoke of a time when “darkness shall cover the earth and gross darkness to the people,” and challenged the church to rise up and let the light shine forth in all its glory.

ARISE AND SHINE

We are told that during the plague of darkness in Egypt, “all of the children of Israel had light in their dwellings” (Ex. 10:23). This is but a symbol of what God expects of His people today. What does the world see in the dwellings of Seventh-day Adventists? Are they places whence the beacon lights of righteousness and truth are shining forth? Or have these lights been dimmed by the shades of compromise and worldliness? Are the lamps of truth kept trimmed and burning? There is light, special light for this generation in our dwellings, but is it shining forth in our neighborhoods as it should?

One thing is clear. God desires that the homes of His people be different from the homes of those who make no profession of the advent hope. It is His purpose that these family units be little islands of light in a sea of moral darkness. As the world drags the banner of civilization deeper into the morass of immorality, God's people are to hold the banner of truth higher and higher.

Another thing is clear. We cannot live in a

world of lowering standards and not be affected by it unless we consciously resist the downward trend. Seventh-day Adventists are affected by everything that goes on in the world. We live here with the people of the world; we do business with them; we read newspapers, books, and magazines they produce; we daily face the advertisements that invite us to do this and that which true Christian principles forbid; and our institutions are coming more and more to be regulated by the same laws that control institutions that hold views contrary to the faith we profess. Each day sees some wrong trend taking toll of our members who step by step have been yielding to worldly influences.

A DETERMINED PURPOSE NEEDED

... We read: “There must be no pretense in the lives of those who have so sacred and solemn a message as we have been called to bear. The world is watching Seventh-day Adventists, because it knows something of their profession of faith and of their high standards, and when it sees those who do not live up to their profession, it points at them with scorn.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 23. . . .

Surely the growing darkness in the world about us should be a challenge to each one of us in this new year to make his life what it ought to be so that his dwelling place may shine with the light of truth and righteousness. ♣



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I REMEMBER

It was my Friday routine: ball cap and jeans, today with boots because of the cold weather. Not usual office attire, but that's the beauty of Friday when 3ABN is closed. No interruptions, no meetings, no phone calls. Just time to catch up on the work piled on my desk.

Today, however, was different. Midway through the morning my cell phone rang. It was Ann,* my "second" mom. I marvel sometimes at the beauty of family. Biological connection is good, but not always essential. The connection of heart and spirit can be just as deep, whether one is related or not.

Ann's husband, Calvin, had been sick for a couple weeks, and his blood work wasn't normal. Something was wrong, but the doctor couldn't determine what. They were heading for the ER, based on the doctor's recommendation.

I leaned back in my chair and closed my eyes as Ann talked. Then she said, "Calvin wants to talk for a moment."

Calvin's normally strong voice sounded weak and old. "Hi, Jilly, I need to go into the hospital." I turned the volume up on my phone, but his voice didn't get any louder. "We'll be fine. Just getting checked out." His voice dropped to a whisper. "Love you, darling. I'll let you go."

This was more serious than I'd thought. When had he become so weak?

I turned back to my desk, but the tears kept blurring my vision. I loved Calvin more than almost anyone on earth. He believed in me, even when I doubted myself. He was always so proud of me. He listened to me—really listened. Not just superficially, as many do. You know,

the polite nod with a quick comeback. Instead he always sought to find my meaning underneath. What my heart felt inside. Most of all, I always knew I was loved. No matter what. *God, I hope it isn't serious.*

Later that day Greg and I entered his hospital room. The tests and scans had revealed a mass. No official diagnosis of cancer yet, but the word hung in the room. I looked at my "dad" sitting in bed, and the words wouldn't come.

Greg carried the conversation well, and we talked about tests and blood work and the doctor's thoughts and recommendations. All the while I thought, *I can't lose you. How do you pour a heart full of love and longing into just a few words?*

I tried several times, but the words never came. We prayed together, and it was time to go. I still hadn't said anything of substance. Anything that really mattered.

Walking to the bed, I reached out and held his hand. Our eyes locked, and I blurted out the only thing I could, past the lump in my throat. "Don't forget that you're my dad."

Calvin didn't laugh or ask what I meant. He just said two words. "I remember."

And in that moment I knew. He understood what I couldn't convey. Maybe, for today, that was enough. ♣

*Names used in this article are pseudonyms.

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

JOURNEYS
WITH JESUS
JILL
MORIKONE



I MARVEL
SOMETIMES AT THE
BEAUTY OF FAMILY.
BIOLOGICAL IS
GOOD, BUT NOT
ALWAYS ESSENTIAL.



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TRAFFICKING VICTIMS
ARE EVER RESCUED**

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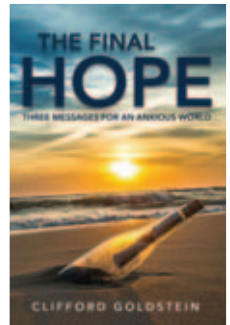
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CLOSER LOOK



The Final Hope

Clifford Goldstein, *The Final Hope* (Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 2021), 96 pp., \$2.49, available from Adventist Book Center; reviewed by Lael Caesar.

Best-selling author Clifford Goldstein has written another book for friends of *Adventist Review* readership. Small, inexpensive, and provided as the Adventist Church's Missionary Book of the Year, it continues where Mark Finley left off with the church's last two missionary books of the year, *Hope for Troubled Times*, for 2021, and before that, *The Power of Hope*, for 2020, which reached a distribution of 35 million copies.

These "HOPE books" are written against the backdrop of a global plague that has already killed almost 3½ million people worldwide. What Goldstein's latest shows is that optimism about the future is realistic and sane, when we live in the light—the light of the Bible's last message to the world, identified in Revelation 14:6-12 as the three angels' messages.

Available in bulk from Adventist Book Centers or through the Adventist Church's Publishing Department, Goldstein's twenty-first book is put together in six divisions called sections, rather than the usual, chapters. Sections themselves comprise as many as eight or as few as three subsections.

Goldstein confronts the mentality that a godless and accidental theory of existence inspires, viz., that life can have no ultimate meaning since existence is a temporary fluke. He invites us to consider the mind that built our universe—an entity 50 billion light-years wide and containing 2 trillion galaxies, each one containing its own hundreds of millions of stars. Reading Goldstein's numbers reminds of a competing claim: the universe is 93 billion light-years wide (Neil deGrasse Tyson, Michael A. Strauss, J. Richard Gott, *Welcome to the Universe*). Goldstein's numbers—as well as competing and incompatible others—show how far

humans are from fathoming just the vastness around and beyond us in the place that is our home. For Goldstein, such scope hardly comports with mere chance as an explanation of existence. Purposeful intelligence is the context considering the three angels' messages: our lives and those messages are about sense, not about nonsense.

Message One, "Fear God," introduced in section 3, page 47, continues through sections 4 and 5, and shows that there is an audience observing and caring about outcomes on earth; also, that the biblical teaching of accountability for our behavior and life record is normal "should not be surprising" (p. 60); also, that humans, by our own selfish choices and actions through life, are hopelessly doomed to damnation.

Oddly enough, establishing humans' total corruption takes two lengthy quotations of the same eight verses of Scripture (Rom. 3:11-18: p. 35 and pp. 61, 62)—in a book with little or no room for redundant repetition. Be that as unusual as it may, the author also shows that "the everlasting gospel" is God's specific provision for any who are despairing because they see themselves in that repeated list of shame. The miracle is that whosoever we be, we can receive divine exoneration in the time of judgment the first angel announces (p. 62). No doubt we get his point when he says, No, we aren't sinless; we simply believe that the Father accepts Christ's righteousness as ours. It should nevertheless be insisted that Goldstein is not obliquely accusing God of self-deception in thinking we are what everybody knows we are not. God does not speak untruth when He declares us innocent and/or perfect.

Those reflections and comments on message one of three occupy nearly half this book (46 percent, or 41 of 89 pages of text) and five of its six sections. This does strike one as odd, even out of balance. Hopefully these unusual proportions will be vindicated by the hope found by a multitude of despairing readers who encounter this little book because of your sharing. 📌

Reviews and commentaries about books, films, or other items do not constitute endorsement by the editorial staff of Adventist Review Ministries.

JANUARY-BORN REFLECTIONS

The voices we hear in this issue of the *Adventist Review* speak of expansive variety: White, Native American, Black, female, male, ancient, contemporary. Why privilege their speech? Ethnicity? Gender? Epoch? Fame? Common theme? Unified perspective on religion, principles of morality or life? Similar genre? All: “No.” Why, then? Because, in common with *Adventist Review’s* “Beginnings,” they are all January-born.

The combination of their contributions is designed for intellectual satisfaction, including your blessed provocation, as you identify with, are perplexed by, or are even dismayed at one or another of them for thinking and speaking as they do.—Editors.

.....
MEGHAN WAZOUA, TWENTY-FIRST-CENTURY EDUCATOR. FROM “THINKING FORWARD”:

“... one word comes to mind, intentional. To decisively purpose your thinking toward a specific action or emotion—an end goal. No resolutions, just honest action: “Walk in wisdom . . . , let your speech always be with grace.”

.....
JOHN ROBINSON JEFFERS, TWENTIETH-CENTURY POET, LOVER OF SOLITUDE AND THE PAST. “CARMEL POINT”:

The extraordinary patience of things!
 This beautiful place defaced with a crop of suburban houses—
 How beautiful when we first beheld it,
 Unbroken field of poppy and lupin walled with clean cliffs;
 No intrusion but two or three horses pasturing,
 Or a few milch cows rubbing their flanks on the outcrop rockheads—
 Now the spoiler has come: does it care?
 Not faintly. It has all time. It knows the people are a tide
 That swells and in time will ebb, and all
 Their works dissolve. Meanwhile the image of the pristine beauty
 Lives in the very grain of the granite,
 Safe as the endless ocean that climbs our cliff.—
 As for us:
 We must uncenter our minds from ourselves;

We must unhumanize our views a little, and become confident
 As the rock and ocean that we were made from.

.....
ZORA NEALE HURSTON, AUTHOR AND ANTHROPOLOGIST, CLASSMATE OF MARGARET MEAD’S. FROM *HOW IT FEELS TO BE COLORED ME*:

“... in the main, I feel like a brown bag of miscellany propped against a wall. Against a wall in company with other bags, white, red and yellow. Pour out the contents, and there is discovered a jumble of small things priceless and worthless. A first-water diamond, an empty spool, bits of broken glass, . . . old shoes saved for a road that never was and never will be, a nail bent under the weight of things too heavy for any nail, a dried flower or two still a little fragrant. In your hand is the brown bag. On the ground before you is the jumble it held—so much like the jumble in the bags, could they be emptied, that all might be dumped in a single heap and the bags refilled without altering the content of any greatly. A bit of colored glass more or less would not matter. Perhaps that is how the Great Stuffer of Bags filled them in the first place—who knows?”

.....
EDGAR ALLAN POE LIVED A UNIQUELY MELODRAMATIC LIFE; POET AND COMPELLING LITERARY CRITIC. FROM “WILLIAM WILSON. A TALE”:

“Men usually grow base by degrees.”



.....
JOHN WINTHROP, SEVENTEENTH-CENTURY
PURITAN PREACHER AND GOVERNOR. FROM
“A MODEL OF CHRISTIAN CHARITY,” SERMON
PREACHED WHILE AT SEA:

“God Almighty in His most holy and wise providence hath so disposed of the condition of mankind, as in all times some must be rich, some poor, some high and eminent in power and dignity; others mean and in subjection.”

.....
JEANNETTE PICCARD, BALLOONIST, SCIENTIST,
EPISCOPAL PRIEST. FROM CLAUDIA M. OAKES,
UNITED STATES WOMEN IN AVIATION: 1930-1939:

“If we do not add something . . . by our trip to the stratosphere this summer, we had better not go. We had better stay on the ground, be hewers of wood and drawers of water.”

.....
COURTNEY RAY, CLERGYWOMAN, CLINICAL
PSYCHOLOGIST. FROM “DECISIONS”:

“It’s fine to walk away from things you don’t really want. Many positions, opportunities, and paths that present themselves may sound alluring on paper, or have status/cachet attached, or are things that other people think you should accept, yet they aren’t aligned with your own goals or values. Be clear about where you want to go and what’s most important among your priorities. Protect your peace. Run your own race.”

.....
JUDITH FISHER, PSYCHOLOGIST. FROM “A
THOUGHT TO SHARE”:

“Free will gives humans access to limitless possibilities, a bridge to achieving the uncommon, connecting the human mind to the mind of the divine, and accessing the power of omniscient God. Meticulous nurturing of this multi-dimensional gift empowers us to move

mountains in our lives, no matter their size, opening clear pathways to living optimally, while engaging in a most intimate relationship with the supreme being of the universe. Through this amazing gift in Christ, you can truly do ALL things.”

.....
JOHN G. NEIHARDT, REPRODUCING, AS BEST HE
CAN, THE WORDS, THOUGHTS, AND EXPERIENCE
OF NATIVE AMERICAN SPIRITUAL LEADER BLACK
ELK. FROM *BLACK ELK SPEAKS*:

“When the ceremony was over, everybody felt a great deal better, for it had been a day of fun. They were better able now to see the greenness of the world; the wideness of the sacred day, the colors of the earth, and to set these in their minds.”

.....
CARL AUGUST SANDBURG, JOURNALIST, POET,
CHICAGOAN WHO LOVED CHICAGO. “FOG”:

The fog comes
on little cat feet.

It sits looking
over harbor and city
on silent haunches
and then moves on.

.....
ANONYMOUS, COMMUNICATIONS DIRECTOR.
FROM “ORDINARY THINGS”:

“I turned 40 in January of 2021. At the time, I was overwhelmed with getting older, . . . and just overall winter blues. My 9-year-old . . . said, “Mom, you should write a book called ‘The Miserable Life of Ordinary Things.’” She shook her head and walked away. I realized, after laughing out loud, how ridiculous I must sound to her. I had so many blessings, and I wasn’t being thankful for any of them. This January my book will be called “The Blessed Life of Ordinary Things.”

BETTER DAYS AHEAD?

Many years back, at his 10-year high school class reunion, my husband, Larry, ran into Bobby, a friend from his high school days. Happy to see Bobby again, Larry asked what he'd been doing the past decade.

"Two weeks after graduation I joined the Army," Bobby said, "and was deployed to Vietnam."

Bobby then shared his tragic story of being captured by the Vietnamese and imprisoned in Hanoi at the infamous "Hanoi Hilton." He was placed in solitary

confinement in a four-by-four-foot cell—so small, he said, that he couldn't even lie down. He described to Larry the torture, starvation, and loneliness he'd endured there for months. It was a story difficult to listen to.

"How did you survive such an ordeal?" Larry asked.

"I envisioned a future," Bobby said. "I couldn't physically see past those dank, dark walls; past the blackness that surrounded me; so I continually envisioned a future outside those walls."

Bobby clung to hope, even amid a seemingly hopeless situation, and survived.

At the beginning of each new year, "hope" is in our hearts. *Maybe this year, we muse, things will be better. Life will be more enjoyable. People will be kinder.* We're somehow "imprisoned" in this mindset; "prisoners of hope," as Zechariah describes God's people (Zech. 9:12).¹ We can't seem to help ourselves. "Tomorrow will be a better day" slides loosely off our tongues.

We all realize, however, that tomorrow isn't always better than today.

On New Year's Eve 2020, one often-expressed catchphrase was "Thankfully, 2020 will now be in the rearview mirror!"—and


that was true. We'll never experience that year again. But the world's hurts, sorrows, burdens, and tragedies didn't remain confined within those 12 months; instead, they flowed seamlessly into 2021, as we knew they would. And we're evidently becoming more desensitized to them.

"Increasingly it seems that we simply do not care about the other person, that other family, someone else's child. The self is everything," one journalist recently wrote, and added that, apparently, "many of us are [even] unmoved by death."²

Reading such statements and witnessing their truthfulness firsthand in our daily lives can certainly dishearten and rob us of hope—but only if we let them. We can make a different choice, a better one, when we personally know Jesus, the "hope of glory" (Col. 1:27); "our hope" (1 Tim. 1:1); the One on whom we have set our hope.

We are indeed prisoners of hope in Jesus. Because of Him, even in this world, we can live in hope that tomorrow *will* be better. As Bobby envisioned a future beyond those four cell walls—and God granted him that gift of a future—we too can trust in God's goodness and His faithful promises.

But as with John the Baptist, even if we don't get beyond our own cell walls—whatever form they take—we can still envision and one day experience a future, an eternal one, with our Savior.

We must never lose hope. Cling to God, who "plans to give [us] hope and a future" (Jer. 29:11). His promises are sure. 

¹All Bible texts are from the New International Version.

²https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2021/03/23/americans-are-stubbornly-unmoved-by-death/?utm_campaign=wp_todays_headlines&utm_medium=email&utm_source=newsletter&wpisrc=nl_headlines

Sandra Blackmer is an assistant editor of *Adventist Review*.

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HIS Impact On Me

A Strong Claim for the Gospel



The Holy Spirit was working miraculously in the group pictured above, not only in the hearts of the students but to their parents/guardians as well. In addition to the **sixteen students** that were baptized, **three parents** were also baptized along with **two graduate students**, and **five staff children** for a total of **twenty-six** souls.

Pastor Ludy Mahinay is the school's Bible class teacher, chaplain, and Pastor. He spends a lot of his time in the spiritual area of our students. However, he would be the first to tell you that these baptisms are the result of a collaborative work of Divine power and a staff that loves their students.

"I did a random survey in class, asking our students what inspired them to accept God or get baptized," he said. "The multiple-choice options included: various specific teachings/doctrines or topics of the bible and a space for an 'other' response." The responses are heartwarming.

"Some answered with specific topics that convinced them," Pastor Mahinay recalls, "but generally, they wrote what convinces them is how all the staff here treated them, cared for them, and loved them. To me, this is a perfect reflection of God's love through action and not just in words."

This is how God works: He utilizes a network of human vessels, from the supporters of Holbrook Indian School who help make the resources and staff possible, to the staff who in turn provide direct education, love, and care.

"The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian."
– Ellen White

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