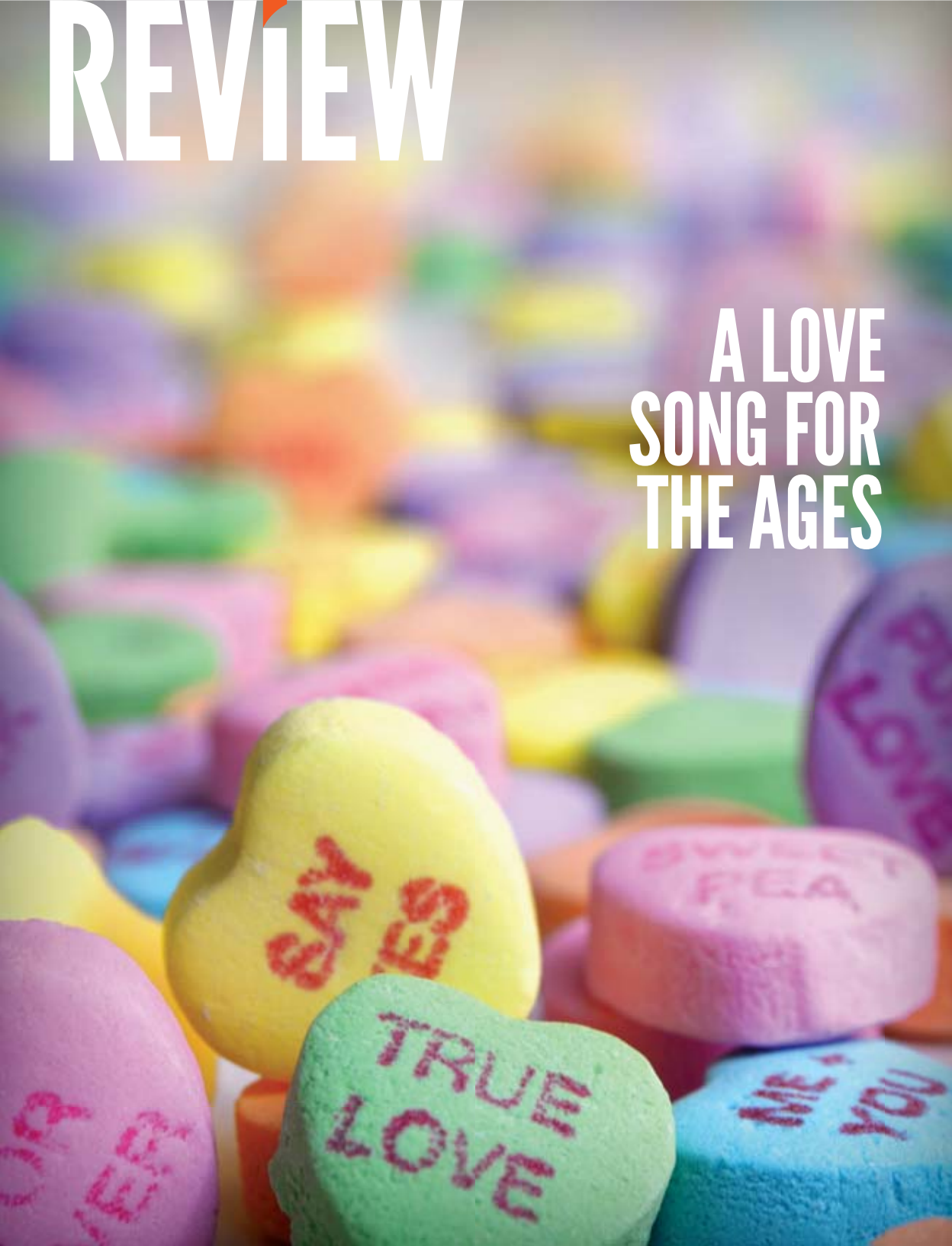


ADVENTIST REVIEW

**JANUARY 2018: THE AGNOSTIC EPISCOPALIAN +
TELLING OUR CHILDREN ABOUT SEX + MARRIAGE
WORKS + GOD HAS A PLAN FOR THAT? +
NEW WINE, NEW CLOTH + PREDATORS IN THE PEWS**

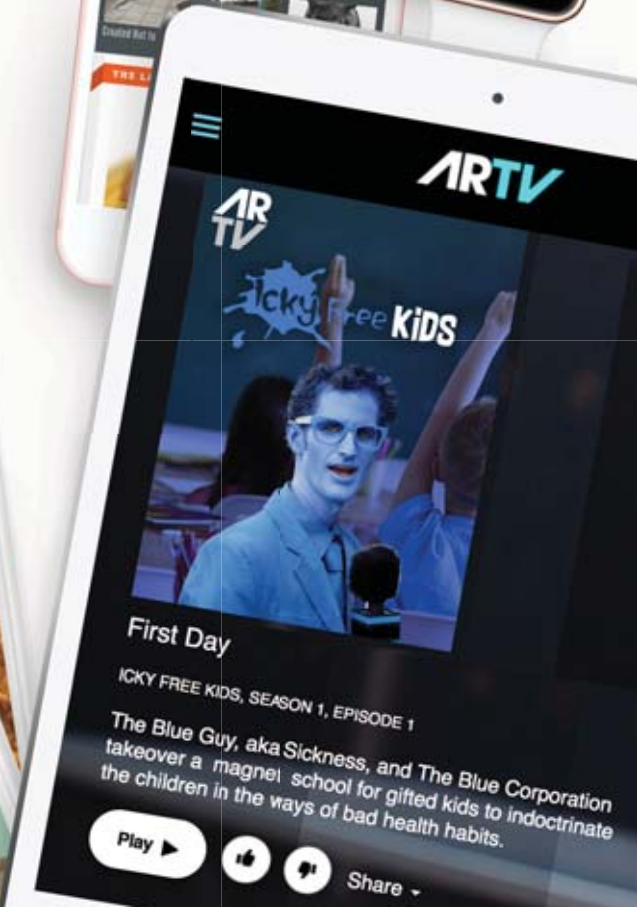
A LOVE SONG FOR THE AGES



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TRENDING

THE MOST SHARED STORIES ON ADVENTISTREVIEW.ORG LAST MONTH:



- 1 Leave Her Alone
- 2 A Doctor Sets Out to Heal His Community
- 3 Christianity and Capitalism: Why Women and Shopping Matter
- 4 Questions Regarding Care for Students Navigating Sexual Orientation and Gender Identity Differences
- 5 Church Division President Baptizes Own Father

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Thanks for your help, and keep reading *Adventist Review*!

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BILL KNOTT



*There is a mystery—
and for believers, even a kind of
holiness—in the unwritten page.*

The Unwritten Page

Like many tech-reluctant consumers, I now buy almost all my books online (through Amazon, specifically), grudgingly acknowledging that the ease of rapid home delivery exceeds the heady joys of browsing through a bricks-and-mortar bookstore.

I order volumes on military history, commentaries on Scripture, and collections of favorite short stories with none of the high spirits that once accompanied my monthly forays to the overcrowded and understaffed bookstores of my adolescence. The choices now are many, and the decisions merely mechanical: this title; by this author; without the 2nd edition foreword; in the paperback edition; at a cost that doesn't twinge my Yankee conscience.

But there is one portion of a physical bookstore that I suspect may never satisfactorily be replaced, even when the Amazon drones are someday flying through our neighborhoods to drop off packages by 3:00 p.m. Strategically positioned near the cashiers' counters in each bricks-and-mortar store are rows of "empty" books—blank journals, diaries, and sketchbooks—that call to us like Sirens singing to Odysseus. They promise us what no other volume in the "Book Barn" ever can—the power of shaping our reality; of telling our own truth instead of reading truths from others; of leaving some terse testimony of the fact that we were here—even as the

drones invade the side streets.

There is a mystery—and for believers, even a kind of holiness—in the unwritten page. We know too well the sordid facts from 2017 that could, if they proved interesting enough, become the fodder for unflattering biographies. We know that anything like candor would quickly show our smallness and our pettiness, our preference for gossip and "fake news" (whoever is defining it). We know that, unless remedied by grace, our stories would too soon be heavily discounted on the bargain table at the back.

But there is now an empty book in front of us, with softly stated light-blue lines on which the story of a new year may be written. And all that's good and holy in our lives—all the deep deposit of God's mercy that has changed and rearranged our story—calls out to us to start again, begin anew. The most hopeful person on the planet may well be the man or woman, the boy or girl, who holds a blank book on which the gold embossing reads "The Story of 2018."

Once we have wisely fought off the temptation to fill the first unwritten page with "New Year's resolutions," a quieter and more persistent voice advises us to fill that page with better questions than we asked ourselves last year.

Will I be truthful—at least to God, then to myself—about my sins, my brokenness, my pride?

Will I confess my need of grace, acknowledging how empty are my promises?

Will I seek answers in the one volume that speaks God's timeless truth to me, interpreted by the Holy Spirit who prompted it? Will I respond to prompts to pray—not once or twice—but on each day, and on each page?

Will I invite the counsel of my godly friends to shape me, help me more than I have done before?

Will I extend the grace Christ offers me to the graceless and the angry?

Will I become an agent of His wholeness to those whose names will fill the story of my new year?

The candid record of unmet resolutions and pounds regained by February advises us to choose our questions rather than give our answers at the threshold of a year. We cannot—should not—promise better performance for 2018, for promises not powered by grace are simply "ropes of sand."¹

But on that as yet unwritten page inaugurating a new year there is an indelible watermark from Him who finally writes the truest story of our lives: "*Fear not, for I am with you; be not dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you, yes, I will help you, I will uphold you with My righteous right hand*" (Isa. 41:10, NKJV).²

¹ Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956), p. 47.

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FANTASTIC

Regarding “Before or After? When Did She Say It?” (October 2017): Fantastic! Because I have heard, again and again, that Ellen White changed her views in 1888, and that her statements before 1888 are not quite as trustworthy, I started my own mini compilation of quotes, similar to those presented in this article. Thanks for sharing these. Great format, too!

Bill Krick

Clovis, California



SPIRIT OF TRUE REFORMATION

I just finished singing Bill Knott's new song, "Spirit of True Reformation" (October 2017). I absolutely love it! Thank you so much. I plan to lobby for my church to sing it.

Dixie Strong

Moore, South Carolina

As one who loves spiritual poetry (having written a booklet of them in 1973), I was so blessed to read,

then sing, Bill Knott's "Spirit of True Reformation." This is truly Adventism at its believing core. Every verse resonated with the deep-seated faith of Knott's lifetime commitment to the Trinity. Thank you for expressing my faith so beautifully. May your tribe increase!

Marlene Smith

Naples, Florida

Thank you for the coverage on the celebration of the 500th anniversary of the Reformation

(October 2017). Bill Knott's editorial mentioned that the Reformation changed everything. The message of Martin Luther as he nailed the 95 theses on the door of the castle church of Wittenburg elucidated to the religious world only the Bible, only faith, only grace, only Christ, only glory to God, [and] helped to emphasize a new dimension in our relationship to God.

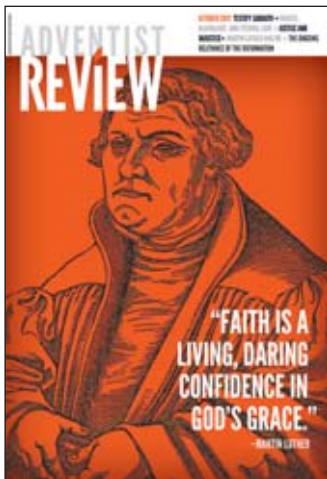
It was my privilege to visit Wittenberg, Erfurt, and other

Thank you for expressing my faith so beautifully.

MARLENE SMITH, NAPLES, FLORIDA

sites of the Reformation in 1983, during the days of Communism. It was evident that they wanted to obliterate religion from the people. However, the message of the Waldensians, Martin Luther, John Huss, and many other leaders of the Reformation kept the church alive.

Andy Nash wrote: “Every moment of every day, God’s



living Word waits for us to enter in.” Marcos De Benedicto, editor of the Brazilian *Adventist Review*, stated that “to move forward with a reform on a global scale, we need to reform first our own life and the church.”

Leo Ranzolin
Estero, Florida

IN A FEW WORDS...

SURVIVOR[S]

I enjoyed these three stories (October 2017). They're like no-holds-barred testimonies. I always find this kind of sharing relevant and inspiring.

Jeremy Vandiemer, via Web

95 THESES FOR THE CONTINUING REFORMATION

Absolutely awesome, thank you (AR Online, Nov. 16, 2017). I am certain I just tasted a drop of the latter rain.

Fran Durbin, via Web

ADVENTIST MEETINGS DRAW MORE THAN 2,000 IN PAKISTAN

Reading this news makes my heart sing (AR Online, Nov. 15, 2017)! I was a student missionary teaching first-year nursing students in the 1976-1977 school year at the Adventist hospital in Karachi. I visited the Adventist seminary for one week in the spring of 1977.

Suzie Ponder Sparks, via Web

BAPTIZED AT FIRST SIGHT

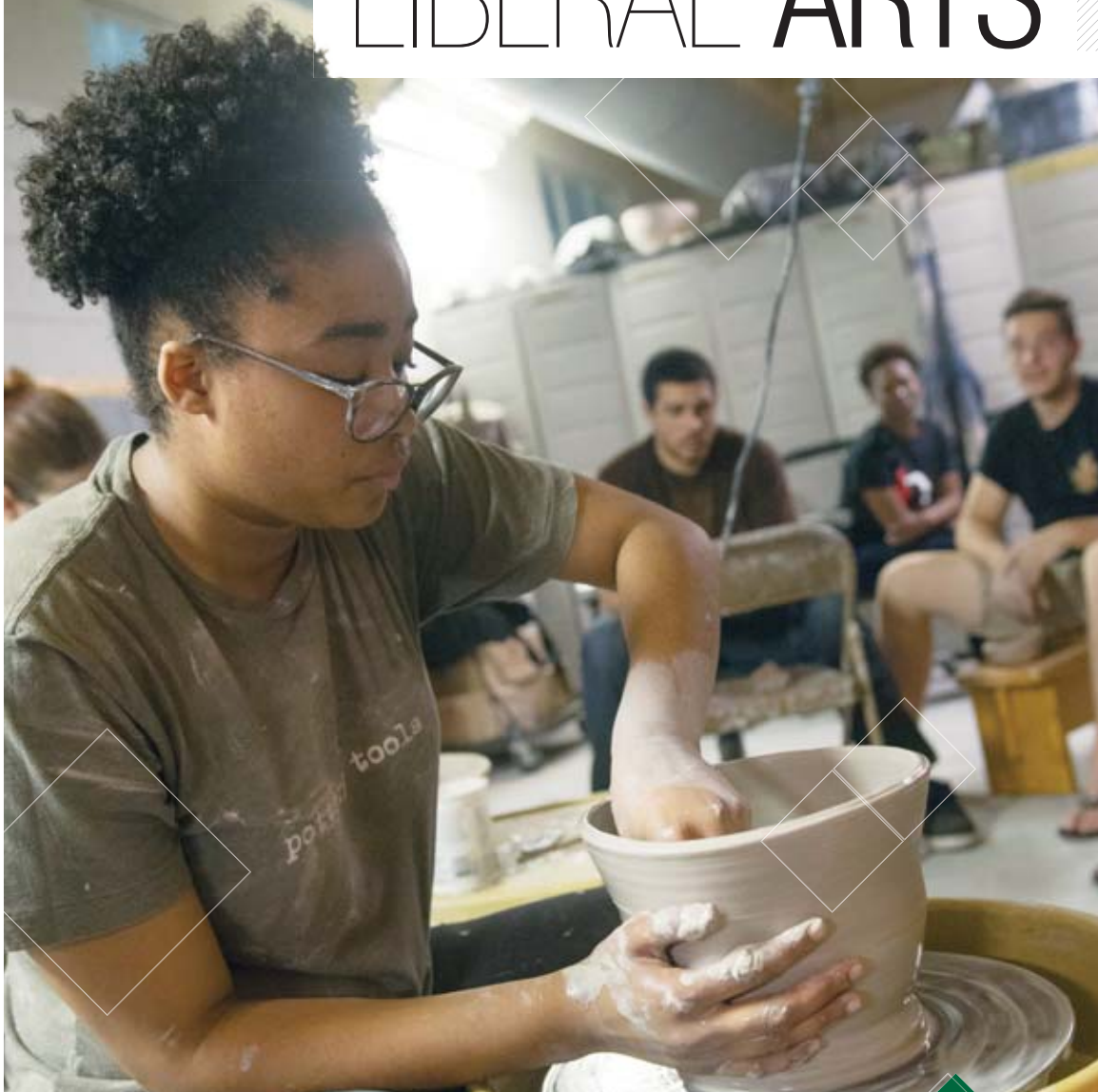
God calls people to the truth in some unique and in an unexplainable way (AR Online, Nov. 11, 2017). God bless, Robert; enjoy your journey with Jesus.

Amie Lazado, via Web

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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“It was so encouraging for our amazing team to see hundreds of people from all walks of life purchasing tickets to an event that offered them the latest scientifically proven techniques for increasing their health, hope, and happiness.”

–Page 13



Ben Carson and his mother, Sonya Carson.

PHOTO: BEN CARSON FACEBOOK PAGE

SONYA CARSON, BEN CARSON'S MOTHER, PASSES AT 88

**SHE IS CREDITED WITH HAVING BEEN
A MOLDING INFLUENCE ON HER SON'S LIFE.**

BY ADVENTIST REVIEW STAFF

Sonya Robinson Carson, the mother of Ben Carson, renowned pediatric neurosurgeon and current secretary of the United States Department of Housing and Urban Development, passed away at 88 on November 6, 2017. Sonya Carson, a single mother with little formal education, is credited with having been the molding influence on Ben Carson's life, as he has acknowledged numerous times.

“All that I am is because of the love of my mother,” wrote Carson in a tribute on one of his Facebook pages on November 8 as he shared the news of her passing. “She was

one of God's greatest blessings to me, and it was her foresight and discernment that pushed me to reach my dreams.”

UNPROMISING BEGINNINGS

Sonya Robinson Copeland was born on December 24, 1928, and grew up in rural Tennessee in a large family. She stopped attending school after the third grade, before she could learn how to read and write.

At 13 Sonya married World War II U.S. Army veteran Robert Solomon Carson, 15 years her senior, and several years later had two sons, Curtis

and Benjamin. In 1959, when Ben was 8, Sonya made the difficult decision to leave her husband, having discovered that he had never divorced his first wife. Sonya and her two sons moved in with an older sister in Boston, Massachusetts. Sonya's sister was a Seventh-day Adventist. Eventually, she and the boys were baptized into the Adventist faith.

Those were difficult years for Sonya, who fought depression while working long hours as a domestic worker. Two years later the family decided to return to Detroit.

A MODELING INFLUENCE

In a story related by Ben Carson in his 1996 book, *Gifted Hands*, and numerous interviews, he wrote that his mother was instrumental for him and his brother to start catching up and making headway in school. Carson often shared that at times his academic performance lagged well behind his peers. Sonya, however, taught her sons that it was in their power to change their situation in life, both academically and financially.

“[My mother] understood how success was achieved in our society,” wrote Carson in his Facebook tribute. “If anyone had a reason to make excuses, it was her, but she refused to be a victim, and would not permit us to develop the victim mentality either.”

According to Carson, his mother devised a plan for her sons to curb TV time and write two book reports a week instead. Working as a domestic for successful families, she

“She always had faith in us, and she never accepted excuses.”

had noticed that they read far more than they watched television. The required book reports were turned in to Sonya, who would mark them up with checkmarks and highlights. “Years later we realized her marks were a ruse,” wrote Ben Carson in an NPR commentary on parenting. “My mother was illiterate; she had received only a third-grade education.”

For Ben, regular reading was the beginning of a fruitful academic career that eventually took him to Yale, then to Johns Hopkins University Hospital, where he worked as director of neuropsychiatric surgery from 1984 to his retirement in 2013.

Carson has repeatedly shared how his mother often told him and his brother that they could do anything, and do it better, if they just worked hard at it. “She always had faith in us, and she never accepted excuses,” said Carson. “Her life maxim was ‘Learn to do your best, and God will do the rest.’”

CARSON SCHOLARS FUND

Inspired by Sonya’s life and the principles she taught, Ben and his wife, Candy, created The Carson Scholars Fund in 1994 to support two main initiatives: The Carson Scholars Program and The Ben Carson Reading Project. The first awards scholarships to students who have embraced high levels of academic excellence and community service. The second provides funding to schools to build and maintain Ben Carson reading rooms, “warm, inviting rooms where children can discover the joy of independent leisure reading,” according to the charity’s Web site.

The fund also honors people who make a difference in the life of students by giving the Sonya Award. For years Sonya Carson supported the fund by regularly attending reading room openings, and “flourished in the children’s enjoyment of reading,” according to a tribute video posted on YouTube. The Sonya Award recognizes community role models and people who uphold Sonya’s standards and share her drive.

After Sonya’s passing, Ben Carson thanked those who were providing comfort and support in their time of grief. “Over the past few days we have received so many thoughtful and encouraging notes and comments from many of you, and for that we are extremely grateful,” wrote Carson.

Carson acknowledges the debt of gratitude he has to his mother, whom he believes is responsible for many of his achievements. “She has been such an important influence in my life,” he said. ▀

OPIOIDS EPIDEMIC DISCUSSED AT ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY EVENT

PANEL OF EXPERTS AT LOMA LINDA TACKLES CURRENT ISSUES AND SUGGESTS A WAY FORWARD.

BY JAMES PONDER, LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY NEWS

One of the United States’ most prominent health topics came into focus last month with a panel of Loma Linda University Health experts identifying issues surrounding the opioid addiction and abuse epidemic, setting the stage for a discussion of proper pain management by health professionals and addressing underlying matters in addiction.

Presenters and four panelists convened on October 25, 2017, at Loma Linda University Medical Center in Loma Linda, California, for the Spotlight on Health Policy meeting, which was organized by the Institute for Health Policy and Leadership and cosponsored by the Center for Christian Bioethics.

At the start of the meeting Wonha Kim, director of the institute, told the estimated 175 attendees—comprising staff, faculty, students, and administrators—that the problem with opioid pain relievers is that they induce feelings of euphoria in some users and often become addictive.

Kim said opioid addiction is associated with such negative consequences as job loss, homelessness, alienation from family and friends, transition to harder drugs such as heroin, and even death from overdose. She pointed out that opioid overdoses claim the lives of approximately 91 Americans per day.

“Let that sink in a little bit,” she said. “Ninety-one Americans each day.”

Kim reported that the total cost



Wonha Kim, director of the Institute for Health Policy and Leadership, introduces the panel of experts who tackled different angles of the current opioid crisis, and suggested a way forward. ANSEL OLIVER, PHOTO: LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY NEWS

of the opioid epidemic—including expenditures for health care, lost productivity, addiction treatment, and criminal justice—amounted to approximately \$78.5 billion in 2015 alone.

INITIATIVES ON CAMPUS

Kim said four local Loma Linda University Health resources focus on the opioid epidemic.

The substance use recovery and wellness program at the Loma Linda University Behavioral Medicine Center offers a five-to-seven-day medically managed inpatient detoxification program, a four-to-six-week outpatient rehab program, and after-care groups for patients who have completed rehab.

The program is headed by psychiatrist Katia Stoletniy. In a separate interview Stoletniy said patients with chronic pain have a special track within the detox and rehabilitation program. The rehab program involves group classes to learn about the disease of addiction, new coping skills, and relapse prevention, among other support strategies.

PANELISTS REPORT

Kim introduced four Loma Linda University Health providers—a dentist, a pharmacist, and two physicians—to present their unique perspectives on the often-conflicting

demands health-care professionals must balance in order to provide the best care for their patients.

Panel moderator Gerald R. Winslow, director of the Center for Christian Bioethics at the LLU School of Religion, set a somber tone by announcing that the opioid epidemic has affected him personally.

“I lost an older sibling to an opioid addiction, so it’s not a matter of an abstract subject to me,” Winslow said. “I have also watched two friends go through this, and even though they’re still in the community, they’re not available for relationships much anymore. So, it’s a personal matter to me.”

In response to a question from Winslow about the geographic extent of the opioid crisis, panelist Justin Hata, chair of the Department of Physical Medicine and Rehabilitation at Loma Linda University Health, pointed out that from a political and regulatory perspective, the pendulum has swung away.

“We have moved from the over-prescribing of opioid medications to the situation today where few health care workers want to write such prescriptions,” he said. “I think that puts a lot of people at risk, and it’s going to be very challenging how we move forward.”

A DENTIST’S TAKE

Greg Olson, an associate professor at the LLU School of Dentistry, said that a key way to take on the opioid epidemic is to have an organized method for making students aware of the complexities of the epidemic.

Olson said he attended a policy session three years ago for the American Dental Education Association in which he and his colleagues came up with ideas for the most appropriate ways of combating the opioid crisis. “Since then, I’ve been on a path to try and figure out what role dentistry plays in this,” he said.

Olson added that the central points that emerged from the meeting were that dentists must monitor themselves and their colleagues for symptoms of addiction, and that they must also be alert for patients who keep calling back for refills of specific pain medications, particularly if they are in high-risk groups.

Citing a tagline posted on the National Public Radio Web site that says “My dentist hooked me on opioids,” Olson added, “We do that a lot through the extraction of third molars. That’s the classic one. We take out third molars, and we give a prescription for hydrocodone or OxyContin, and we let them go. And

those people happen to be teenagers from 16 to 20 to 25, high-risk.”

A PHARMACIST'S CONTRIBUTION

After noting that pharmacists are often on the front line in the battle against opioid addiction, Winslow asked Emily Hollinghurst, an assistant professor at the LLU School of Pharmacy, for her perspective on the opioid epidemic.

Hollinghurst's answer was carefully nuanced. She said the question of whether to prescribe the controversial painkillers is not easy to answer. She added that the education point when dealing with patients who are expected to have acute pain—as opposed to the long-term, chronic pain cancer patients often experience—is to ask them, “What pain score is tolerable to you?” She said it is important to give them the expectation that they may have pain after certain procedures.

“As a pharmacist on the oncology side, it is difficult because you have patients with tumors that are compressing on nerves, and other issues causing a lot of pain,” Hollinghurst said. “But then you also have acute issues that are going to be treated with chemotherapy.”

Winslow directed questions to the panelists for approximately 40 minutes before inviting members of the audience to join the discussion.

The room became quiet as one audience member shared his personal experience as a recovering opioid addict. He said he had received excellent and effective therapy, both on an inpatient and outpatient basis, at the LLU Behavioral Medicine Center.

Moments later the audience broke into spontaneous applause when he reported that he has enjoyed two years of sobriety in the aftermath of his treatment. ▀



Participants of a poverty simulation exercise at the La Sierra University church line up to deal with simulated banks, payday lenders, and other life services frequented by those with low income. PHOTO: NATAN VIGNA, LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY NEWS

U.S. ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY SHARES POVERTY ATTACK PLAN AT NATIONAL EVENT

LA SIERRA SOCIAL WORKERS AND PASTOR SUGGEST HOW TO PARTNER TO FIGHT DESTITUTION.

BY DARLA MARTIN TUCKER, LA SIERRA UNIVERSITY NEWS

Two La Sierra University social work faculty members and a university church pastor recently gave a presentation at a national conference on ways churches and social workers can join forces to meet the needs of impoverished populations better.

Daphne Thomas, an associate professor of social work; Marni Straine, assistant professor of social work; and Steve Hemenway, a La Sierra University church pastor, led a workshop titled “Bridging Gaps: Social Workers Provide Solutions in Faith-based Arenas” for the National Association of Christian Social Workers convention. The event took place November 2-5, 2017, in Charlotte, North Carolina.

The trio from the Riverside, California-based school spoke on ways churches and other faith-based organizations can work with social workers and social work student interns in better helping poor individuals connect with appropriate agencies. They also explored new models of partnerships between congregations and local and governmental agencies.

“Not only can it be difficult navigating the wide array of services provided by city and county organizations, but many clergy and faith-based leaders may lack the time, skills, or training to adequately provide helpful and long-term solutions,” they said in their convention proposal. “This presentation will look at how local congregations can utilize social work professionals to assist, educate, and better serve those in need throughout the community.”

INTERNSHIP WITH THE CHURCH'S COMMUNITY

The workshop's concepts are the outgrowth of an internship program begun three years ago at the La Sierra University church by La Sierra's Social Work Department. Interns, working with Hemenway and under the direct supervision of Straine,

A packed Empire Theatre on the Sunday morning of PROPHETICA. PHOTO: ADVENTIST RECORD



began working with the church's Community Services program to help people who needed more assistance than the food and clothing provided by the church. The social work interns were able to assess individuals and families and direct people to appropriate local service agencies.

"It has been a great success, and the [La Sierra church] pastors report that it is going very well—so well, in fact, that they began telling other churches about this," Thomas said.

Meanwhile, in the fall of 2016 Hemenway was instrumental in launching a task force with the city of Riverside focused on engaging local faith communities in aiding poverty-stricken and homeless populations. The task force includes representatives from social work programs at La Sierra, Loma Linda, and California Baptist universities, and several local agencies. Students from each of the organizations are creating an asset map that charts current activities at regional churches that help at-risk populations. The map will help the task force address gaps in services.

In September the office of Riverside mayor Rusty Bailey held a faith summit aimed at bringing together faith-based groups to discuss collaboration toward addressing the needs of the poverty-stricken and homeless communities. The summit was attended by 170 representatives of 70 organizations. "Placing social work interns in churches in our area is one of the goals of this larger group," Thomas said. 🍀

TED-STYLE LIFE-ENRICHMENT TALKS ATTRACT HUNDREDS IN AUSTRALIA

TWENTY-MINUTE PRESENTATIONS FOCUS ON "HEALTH, HOPE, AND HAPPINESS."

BY JARROD STACKELROTH AND MICHAELA TRUSCOTT, ADVENTIST RECORD

More than 800 people attended a TED-style weekend of presentations held in Toowoomba, Queensland, Australia, November 4-5, 2017, and more than double that number watched online.

PROPHETICA 2017 featured a diverse list of presenters, including award-winning cookbook author Sue Radd, leading lifestyle disease researcher Ross Grant, radio host and history buff Lyle Southwell, and former punk rocker turned pastor David Asscherick.

The 20-minute presentations included numerous ways for audience members to participate in Q-and-A sessions, including a mobile text line, meet-and-greet sessions, and meet the host dinners.

The event was held at the Empire Theater, and event organizers say they were happy with the turnout as a first-of-its-kind event.

Event organizer Julian Archer was thrilled by the community response. "It was so encouraging for our amazing team to see hundreds of people from all walks of life purchasing tickets to an event that offered them the latest scientifically proven techniques for increasing their health, hope, and happiness."

While many attendees were from the local area, a number traveled up to 100 kilometers (60 miles) to attend the event. There was also a group from Vanuatu.

In attendance was a group of 14 theology and ministry students and three faculty members from Avondale College of Higher Education.

The students found the opportunity to hear such polished presenters beneficial and will take back skills and techniques learned from the short but information-heavy presentations.

"The caliber of the speakers and their knowledge of the subject matter was fantastic," said Aniele, a third-year student.

The group was sponsored by the Avondale Ministerial Training Scholarship Fund, set up in 2001 to help support ministry and theology students with potential for full-time ministry to pursue extra learning experiences.

The PROPHETICA 2017 team has been asked to consider holding similar events in other cities. Presentations are available at prophetica.com. 🍀



Aircraft carrier, USS Hornet hosted Central's 2017 Men's Convention, Chosen for Action. PHOTO: SERGIO CANO

U.S. AIRCRAFT CARRIER HOSTS ADVENTIST MEN'S MEETING

CENTRAL CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE ORGANIZES MEMORABLE MEN'S RETREAT

BY SERGIO CANO, CENTRAL CALIFORNIA CONFERENCE

Originally commissioned as an instrument of war, the aircraft carrier U.S.S. *Hornet* hosted the Central California Conference (CCC) 2017 Men's Convention in Alameda, California, September 29 through October 1, 2017. The event was cosponsored by the North American Division, Pacific Union Conference, and Northern California Conference. More than 400 were in attendance.

The U.S.S. *Hornet*, commissioned in 1943, played a major role in launching multiple aerial assaults against Axis powers during World War II, as well as the war in Vietnam, earning the ship 11 awards and decorations. One of those assaults is the well-known Doolittle Raid. The vessel also holds significance in history as it served as

the recovery vessel for the first moon-landing mission, Apollo 11, on July 24, 1969.

Men commit to be "soldiers for God" after an appeal from speaker José Rojas.

PHOTO: SERGIO CANO



"What better place than aboard the U.S.S. *Hornet*, where pivotal points in history were made, to bring our men, who have been 'chosen for action,' and provide them the tools to realize their God-given destinies and to live their lives the way the Divine designed for them to live," said Steve Horton, CCC vice president for ministries.

This year's theme, "Chosen for Action," drew men from all over the Pacific Union Conference together to experience what it was like to live on the ship as a mid-twentieth-century soldier. The men slept in large berthing compartments where the bunks were stacked three high and, in some cabins, slept up to 72 men. Every morning of the weekend, the men were also awoken to the sound of "Reveille," the military bugle wake-up call.

Four keynote speakers inspired attendees: Pierre Steenberg, CCC

LIGHTING CANDLES? OR CURSING THE DARKNESS?

**THE CALLING OF CHRISTIANS
WITHIN A TROUBLED WORLD**

BY TERRY SHAW, PRESIDENT AND CEO OF ADVENTIST HEALTH SYSTEM

During the past few months mind-numbing events have reminded us that, ultimately, this world is not our home.

Across the globe, we are witnesses to the bigotry and the hatred that a few can inflict on the many. In places where we or our family members live, we are reeling from devastating natural disasters.

Not too long ago, in Las Vegas, we gasped at the senseless devastation that one person can inflict on the physical and mental state of so many. Our society seems to be becoming more polarized, more fearful,

more angry, more disenfranchised, more lonely, more dehumanized, and more segregated than ever. There seems to be something going on: something deeper appears to be taking place at the root of the human spirit.

As Christians in this societal malaise, we have a responsibility to do what Jesus did while He was on this earth: be people who build up, not tear down. Scripture tells us that Jesus Himself created us, which means that we all have infinite value.

At this precarious and challenging moment let's be people who debate, not eviscerate; people who seek encounters, not confrontations; people who listen to understand, not just to respond. In short, let's be people who are filled with humility, grace, and trust in the Lord.

In this dark time we have a choice: light some candles, or curse the darkness.

As a Christian, I pray that God helps me to be someone who is the least-angry, least-fearful, and least-resentful person whom others will encounter. We live this way, not because we have given up, or because we have lost faith in goodness, but because we are called to bring love, acceptance, and a safe zone for others in our daily encounters with the world.

Lord, may You bring Your grace, peace, and light to our hurting world. 🕯️

ministerial director; José Rojas, well-known Adventist speaker; Marc Woodson, Northern California Conference executive secretary; and, Arlene Taylor, brain health specialist. Speakers shared practical leadership principles from a position of love and strength, to be applied both in the home as well as in the church.

Saturday's schedule was packed with testimonies from each of the four speakers and also included tours of the ship, where attendees got a firsthand look into the lives of the sailors who once risked their lives on the very vessel the attendees stood on. The day ended with an inspirational concert by recording artist Michael Harris.

The convention ended with a special anointing service. All ordained deacons, elders, and ministers were called up to participate in the anointing of those who requested it. Said Fernando Ruiz, ordained elder in Watsonville, "I felt so inadequate and unworthy to be the one to anoint someone else, but God truly blessed and anointed me in the very act of doing this for another."

"This was not just an event, but the beginning of a more developed men's ministry," says Horton. "It is our desire that men's ministry begin to take on a new emphasis in the local church, conference, union, and the world church." 🕯️

**LET'S BE PEOPLE
WHO DEBATE,
NOT EVISCERATE;
PEOPLE WHO SEEK
ENCOUNTERS, NOT
CONFRONTATIONS;
PEOPLE WHO LISTEN
TO UNDERSTAND,
NOT JUST TO
RESPOND.**



ADRA leaders and coordinators of ADRA offices across Europe met in Brussels, Belgium, to outline the next steps of the agency, the humanitarian arm of the Adventist Church. PHOTO:

TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION NEWS

ADVENTIST HUMANITARIAN AGENCY OPENS NEW OFFICE

FACILITY IN BRUSSELS WILL ALLOW FOR BETTER PARTNERSHIPS.

BY VICTOR HULBERT, TRANS-EUROPEAN DIVISION NEWS

The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) in Europe, the humanitarian arm of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, is bigger than you think. With 29 active offices across the 32 countries that make up Europe, more than 225 staff and 11,000 volunteers support development projects in Europe and around the world.

Representatives from 19 of the country offices met in Brussels, Belgium, for three days of intense meetings October 16-18, 2017. ADRA leaders and coordinators in Europe enjoyed the possibility of networking together, sharing plans, and developing a coordinated way forward for ADRA on the European continent.

ADRA EUROPE AND BEYOND

Until two years ago, ADRA in Europe was a loose coalition of offices, held together by two directors based at the Inter-European Division (EUD) and Trans-European Division (TED) offices. However, discussions between ADRA and the two division church regions concluded that a more coordinated approach across the whole of Europe could have significant bene-

fits regarding funding, project coordination, and the ability to draw expertise from various country offices to help the whole team.

ADRA Europe now has an office based in Brussels, home to the European Union. João Martins, formerly country director for ADRA Portugal, and briefly ADRA EUD director, heads the European team. Thomas Petracek, who until recently worked for ADRA Germany, joined as programs director.

Internationally, a turnover of US\$45.5 million annually assists humanitarian, livelihood and income-generating projects, and economic development initiatives. Offices are involved in eight health and clean water projects, nine educational projects, and one focused on ecology. Using partnership funding, ADRA Europe is reaching and changing lives in countries such as Sudan, Mali, Rwanda, Nepal, and Vietnam.

In Gokwe, a rural area of Zimbabwe where maternal mortality rates are very high, ADRA United Kingdom (UK) is providing a 36-month program ensuring improved maternal health care services for women of childbearing

age. With few, ill-equipped health-care facilities combined with a limited awareness of the benefits of maternal health services, ADRA UK provides equipment, education, and training.

Within Europe 14 offices also offer domestic assistance focused on humanitarian needs, social issues, refugee support, and health, at a total investment of 13.6 million Euros. In Belgrade, ADRA Serbia is running a community-based project that works both with refugees, the Roma community, and local Serbs. Working across the groups helps facilitate integration while at the same time assisting the refugees with school transport, community programs, language instruction, and homework support.

Similar programs are running in Italy, where ADRA has just completed the first cycle of a one-year internship with migrants from sub-Saharan Africa who now have skills to be able to run and develop their businesses.

HEALTHY DISCUSSIONS

Vigorous debates during the three days of meetings demonstrated that every office is committed to the humanitarian and Christ-centred role of ADRA.

"I am so excited about being here," stated ADRA International president Jonathan Duffy. "We shared information and had healthy discussions. We may have more questions than answers, but this is a forum where we can obtain the answers." 🍷



JAMAICA GRANTS NATIONAL HONOR TO ADVENTIST LEADER Glen Samuels, president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in west Jamaica, was the recipient of a national award. The government of Jamaica recognized Samuels for his outstanding contribution to religion with the Order of Distinction, Officer Class. Samuels also serves as a justice of the peace, member of the Police Civilian Oversight Authority of Jamaica, and member of the St. James Peace Management Board.



ADVENTIST ATTORNEYS ADMITTED TO SUPREME COURT BAR Eight Adventist attorneys (Harold Cleveland, Jr., Allison Dichoso, Theodore Flo, Meredith Jobe, Maria McPhaul, Josue Pierre, Leesa Thomas, Jesus Uriarte) were admitted to the U.S. Supreme Court Bar on November 1, 2017. The General Conference Office of General Counsel sponsored the event. The attorneys are now able to argue Supreme Court cases and are offered preferred seating for observing other cases.



PUERTO RICO STILL RECOVERING Puerto Rico continues to recover from the devastating aftermath of Hurricane Maria, which left the island territory with little to no power amid widespread destruction of buildings and homes. "This storm hit us hard," said Luis Rivera, treasurer of the Adventist Church in Puerto Rico. At least 16 local Adventist church buildings suffered serious damage, along with five of the 20 Adventist schools in Puerto Rico.



VIETNAMESE SCHOOL OF EVANGELISM OPENS IN CALIFORNIA Vietnamese from across the United States recently came together for the inauguration of the Vietnamese School of Evangelism at the El Monte Vietnamese Adventist Church in southern California. Among courses taught will be practical theology, health, and character development with an emphasis on discipleship. The school will be conducted in person at the beginning of every quarter, then via virtual classroom twice a week for the remainder of the quarter.



KENYAN CHURCH OPERATES SUCCESSFUL PRISON MINISTRY The Newlife Seventh-day Adventist Church in Nairobi, Kenya, runs a unique Sabbath School—in a local prison. The Newlife prison initiative was launched in 2012 to provide spiritual growth opportunities to inmates and supporting them in leading more productive lives after prison as committed Christians. The program has ministered to more than 2,500 inmates. Approximately 1,000 have been baptized.



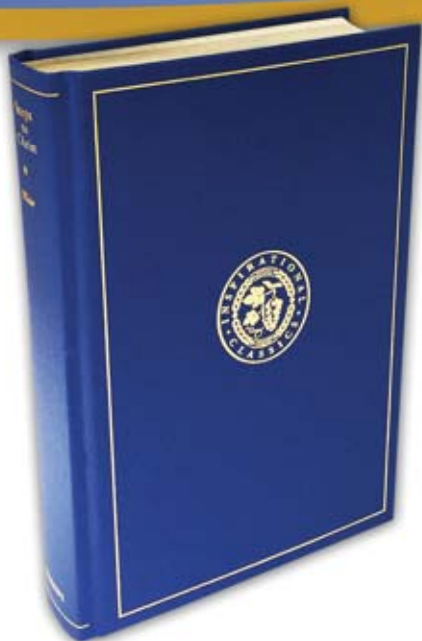
CHURCH PROVIDES FREE HEALTH CARE IN FIRE-DAMAGED VILLAGES Adventist Church members in Port Moresby, the capital city of Papua New Guinea, have provided free health care and advice to people from two communities affected by a devastating fire in 2017 that left 150 people homeless. More than 200 patients turned up each day. By the end of two weeks, more than 1,500 patients had received basic health care from the team of health professionals.



ROMANIAN VOLUNTEERS PROVIDE HUMANITARIAN AID IN IRAQ Volunteers with ADRA Romania recently offered medical and psychological assistance to refugees in Erbil, Iraq. Assistance was provided at the ADRA/Adventist Help hospital, located in a region with more than 100,000 refugees. Having learned that refugees lacked books to continue their education, Romanian volunteers raised funds to purchase almost 300 books, which were subsequently set up as a library in the refugee camp.



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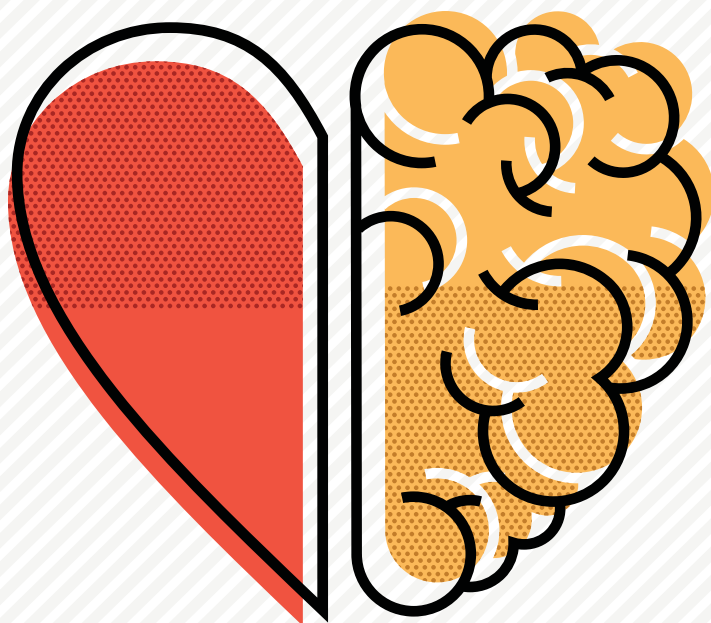
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DISCOVER



VIRTUOUS THINKING

Loving God with heart and mind

FRANK M. HASEL

There is an aspect of our love of God that is strangely underdeveloped among Christians. When we think about our love of God, we usually envision something on the emotional level. But in the Bible the love of God also encompasses our thinking.

The New Testament contains a noteworthy passage, in which a lawyer is in conversation with Jesus about issues of eternal consequence: he wants to know what it takes to inherit eternal life. Jesus refers him back to what is written. The lawyer then recalls the Word of God and gives an answer that Jesus approves: "So he answered and said, "'You shall *love the Lord your God* with all your heart, with all your soul, with all



your strength, and with *all your mind*,” and “your neighbor as yourself”” (Luke 10:27 NKJV).¹

This is Scripture's amazing declaration: you shall *love* God not just with your heart, but with *all your mind*! The Greek word *dianoia*, which is used here for the English word “mind,” describes the “activity of thinking,” “comprehending,” “reasoning,” and “reflecting,” in the sense of understanding something. This is how God created us to be. Thinking and reflecting is an activity with which God has endowed human beings. We have the privilege to exercise our thinking abilities to explore things not only in the Bible but in all areas of life and learning.

To love God with all our mind means having His love control all our thoughts. Such thinking is characterized by certain inner attitudes and dispositions toward such things as truth, knowledge, and understanding. Inspired by the work of Philip E. Dow, I now refer to this mindset as virtuous thinking.² We are dealing here with the question of *how* we pursue what we do when we engage our thinking. Without exercising virtuous thinking, we cannot truly love God; nor will we give honor to Him. It will be only to our spiritual detriment to think any other way (2 Cor. 10:5), I submit the following four virtuous thinking traits as foundational in our drive to express our love of God with our hearts *and minds*.³

INTELLECTUAL CAREFULNESS

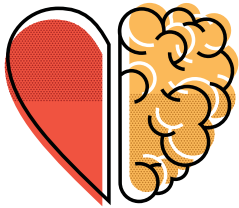
Any inquiry into knowledge, any serious study and scientific research, requires carefulness. People who are intellectually careful want to know the truth and consistently make sure not to rush to hasty conclusions based on rather limited knowledge.⁴ Instead, intellectually careful people are thorough and diligent in their thinking, careful not to overlook important details.

We all know stories in which hastiness or carelessness in our work, in our studies, in our relationships, in science and also in theology, has led to disastrous results. Sometimes those negative results of hasty or careless thinking show up immediately; sometimes it takes awhile until they become evident. But the negative effects are inevitable. If we truly believe that we are children of God, then what we do and *how we do what we do* should reflect the character of Him who is Lord of the details, Him to whom our ultimate loyalties belong.

As Seventh-day Adventists we should pursue and cherish an attitude of intellectual carefulness not just because it is academically sound and scientifically mandated, but because it grows out of our respect of God, who is our careful Creator and Redeemer. His example and character compel us to think carefully. Faith is neither sloppy nor hasty. We do not honor God by avoiding meticulous and careful thought, word, research, publication, and

A humble inquiry is the foundation of all growth in knowledge, for it generates a freedom that naturally produces a teachable spirit.





Our worship and our relationship with God demand that our minds be fully engaged.

other action! Put positively: loving God with all our hearts *and minds* includes being intellectually careful!

INTELLECTUAL FAIR-MINDEDNESS

A second intellectual virtue is fair-mindedness. Those who are fair-minded are people who earnestly want to know the truth and are therefore deliberately willing to listen in an evenhanded way to different opinions.⁵ Such discriminatory thinking would of course make no sense if there is no such thing as truth. The virtue of fair-mindedness would then morph into meaninglessness, and the end of education would not be far away.⁶ Fair-minded persons have chosen to put truth over any allegiance to their ego, or any allegiance to cherished opinions. They listen in an evenhanded way, even if they already have strong views on the subject. Fair-minded people also try to view the issue from the perspective of those they disagree with, because they are aware that they do not always have the most complete or accurate perspective on a given issue. We could say that an intellectually fair-minded person values knowing the truth in a fair-minded manner more than winning an argument. Intellectual bias is the vice corresponding to intellectual fair-mindedness.⁷

Among the many benefits of intellectually fair-minded people, one is particularly practical: genuinely fair-minded people tend to make and keep friends more easily than people whose thinking habits are closed-minded or biased. The reason for this is simple: it is the inherent link between fair-mindedness and attentive listening.

Fair-minded people, because they are committed to discovering truth, listen. They actually listen! Very few things give people a greater sense of their own value and worth, and nothing attracts us to other people more than the belief that we are valued. This value and respect often is expressed through attentive listening. Such fair-minded thinking leads us toward lives of wisdom, richness, and depth. Put positively, loving God with all our hearts *and minds* includes being intellectually fair-minded.

INTELLECTUAL HONESTY

A third virtue is intellectual honesty. Those who are intellectually honest want to encourage the spread of truth. Therefore they consistently use information in an unbiased way.⁸ Intellectually

honest persons are careful not to use information that is taken out of context. They will not exaggerate facts or distort the truth by describing it with loaded language, or otherwise mislead by using statistics or other types of evidence that might have a deceptive effect. They do not take credit for evidence or ideas that are not their own.⁹

Of all the intellectual virtues, honesty is perhaps the most admired. Unfortunately, it is too often less practiced and more tampered with than ever should be. Honesty often seems the more difficult road to take. But in the end it is always the one characterized by greater freedom. The most ominous peril of dishonesty is that, ultimately, we firmly believe our own lie and are thoroughly deceived: damned for choosing not to believe the truth, and finding satisfaction in falsehood and wrong (2 Thess. 2:12). On the other side, honesty inevitably builds trust between people and restores confidence in leadership; it is the foundation of all healthy relationships. Put positively: loving God with all our hearts *and minds* includes practicing intellectual honesty!

INTELLECTUAL HUMILITY

Last but not least, there is the virtue of intellectual humility. Intellectually humble people have come to the amazing realization and humbling insight that in their thinking they are dependent upon something or someone outside themselves. They are aware that truth is not of their own making, but is ultimately God-breathed. Thus, they have realized that they are not the measure of everything.¹⁰ Therefore they gladly bring every thought into captivity to the obedience of Christ and His Word (cf. 2 Cor. 10:5).


Humble inquiry is the foundation of all growth in true knowledge, for it generates the freedom to be teachable. Humble people tend to be pleasant to work with. This does not mean that they lack firm convictions. Rather, it means that they are submissive to God's truth, while ever aware of the limitations of their knowledge. The humble are capable of expanding their knowledge and understanding of the world in a way that arrogance and pride will not facilitate.¹¹ Put positively: loving God with all our hearts *and minds* includes being intellectually humble.

For the follower of Jesus Christ loving God with all our hearts *and minds* will include being intellectually careful, fair-minded, honest, and humble.

WORSHIP

These intellectual virtues are particularly significant in the realm of worship. Entering into meaningful worship with God is inseparably tied to the state and character of our minds. The more we apply our minds to understanding God in His written Word, and to exploring His creation, the more our ability to worship Him increases. Worship is certainly far more than merely knowing a lot of information about God. But our worship and our relationship with God demand that our minds be fully engaged. We cannot truly worship God without thinking. But when we engage in *virtuous thinking*, our actions will reflect God's goodness and display a teachable spirit that is fair-minded and honest.

How we think is expressed in how we behave. Your virtuous thinking will express itself in how careful you are in what you say about me, in your fair-minded treatment of my opinions, your honesty in your dealings with me, and the humility your demeanor reflects.

Imagine if the church we love and belong to were filled with people of such character and attitude. What a fellowship that would be! Imagine how the relationship and the atmosphere within the church would change for the better if *we all* practiced this. God would be delighted. Others would be attracted. We would all be greatly blessed! 

¹ Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

² Philip E. Dow, *Virtuous Minds: Intellectual Character Development* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 2013) This delightful book has greatly stimulated my own thinking and inspired me to become a more thoughtful person. I am greatly indebted to Dow, and follow several of his ideas closely.

³ Dow's book lists seven thinking virtues, but the present article will focus on just four indispensable thinking traits.

⁴ See Dow, p. 147.

⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 48. For a powerful argument in favor of truth, see Princeton professor Harry G. Frankfurt's short book *On Truth* (New York: Alfred E. Knopf, 2006).

⁷ See Dow, pp. 49 and 149.

⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 151.

⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 61-69, 151. Here I again freely admit my strong dependence on the magnificent thoughts found in these pages.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 72, 152, 153.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

Frank M. Hasel, originally from Germany, serves as an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference.



TRAFFICKING PEOPLE

How to recognize the many faces of evil

IVONA BERNARD

I heard the name Veronica's Voice for the first time when I rushed into the Beacon Light church to catch what I could of an Adventist Youth (AY) program hosted by the church's Community Services Department. Unfortunately, I heard only enough to know that there was an agency in Kansas City whose mission was to help women find a way out of prostitution. I was both touched and intrigued.

I remember thinking, *I'd like to find a way to help them.* Unfortunately, I tucked that thought away on a ledge in my brain and it lay there, like many of my well-intentioned thoughts often do.

The second time I heard about Veronica's Voice, about a year and a half later, the situation was a little more dramatic. I had absentmindedly turned on the news when I heard the name Veronica's Voice spoken in a somber tone. As I looked at the television screen I saw a group of picketers protesting the purchase of a house in their neighborhood that would be used to help women seeking to escape a life of sexual exploitation.

I heard one picketer say she

was a good Christian and didn't want that "element" in her neighborhood. I was first mortified, then defensive for the sake of the poorly represented heart of Jesus. Had she read the Gospels? Ever? Through my alternately angry and aching heart, I prayed that God would somehow soften the pain of rejection for that agency and the women they sought to serve. This time my desire to help Veronica's Voice stayed alive.

START SMALL

I wanted to help, but I wasn't sure what I could do. I figured women trying to find refuge from the street might need a way to clean up physically, so my first thought was to put my "collection" (read: pack rat) habit to use by gathering hotel toiletries from my honey's and my frequent road trips. Then, at the Mid-America Union Conference presidents retreat, I asked my fellow conference presidents' wives to save their toiletries for me too.

When I got on the Veronica's Voice Web site, in an effort to find a way to contact them, I saw a wish list that included such items as a freezer, copy paper, alarm clocks, storage bins, a security system. I thought, *This is doable*.

I supposed I might organize a fund raiser that would raise enough money to fill those needs, and I had every confidence that my Ministerial Spouses Association (MSA, formally known as Shepherdess) sisters in the Central States Conference, a group of compassionate and capable women, would agree to get on board.

When I first met with Kristy Childs, founder and program director of Veronica's Voice, and Terrel Bishop, program manager, I experienced a range of emotions. I was startled by the real-life stories and experiences they shared with me, shocked by the statistics of human trafficking, and saddened by their genuine surprise that someone would seek them out to help.

I was even strangely embarrassed when Kristy asked if I was an angel. Terrel confided that she had been praying to God for people who would be willing to come alongside them.

When Diane Thurber, Mid-America Union Conference MSA president, mentioned to Donna Jackson (North American Division MSA director) about my interest in helping this marginalized group of women, I was encouraged to apply for an NAD compassion grant. Subsequently, Jackson

Victims often walk into trafficking understanding little of the type of life that awaits them.

suggested that the three conferences in our area—Iowa-Missouri, Kansas-Nebraska, and Central States—might partner together to help. The Rocky Mountain Conference and the Mid-America Union Conference, along with various NAD departments, also agreed to pitch in with significant contributions.

The initiative that grew out of this series of events came to involve much more than toiletries, which, it turns out, Veronica's Voice did not need (Lesson? Find out what people *truly* need before you provide them with what you *think* they need!).

FIGHTING A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM

As we learned more about the scourge of human trafficking and met people who shared with us the havoc it wreaks on real lives, our mission morphed to include prevention through education and awareness, as well as fund-raising to provide for some of the needs at the Magdalene KC Transitional House, newly opened in a different state altogether. In addition to items on the original wish list, we hoped to help them move a power line that was too close to the house, arrange for a much-needed bathroom redo, and provide a deck to use as a healing place for in-season group therapy sessions. We also wanted to equip them with a new (or lightly used) van to meet their transportation needs.

To achieve our goals, we planned a weekend's worth of activities. These included door-to-door distribution of information, a symposium/concert, and a community expo.

The door-to-door ministry was carried out by

Victims often walk into trafficking, not necessarily by force, but by understanding little of the life that awaits them.

members from the various conference churches and area Pathfinders. The brochures given out included information about the tactics traffickers use to ensnare their victims. The symposium/concert featured survivors' stories, inspirational music, and a keynote address by Renee Battle-Brooks, an assistant state's attorney for Prince George's County, Maryland. The weekend concluded with a community expo that focused on attracting and educating members of the community of all ages.

The collaboration between the MSA departments of three conferences, our union conference, and the NAD provided more resources than we would ever have had alone. These resources allowed us to raise greater awareness and impact more lives than any one of us could have done alone. We also learned many invaluable lessons along the journey. Here are three:

Trafficking is not only horrific, but growing; it can be found everywhere. Corollary: trafficking can happen almost anywhere to almost anyone: on the job, in schools, neighborhoods, and churches. It can happen to both well-educated and poorly educated. It has become the third-fastest-growing illegal industry in the world. Conservative estimates of \$32 billion a year put trafficking just behind illegal drugs and weapons sales, and it is much more difficult to detect. Besides, though drugs may be sold and resold, trafficked humans are more likely to be resold many times over.

Trafficking doesn't always happen the way we think. While every dramatic thing portrayed in the movies about trafficking may well have happened, the most common ways people become shackled

are not by external chains, but by bondage already starting in their youth: low self-esteem, abuse (both physical and sexual), neglect, homelessness, naïveté.

Victims often walk into trafficking, not necessarily by force, but by understanding little of the type of life that awaits them. Groomers (traffickers) actively seek people who are vulnerable, and feed them what they want to hear. "I love you, baby." "I know you've been hurt, but I'll take care of you." "I'll help you get that job." "You're so beautiful."

Traffickers look for young people who are full of angst (what teenager isn't, at some point?), or for anyone down on their luck needing quick money. What victims get instead is a life filled with beatings and rape (and that usually happens even before they are prostituted!). They are often forced to service up to 40 people a day.

We Christians have to examine our true feelings (and corresponding actions) about redemption. Do we see redemption as a real thing? Whom do we deem "worthy"? Is God really capable of giving new hearts and new lives?

I ask because I've observed how people's passion for helping victims snatched off the street dramatically diminishes when they learn that a girl may have willingly given herself over to abuse. "Poor girl," they say at first. Then: "Just getting what you deserve, stupid!" They simply do not appreciate that her boyfriend (read: pimp) betrayed her. And besides, is grace only for some of sin's victims?

PRAY AND ACT

So I pray. I pray that our actions will prove our profession. I pray that we will educate ourselves, our children, our churches, and our communities about human sex trafficking. Prevention is always preferable to remediation.

I pray that we stay away from commercial sexual exploitation in all its forms (pornography included). Remember, there is no reason for supply unless there is demand.

Last, I pray that we not let fear overwhelm our faith. Whatever the Lord puts on our hearts to do, let's step out, try it, come together, and watch God move. 🙏

Ivona Bernard is director of the Central States Conference Ministerial Spouses Association.

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TELLING OUR CHILDREN ABOUT

SEX

Whose job is it?



ALLAN R. HANDYSIDES

Q: What should I tell my children about sex? When should I tell them, and how detailed should I get?

A: In most Western societies “sex education” is part of the school curriculum; in others, it is nonexistent. Many parents abdicate their responsibilities in this critical area of parenting. This leaves youngsters to learn from whispering, snickering companions at a much younger age than their parents may imagine.

While “telling” children may seem to be the most desirable method, we most powerfully “model” the spousal relationship. The respect and values with which we engage with our spouses send to our children a most powerful message. Children quickly learn the disdain communicated by the rolling of the eyes or the power struggle of controlling people locked in matrimony.

Sexuality, when expressed within the relationship of love, mutual support, nurture, and caring, rises to the level God intended. Adam, fresh from the hand of God, was alone and incomplete. He required a companion, designed emotionally and physically as a perfect complement. Eve was a person created to share his daily life, to engage with enthusiasm in the interests, challenges, and especially in the relationships they shared with God and His creation. In our marriages we must powerfully and adequately display for our children the essentials of mutual respect, kindness, gentleness, and caring—which are the foundation for a sexual relationship.

BEGIN EARLY

Children learn about “sex” from a very early age. Most parents start too late, with their information being confirmatory rather than new. I recommend the book *Human Sexuality: Sharing the Wonder of God’s Good Gift With Your Children*, by Ron and Karen Flowers.¹ This is a curriculum frame-

work on God’s good gift of sexuality. It outlines the ages at which awareness of sexuality becomes operative, thereby helping parents to gauge the level of understanding.

When children begin asking questions about sex, answer them simply and unambiguously. A 4-year-old’s question as to where babies come from

does not warrant a full lecture on anatomy, physiology, psychology, and morality. Our answers must convey to the child the acceptability of their question. We do this by answering without embarrassment, and by telling them to feel free to question further, should they feel a need. It is far better to have our children learn basic facts from us without the sometimes-crude embellishments other children add to them.

PROVIDE THE FRAMEWORK

Children need to understand that sex is a feature of the marital relationship. The existence of and method by which contraceptives work is an important part of our teaching, although, of course, at an appropriate age. For many this will be much earlier than perhaps anticipated.

In today's world many children are failing to flourish. This is because of a lack of meaningful connections with caring, responsible adults. The casualness of modern sexuality reaps a dreadful and increasing harvest of broken homes and deprived children. Hollywood—in its isolation of the physical aspects of sexuality from the necessary framework of supportive, emotional, and sustaining marital relationships—has dealt a critical wound to society in general.

A UNIQUE HUMAN BOND

As parents it is important to know and teach the uniqueness of the human sexual bond. Desmond Morris, a zoologist, described 12 uniquely human, sequential steps that contribute to human sexual bonding. Each step Morris describes, when fully explored, accepted, and integrated, contributes to the strength of the sexual relationship. Once a step is established and has involved the relevant biochemical and neurosensory receptors, it becomes a part of the lifelong repertoire. Missing a step weakens the bonding process and devalues the relationship. I recommend his book *Intimate Behaviour: A Zoologist's Classic Study of Human Intimacy*.²

One of the most important of Morris's 12 steps is communication, which needs to mature and become wide-ranging and prolonged if anything meaningful is to come of the recognition of a special person. Most relationships perish on the rocks of noncommunication.

Sexual bonding is far more complex than a


financial or convenient agreement. Sexual bonding is God's glue in marriage and is much more difficult to handle than regular glue!

MORE THAN JUST PHYSICAL

In today's world, where so many seek to make human sexuality merely a physical relationship, failed marriages abound. The mental, emotional, family, and spiritual dimensions cannot be ignored. Sexual intimacy prior to building a secure foundation will result in less than what is possible, desirable, or optimal.

To discover whether they are mature enough for the responsibility of a full sexual, marital relationship, young couples should ask these questions (among others): "Am I ready to make a lifelong commitment?" "Do my friend's values, beliefs, and worldview match my own?" "Are our life goals compatible?" "Do we agree on the roles of a man and a woman in a relationship?" "Are either of us locked into a distorted view that sees one of us serving the use of the other?" "Do we bring out the best in each other?" A negative answer to these questions at this stage should trigger a reevaluation of the friendship. It may be wise to back off and say, "You are a good friend, but we both deserve someone who can dream our dreams with us."

TAKE AMPLE TIME

Long dalliance in the "getting to know you" phase is the most important advice that young people can be given. When there is disagreement on spiritual matters and issues of faith, a marriage is destined for trouble. God's good gift of sexuality encompasses far more than mere sexual techniques. Provided there is a foundation of friendship that is unselfish, noncontrolling, and deeply respectful, there will be ample time and opportunity to grow sexually skillful. Many ignore these basic fundamentals in the headlong rush to a physical relationship. Marital harmony begins in the marriage of true minds, in the mental, spiritual, emotional, and aspirational world vision a couple share. 

¹ Ron and Karen Flowers, *Human Sexuality: Sharing the Wonder of God's Good Gift With Your Children* (Silver Spring, Md.: General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2004).

² Desmond Morris, *Intimate Behaviour: A Zoologist's Classic Study of Human Intimacy* (New York: Kodansha America, 1997).

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THE AGNOSTIC EPISCOPALIAN

As an aficionado of The Great Courses, produced by the Teaching Company, I've been lectured to, hour after hour, on history, philosophy, science, music, literature, and theology by some of North America's best professors. Whole new vistas of thought have been opened up to me, including—by enduring just a few Teaching Company courses on the Bible—why higher criticism is a sure path to hell (but that's another column).

One of my favorite series was by James Hall, who taught for 40 years at the University of Richmond, in Virginia. Early on in the course Hall confessed that, though raised in a devoutly Christian home, "I'm not there anymore." He was now, to quote him directly, "an agnostic Episcopalian."

His course was "The Philosophy of Religion," the religion being the monotheism of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. In 36 lectures he explored, not the philosophy of each faith, but the philosophical assumptions behind them. It was essentially a course on the arguments for or against the God of traditional monotheism.

At times I'd disagree with an assumption he made and the conclusion he extracted from it; or I'd agree with a conclusion but not the assumption behind it. Or, agreeing with an assumption, I didn't derive the conclusion from it that he did. Yet agreeing or disagreeing, I never detected any sophistry, casuistry, or sleight of hand in his logic, and the hours listening were well worth it, especially because of one lecture on theodicy.

Theodicy deals with the ever-present question that haunts traditional theists: if God is all-knowing, all-loving, and all-powerful, why evil, and so much of it,

too? Hall looked at various theodicies, and, after each one, explained why it didn't work. Without exception, I agreed: none that he described worked.

He then mentioned one more theodicy.

"No one," he stressed, "takes this seriously anymore," then in about 10 minutes Hall depicted what we call "the great controversy": free will, not only on earth, but in heaven; a fallen being, Lucifer; a conflict between good and evil being waged here that explains not only human but natural evil as well.

This theodicy, the professor claimed, worked. That is, it showed that the God of traditional theism could exist while evil did as well. If you could believe in the existence of demonic forces (which, he said, one could rationally derive from looking at the world), you had a theodicy that would, well, do the trick.

Hall was explicit: he didn't believe in this theodicy (or any, for that matter). But that's not my point. My point is that here was a self-professed skeptic even about God's existence. Yet he nevertheless affirmed that what we Seventh-day Adventists believe regarding the great controversy was the only theodicy that could explain the existence of an all-loving, all-knowing, and all-powerful God, the God of the Bible, and evil as well.

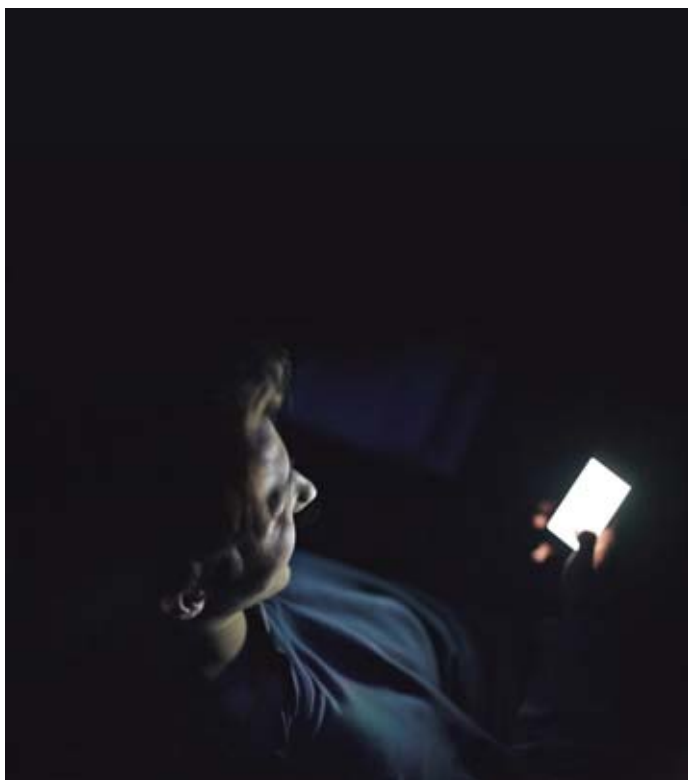
Hall's words don't prove our view correct. Of course not. But coming from an agnostic Episcopalian, I thought them fascinating and affirming, one of the many enlightening moments from The Great Courses. ♣

Clifford Goldstein is editor of the *Adult Sabbath School Bible Study Guide*. His latest book, *Baptizing the Devil: Evolution and the Seduction of Christianity*, is available from Pacific Press.

CLIFF'S
EDGE
CLIFFORD
GOLDSTEIN



IF GOD IS
ALL-KNOWING,
ALL-LOVING, AND
ALL-POWERFUL,
WHY EVIL, AND SO
MUCH OF IT, TOO?



CHANGING YOUR MIND

Pornography and the brain

“The eye is the lamp of the body. If your eyes are healthy, your whole body will be full of light. But if your eyes are unhealthy, your whole body will be full of darkness. If then the light within you is darkness, how great is that darkness!” (Matt. 6:22, 23).

**STANLEY STEVENSON
AND TIMOTHY JENNINGS**

The shaky voice on the other end of the phone line was that of a young woman who had been married only two months. She and her husband had met and dated in the traditional Adventist fashion, at college. They had gone through pre-marital counseling and had waited to consummate their relationship until after marriage.

But in the weeks and months after getting married, her husband had become more distant, critical of his bride’s body. “He says I’m too fat,” she whimpered. “We should still be having a lot of sex, but he’s not

interested in me anymore.”

The story came tumbling out about how within days of saying their vows he began staying up late at night in spite of her best efforts to invite him to bed. There were a few signs along the way when they were dating: he sometimes commented on women’s bodies and clothing, and occasionally he would say something suggestive in mixed company. She chalked them up to “boys will be boys,” nothing she considered “serious” enough to worry about. After all, he was class pastor and led out in various spiritual activities on campus. But now it seemed ruined. How had it all gone so terribly wrong?

A PROBLEM THAT KNOWS NO STRANGERS

Sadly, what this young woman described is not new or unique. The results of recent research of Christians across a broad denominational spectrum help us understand the power and scope that pornography has on the lives of Christians.

About a quarter of teenagers (26 percent) ages 13 to 17 view pornography at least once a week.

Seventy percent of Christian youth pastors have had at least one teen come to them for help in dealing with pornography in the past 12 months.

Twenty-one percent of youth pastors and 14 percent of pastors admit they currently struggle with pornography.

Sixty-four percent of self-identified Christian men and 15 percent of self-identified Christian women view pornography at least once a month (compared to 65 percent of non-Christian men

and 30 percent of non-Christian women).

Twenty-eight percent of Christian men and 11 percent of Christian women say they were first exposed to pornography before the age of 12 (compared to 23 percent of non-Christian men and 24 percent of non-Christian women).

Thirty-three percent of clergy say they have visited a sexually explicit Web site. Of those who have visited sexually explicit websites, 53 percent say they have visited the sites a few times in the past year, and 18 percent said they visited explicit Web sites between “a couple times a month” and “more than once a week.”¹

A PERVERSIVE PROBLEM

For anyone who has spent anytime searching the Internet, chances are you have “accidentally” misspelled a word or typed something innocuous and innocently ended up on a site you wished you hadn’t. The ever-increasing amount of freely available graphic sexual content always lurks in the background of smartphones, tablets, and computers, available to anyone looking for it, as well as to those who are unsuspecting.²

A chilling statement from the U.S. Department of Justice puts the problem into perspective: “Never before in the history of telecommunications media in the United States has so much indecent and obscene material been so easily accessible by so many minors in so many American homes with so few restrictions.”³ Not surprisingly, 70 percent of 15- to 17-year-old Internet users “accidentally” view pornography “very” or “somewhat” often.⁴ With young children being exposed to hardcore pornography at alarming rates, nearly 20 states have declared pornography a public health crisis.⁵

So what does this mean for people in the church? A whole generation of Christian young people is at risk of regularly being exposed to inappropriate sexual material through explicit social media and virtual erotic experiences that normalize deviant sexuality. What effect does exposure to pornography have on the mind and real-life relationships, and how does one break free from its grip?

BRAIN DESIGN

The brain is where we experience life: positive thrills of intimacy, pleasure, love, and satisfaction; or negative feelings, bad habits, destructive compulsions, and addictions.⁶ The brain is designed by God

Not surprisingly, 70 percent of 15 to 17-year-old internet users “accidentally” view pornography “very” or “somewhat” often.

to change based on our experiences and choices. One of God’s design laws—the law of exertion—states that for something to get stronger, we must exercise it. If we want strong musical ability we must practice our instruments; for strong math skills, we must work to solve problems. If we want to be strong in Christlike character, we must love other people. Why? Because if we don’t use it, we lose it.

When we choose what we watch, read, worship, or think about, we determine which brain circuits become active. This activity stimulates the brain to create new components (neurons) and establish new interconnections in the brain that make those networks expand and grow larger. Conversely, if we stop firing those circuits, then over time the brain prunes those components back.

A plethora of scientific studies documents how consuming pornographic material changes brain structure and function. For example, research has documented that the connections between the higher-functioning frontal cortex and other brain regions are diminished in those who watch pornography, indicating that loss of self-governance, reason-based decision-making and other-centered decisions is likely a result of viewing porn.⁷ As the brain changes, viewers of pornography come to believe the material is not as bad as it is made out to be. Subtle shifts in thinking and behaving occur until the mind is transformed so that the substitute nonreality becomes real.

DESIGNED FOR PLEASURE

God designed us to experience pleasure. But in His design we are to experience pleasure as a *result* of living in harmony with His design for life, not as an end in itself. When we choose activities in harmony with God’s intentions, the higher cortex acti-

vates our brain's lower pleasure circuits. There is pleasure in a love relationship as God designed, there is pleasure in discovery, there is pleasure in accomplishment, there is pleasure in helping one another.

Counterfeit pleasure, on the other hand, involves direct activation of pleasure circuits. Pornography is a prime example of this short-circuiting of God's design for human pleasure. Direct pleasure seeking is a characteristic of all addictions and damages the brain's pleasure circuits, ultimately destroying the true ability to experience pleasure.

DESIGNED FOR REAL LOVE AND RELATIONSHIPS

Establishing a love relationship means that prior to sexual consummation, time is spent getting to know the other person, seeking to understand and

healthy relationships strengthen the brain.

In pornography, people are not experienced as real people whom we get to know, value, and appreciate, and for whom we are concerned. Pornography turns people into objects for self-gratification. This shuts down the higher-functioning cortex and activates the lower brain circuits—the pleasure and arousal circuits—dulling concern for the person being viewed. In this way, porn increases selfishness, diminishes the capacity for altruism, and leads to treating other people as objects of pleasure rather than as brothers and sisters in Christ.

As God designed it, sexual intimacy is the culmination of a love relationship. However, prolonged consumption of pornography hijacks our thinking and distorts the design principles we were created

Your Brain on Porn

Pornography hijacks the brain's pleasure chemicals, increasing:

- » Norepinephrine and Dopamine, which increases a sense of energy, focus, muscle tension, heart rate, blood pressure, breathing rate, and sense of excitement, pleasure, fun, enjoyment, as cocaine and methamphetamines do.
- » Endorphins, which are brain produced, opioid-like chemicals that cause a sense of euphoria or high, eliminate pain, and dilate blood vessels, which is what heroin does.
- » Serotonin and gamma-aminobutyric acid (GABA), which causes a sense of calm, relaxation, warm fuzzy feeling, as marijuana does.

Porn becomes an addiction, and, like chemical addictions, damages pleasure circuits. This not only diminishes the ability to experience pleasure from normal healthy relationships, but requires the pornography to become more graphic, intense, and debased in order to experience the sought-after reward.

A. Cotiga, S. Dumitrache, "Men's Sexual Life and Repeated Exposure to Pornography. A New Issue?" *Journal of Experiential Psychotherapy* 18, no. 4 (December 2015): 72.

value them, and anticipating their concerns. This creates compassion, understanding, empathy, and, ultimately, selfless love for and commitment to the other person. Within the brain these experiences activate the higher cortex, where we reason, anticipate, comprehend, and love others. Thus,

Three-Second Rule

When watching TV, walking through the mall, or driving past billboards, temptation can strike when least expected. Many therapists recommend using the Three-Second Rule, which involves three steps: Alert, Avert, and Affirm.

ALERT: Realize that you see something inappropriate. It may only take a split-second to recognize a tempting situation.

AVERT: Close your eyes or look away. These first two steps should be instantaneous.

AFFIRM: Give yourself a mental high-five to congratulate the effort. Say to yourself, "I saw that by mistake, and I quickly looked away. I've been clean for (enter number of days), and I'm going to stay that way."

Sam Black, CovenantEyes.com, © 2017, all rights reserved.

to live by. Viewing pornography leads to a weakened attraction to marriage, family, and child rearing. Trust is eroded between marriage partners. Cynicism about love emerges, and the belief that marriage is sexually confining becomes normalized.⁸

The young husband who found his wife unat-

tractive had unwittingly allowed his brain to become rewired so that he could feel rewarded only by looking at pornography. What he didn't know was that by looking at this material his brain was reducing his wife to the status of an inferior sexual object.

CHANGE YOUR MIND

We've seen how habitually viewing pornography results in destructive short-circuiting of the brain, causing the mind to function outside of God's design for pleasure and a healthy, intimate relationship. The good news is that healing can happen.

With positive habits, new networks of healthy brain function can be developed, diminishing the mind's existing harmful pathways. There are no shortcuts or easy fixes, but the process of change can create hope and positive desires, new competence and stronger willpower. Each person's path to recovery will be unique, but here are some ideas for anyone beginning the journey of "changing your mind."

First, individuals who struggle with pornography must acknowledge that they have a problem and that they are powerless to change that on their own. This is the beginning step for addressing all the critical issues we face in our human, sinful condition. Pornography is a type of enslavement, and each one under its power needs help to break free.

We can never overcome sin alone, in our own strength. Many know this but haven't experienced the victory possible when partnering with the true power that lies outside oneself. Here is the simple reality: the choice is ours, the power is God's. The Holy Spirit is the Spirit of truth, who brings truth to our minds in ways we are able to comprehend and brings conviction so that we know the right action to take.

Then the Holy Spirit leaves us completely free to choose the truth or reject it. Accepting the truth of pornography's destructiveness, and making healthy choices in harmony with God's design—again and again—is the path to victory.

That leads us to an important second strategy: don't go it alone; others can help. Trusted friends and family members, as well as professional helpers, can be enlisted as part of a support team. Though you may be embarrassed to discuss the situation with another person, in the long run having people who care about you and your recovery can make you feel less alone.

Third, plan ahead. Create a strategy for complete

abstinence from pornography. Healthy choice means saying no to the porn, but also to all the triggers, friends, places, and habits that lead right back to the porn. Clean digital devices that can view porn, put on Internet filters,⁹ get an accountability partner, join a 12-step group, see a professional counselor, and avoid television programming with any sexual references.

Finally, replace the pornography habit with good things. Exercise; find a new hobby; fill your mind with healthy, uplifting, material and your brain will heal. Seek to see other people as real people, choose to consider their struggles, their heartaches, their needs; consider how you can help others. Such choices activate the brain's higher cortex, which strengthens the mature circuits, while simultaneously elevating how we see people—as members of God's family.

The Bible speaks of the hope for a "changed mind." Make every thought "obedient to Christ" (2 Cor. 10:5); "be transformed by the renewing of your mind" (Rom. 12:2); nourish God's delight for truth in your innermost being (Ps. 51:6); these are a few of the many reminders in Scripture of our heavenly Father's commitment to bringing freedom to our minds through His truth and love. That includes freedom from pornography's devastation. Today can be the start of a new life—the day you decide to change your mind. 🍀

¹ Barna Group, *The Porn Phenomenon* (2015), www.barna.com/the-porn-phenomenon/.

² XBIZ Research, *The 2012 XBIZ Research Report: Attitudes, Views, and Trends Impacting the Adult Entertainment Industry*, p. 33.

³ U.S. Department of Justice, "Post-Hearing Memorandum of Points and Authorities," at I, *ACLU v. Reno*, 929 F. Supp. 824, 1996.

⁴ PEW Research Center, "Internet Pornography Is Harmful," July 21, 2007, www.pewresearch.org/daily-number/say-internet-pornography-is-harmful/.

⁵ J. Gottesman, "PA House Poised to Declare Pornography a Public Health Crisis," Nov. 21, 2017, retrieved from www.cityandstatepa.com/.

⁶ J. Reisman, J. Sanitover, M. Layden, and J. Weaver, "Hearing on the Brain Science Behind Pornography Addiction and the Effects of Addiction on Families and Communities," hearing to U.S. Senate Committee on Commerce, Science, and Transportation, Nov. 18, 2004.

⁷ S. Kühn, J. Gallinat, "Brain Structure and Functional Connectivity Associated with Pornography Consumption: The Brain on Porn," *Journal of American Medical Association Psychiatry* 71, no.7 (2014): 827-834.

⁸ Dolf Zillmann, "Influence of Unrestrained Access to Erotica on Adolescents' and Young Adults' Dispositions Toward Sexuality," *Journal of Adolescent Health* 27 (August 2000): 41-44.

⁹ www.covenanteyes.com/pornguard.org.

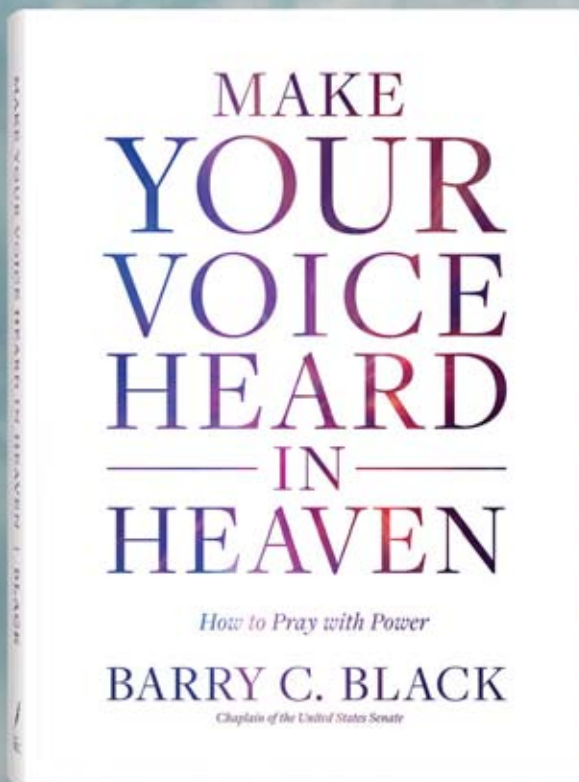
Stanley Stevenson, M.S.W., is an adjunct instructor and life coach at the Tulane University School of Continuing Studies. **Timothy R. Jennings, M.D.**, is past president of the Tennessee and Southern Psychiatric Association.

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CONNECT

A LOVE SONG FOR THE AGES

If we only knew how the Bible talks about love!

Song of Solomon, often referred to as the Song of Songs, is a poetic love song, celebrating marriage and sexuality. For us, as newlyweds, married for only a few months, the meaning of the Song has taken a new turn. And it has insight for singles, too.

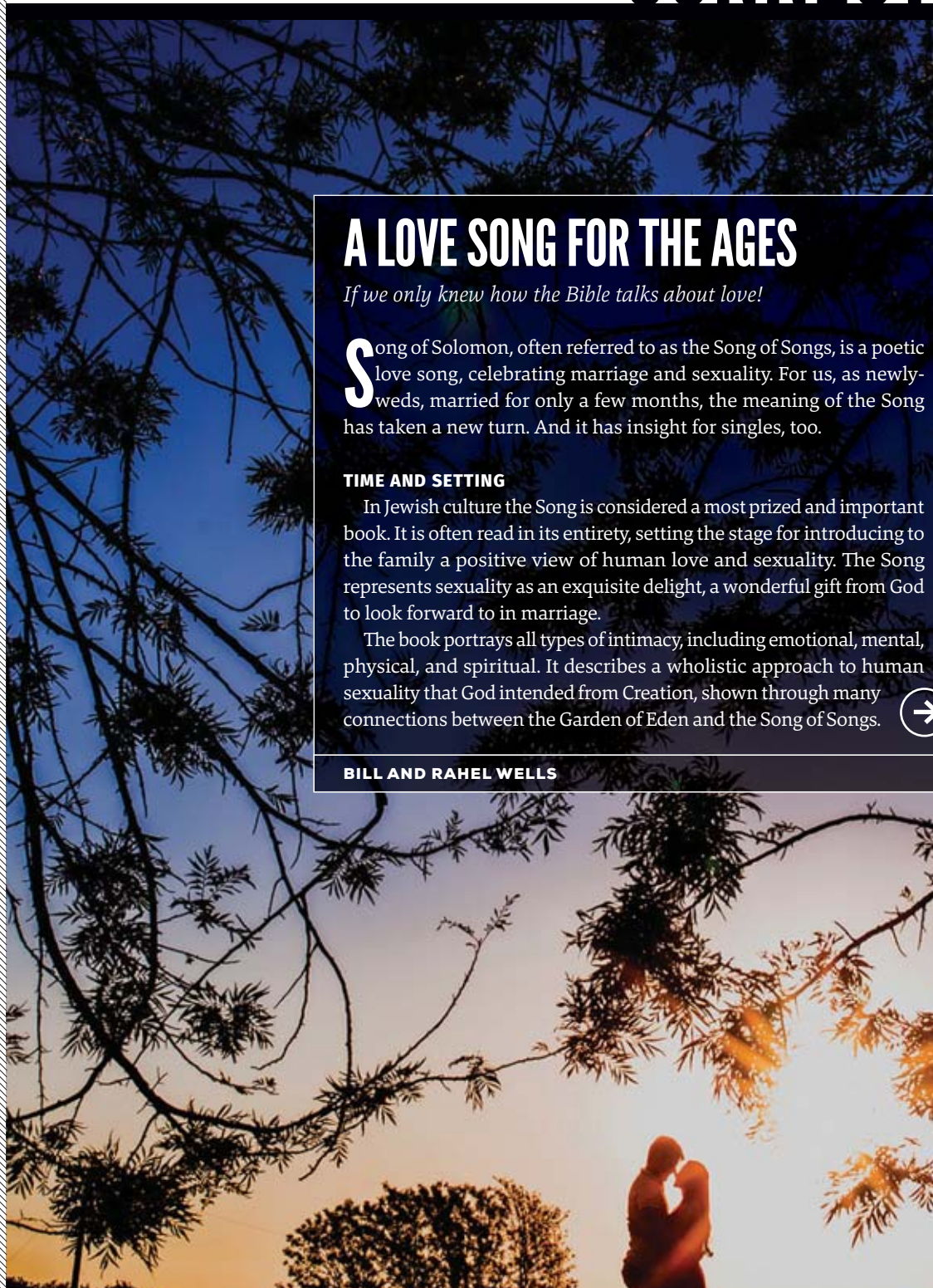
TIME AND SETTING

In Jewish culture the Song is considered a most prized and important book. It is often read in its entirety, setting the stage for introducing to the family a positive view of human love and sexuality. The Song represents sexuality as an exquisite delight, a wonderful gift from God to look forward to in marriage.

The book portrays all types of intimacy, including emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual. It describes a wholistic approach to human sexuality that God intended from Creation, shown through many connections between the Garden of Eden and the Song of Songs.



BILL AND RAHEL WELLS



Contrary to many opinions, the book is not allegorical or symbolic, but a real song written early in Solomon's marital life. The letter reflects actual history as recorded in 1 Kings 3:1 to 9:1. King Solomon married Pharaoh's daughter and lived a monogamous life for some 20 years. The word for "queen" (Song of Sol. 6:9) is used only for non-Israelite queens, so highlights that Solomon's bride is his only one, in contrast to the many in the other nations.¹

Who is this daughter? Textual evidence shows possible connections to Abishag, the Shunamite woman who cared for King David in his last days, and/or Pharaoh Siamun's daughter, born on one of his expeditions to northern Palestine.² Shulamit, her name in the Song, means "Mrs. Solomon," but is also the Egyptian spelling for Shunamite. The mention of royal chariots (verse 12), along with the Song's mirroring of Egyptian love poetry from the time of Solomon, indicate further corroborations to the historical claims of the book. The luxurious and floral settings, connections to Ecclesiastes, the mention of Solomon as "the king," and its relationship with the proverbs of Solomon also reinforce this.

The book describes the progress from their courtship to engagement and finally to their wedding night, as well as the maturation of their marriage. The outline of the book can be summarized as follows:³

- Mutual love (courtship), 1:2–2:7
- Betrothal and dream of being lost and found, 2:8–3:5
- Wedding procession and service, 3:6–4:7
- Wedding night, 4:8–5:1
- Marital conflict, resolution, and dream of being found and lost, 5:2–6:10
- Maturation of marriage, 6:11–8:4
- Mutual love (mature reflections on love's meaning), 8:5–14

While many have been uncomfortable with the literal descriptions of the sexual relationship in Song of Songs, preferring to see an allegorical interpretation, the Song clearly focuses on celebrating and delighting in human sexual love in marriage. Song of Songs highlights several aspects of sexuality often neglected in the church today.

ORIGINATION

The anchor text is: "Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is as strong

as death, jealousy is fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, the very flame of the Lord" (Song of Sol. 8:6).⁴ God is the originator of love. He created the flame that grew between this young couple. He is the one who creates and re-creates the flame of love between spouses today. This creation and maintenance of God's flame of love is something we pray for in our marriage.

Satan has many pitfalls to destroy our ability to love. We may have been the recipient of many experiences and fears that can threaten to dampen our love for another. But God's flame of love is more than sufficient to counteract these deceptions. When we experience the flame of the Lord's love, we not only deepen our love for each other, but also understand more fully the love God has for each of us.


In the center of the book, God urges the lovers, "Eat, O friends! Drink, yes, drink deeply, O beloved ones!" (Song of Sol. 5:1, NKJV). This divine blessing gives the crucial message of God's centrality and rejoicing in marriage, intimate unification, and the sexual relationship. God officiated at the first wedding in Eden, and He continues to bless and delight in marriage.

AFFIRMATION

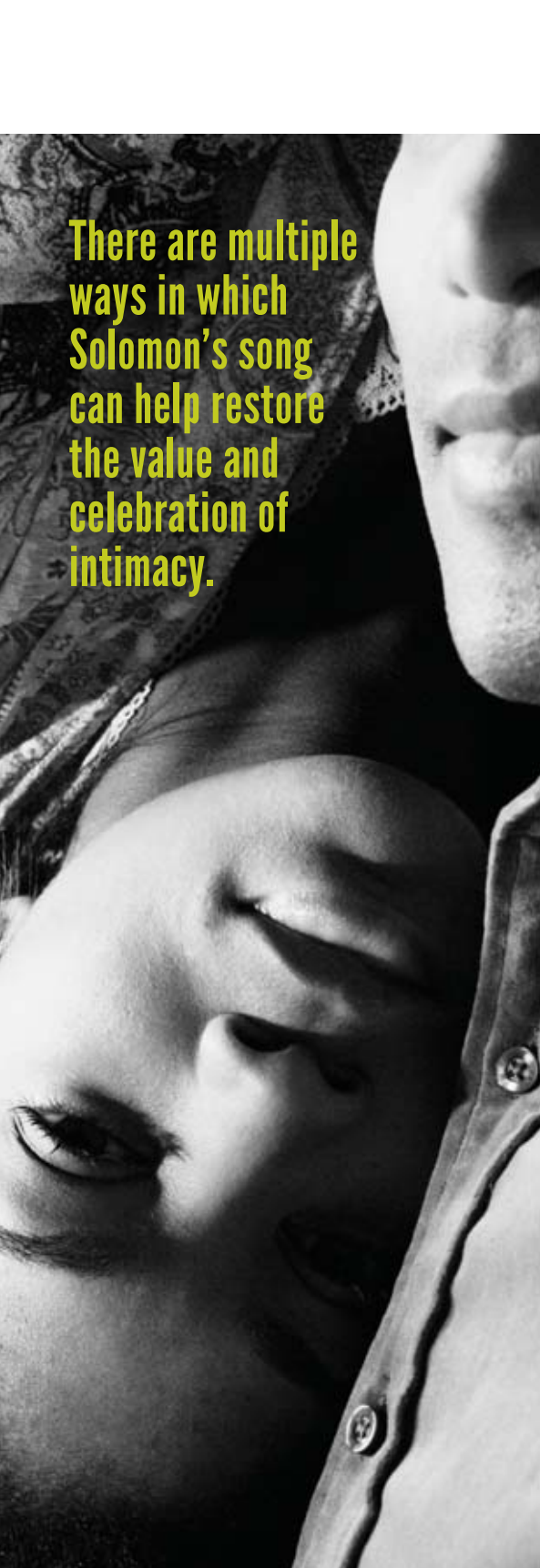
Song of Solomon praises the relational process from beginning to end. The song follows aspects of a *wasf* (an Arabic term used for describing the other with extravagant praise), highlighting the praises of the charms of the lover, using literal as well as metaphorical terms.

The groom is praised twice (Song of Sol. 3:6–11; 5:9–6:3) and the bride is praised four times (Song of Sol. 4:1–7, 8–15; 6:4–10; 6:11–7:10). The song also provides a healthy way of looking at the growth and development of intimacy. Upon engagement, the couple recognize their commitment to each other ("My beloved is mine and I am his" [Song of Sol. 2:16]) and desire sexual union even more. As the wedding night approaches and passes, the height of sexual expression is given. Solomon praises his wife's body, and she praises his.

Affirmation, intimacy, and relationship are themes that run all through the book. God intended for us to praise the wonders and beauty of our spouses. In the midst of their wedding night God blesses the couple, calling upon them to enjoy



God officiated at the first wedding in Eden, and He reminds us in Song of Songs that He continues to bless and delight in holy matrimony ever since.



There are multiple ways in which Solomon's song can help restore the value and celebration of intimacy.

their intimate union (Song of Sol. 5:1). While sex is necessary for procreation, the focus is on the exquisite delight and joy of sexual intimacy within the confines of a biblical model of heterosexual marriage.

VULNERABILITY

Sex is celebrated in the Song, and part of that celebration surrounds a sense of vulnerability. Vulnerability is important in all relationships, especially marital ones. The expression of needs, desires, and boundaries are all important for the healthy growth and development of both marriage and relationships. As Solomon and Shulamit grow in their relationship (Song of Sol. 1:2–2:7), they express intimacy and desire while keeping healthy boundaries for the expression of such intimacy.

Later in the book their desires are fully consummated, and boundaries no longer include sexual restraint. However, boundaries and expression of needs are still important, as the bride emphasizes that the groom's desire is for her (Song of Sol. 7:11). She also shares her needs and desires as she initiates sexual intimacy and searches for him during times of stress. The benefits of mutually expressed desires and vulnerability include respect, building each other up, and submission to the other with joy.

Mutual vulnerability is one aspect of the Song of Songs' portrayal of equality between the husband and wife. Hierarchy does not exist in the marriage relationship. Both are open and accessible, both are agents and initiators, both are employed and served. The Song includes a significant reversal of the curse of Genesis 3: the rare Hebrew word for *desire* is used for the man's desire for his wife (Song of Sol. 7:11), complementing the wife's desire for her husband in Genesis 3:16.⁵ The wife talks more than her husband, but she also initiates intimacy more often, reflecting interesting similarities to, as well as differences from, modern views of gender and marriage relationships.

CELEBRATION

Modern society's aggressive degradation of pure sexual intimacy advances via secular media, hook-up culture, and acts of harassment and abuse. But there are multiple ways in which Solomon's song can help restore the value and celebration of intimacy that Satan and society seek

to destroy. Through the entire book the sexual unification that the couple look forward to, then experience in marriage, is reason for great joy. This biblical celebration of sex radically contrasts with the typical avoidance within the church of discussion surrounding it. Sex is sacred. Sex is powerful. Sex is unifying. Sex is a joyous gift of selflessness for the benefit and joy of the other, as well as a joyous gift from both lovers to be mutually shared.

While societies and even religions denigrate the value and meaning of sex, God encourages His people to live in a way that affirms its thrill and restores its beauty. As a celebration, sex and intimacy galvanize the family into a unit that can reflect the character of God to the world. Celebrating intimacy in every pure and beautiful way conceivable empowers us to draw others to God through their admiration of the gift of love we express between spouses and in the family. As Solomon summarizes toward the end of the book, love and intimacy reflect the very flame of Yahweh Himself (Song of Sol. 8:6). God, the originator of that flame, will keep it burning in our soul if we ask Him, and this is all the more reason to celebrate!

FANNING THE FLAME

So, what if you're single? Do you wonder, *What does this book have to do with me?* We see three reasons the message of this book is valuable.


First, purity is always God's desire for you. If you are interested in marriage, preserving yourself for a God-ignited love with someone is of utmost importance. If you have been abused and assaulted, made mistakes, or thrown away God's gift, His forgiveness and healing can restore what has been damaged through sin.

Second, if you are in a relationship, seek to express intimacy on all levels (emotional, mental, physical, and spiritual), for that is how healthy relationships grow. In your courtship, keep healthy boundaries so as to protect God's gift of sex until your wedding.

Third, personal commitment to God always enhances anyone's future. If that future includes marriage, your commitment is already enhancing your future marital union. Intimacy is enhanced when experienced within the true freedom of commitment. As you live your life in preservation of God's gift, you can look forward to the joyful celebration of intimacy in the marriage circle. The purity of Christian couples can be a blessing to all

single friends. Your preservation can be a means to share the love of God to friends who may have experienced great pain because of misappropriated intimacy. God is the ultimate lover of each person; He is your sufficiency as you delight ourselves in intimacy with Him.

As newlyweds, reading the Song of Songs has enriched our marriage as well as our walk with God. Sex originates with God, and His flame of love ignites love between husband and wife, impacting every aspect of life. Intimacy grows and shines with affirmation of each other, and total vulnerability. Rather than being limited to procreation, or even a taboo subject, sex is to be celebrated, expressed in all its power between husband and wife. From the joy of each other's presence to the passion of engagement and wonders of exploring the other in marriage, the Song of Songs paints the glorious picture of what God designed sex and intimacy to be.

To be "one flesh" also typologically points to the union God has within Himself, and the love He longs to have with His children. The closer and more precious the sexual intimacy between husband and wife, the deeper insights each will have into their Savior's love, as the human flame of love gives glimpses of the heavenly Flame of love! 

¹ In addition, Solomon uses the phrase "there are..." rather than "I have..." likely referring to other women who do not belong to him in any way. He also calls Shulamit his "only one" in 6:9. For further support see G. Lloyd Carr, *The Song of Solomon* (Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries 17; Downers Grove, Ill.: Intervarsity, 1984), 148; Erick Mendieta, "Solomon on Monogamy: Is Song 6:8-9 Really Speaking About Solomon's Harem?" (paper presented at the annual meeting of Andrews University's Celebration of Research; Berrien Springs, Mich., 8 November 2012).

² Siamun was pharaoh during Solomon's reign, and had many connections with Palestine. For instance, he gave the city of Gezer to his daughter as a dowry (1 Kings 9:16), and built for himself a temple to a Canaanite goddess in Egypt. In addition, any illegitimate child of a pharaoh would still be called his daughter, and this could explain why Shulamit's father is never mentioned in the Song of Songs, only her mother. For further explanation, and many other reasons that this hypothesis is likely, see Richard M. Davidson, "Song of Songs," *Andrews Bible Commentary* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University Press, forthcoming).

³ Richard M. Davidson, "The Literary Structure of the Song of Songs *Redivivus*," *Journal of the Adventist Theological Society* 14 (2003): 44-65.

⁴ Scripture quotation from ESV, *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁵ For further discussion, see Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson, 2007), pp. 545-632.

Bill and Rahel Wells were married in 2017. Bill is a recent seminary graduate. Rahel is an assistant professor of biblical studies at Andrews University.



MARRIAGE WORKS

*Putting the “fun”
back in “functionality”*

WILLIE AND ELAINE OLIVER

Marriage is at once awesome, wonderful, and difficult. Awesome and wonderful because it was designed by the Creator for us to reflect His image.¹ Difficult because it brings a flawed man and woman together into the most intimate and lengthy relation existing on earth between humans. Moreover, these two selfish and otherwise imperfect human beings sometimes seem to grow more flawed and selfish as the marriage goes along. No wonder

“dysfunctional marriage” sometimes seems like the trending phrase of the day or year.

WHAT DO YOU MEAN: DYSFUNCTIONAL?

The word “dysfunctional,” used in regard to relationships, refers to a breakdown of that which is normal. In marriage, to be sure, it is normal for two imperfect human beings to disagree, especially in a relationship as intimate as marriage. Hence, every marriage has the potential to become dysfunctional if couples don’t take care of inevitable challenges that will arise in their relationships.

But how does one know if one’s marriage has reached the point of being dysfunctional, or is just going through inevitable challenges that are a part of married life? Too often couples ignore problems by focusing more on the immediate event that has emerged, rather than really thinking through the actual issues facing them. Sadly, too many couples wait too long to think things through together. Their resentment for each other becomes so deep that they stop operating as a team and resort to living as separate individuals.

This is the point at which the relationship becomes dysfunctional. There are, of course, multiple factors that contribute to a relationship becoming dysfunctional, including abuse, addictions, abandonment, and psychological disorders such as depression, anxiety, and clinically assessed personality disorders. Nevertheless, many marriages experience dysfunction because couples have stopped communicating with

each other, and are either unwilling or unaware of how to manage their differences with genuine love and respect. They yell and scream at each other rather than finding helpful solutions together that can assist their marriage to become more functional. Subsequently, as a quick solution (they think), they head to the divorce attorney, claiming irreconcilable differences.

FORESTALLING DYSFUNCTION

Successful couples learn over time to diminish destructive or negative patterns in their relationship. Each partner focuses on what they can do to be a better spouse and looks for their partner's positive attributes.

We regularly invite premarital couples to (1) list 12 reasons they love and want to marry the other person; (2) keep their lists in a safe place; and (3) pull them out when times get difficult, as a reminder of what it is they loved about each other. Usually those reasons still exist, but lie buried under the rubble of daily living.

So the good news is that dysfunction can be repaired. Frustration, contempt, and isolation do not have to lead to divorce: people can choose to fight for their marriage. But it requires couples to begin to see their marriage in a different light. They need a new way of thinking about their marriage and their spouse. There is no perfect marriage, because there are no perfect people. Yet couples can grow in their experience of the oneness God intended for marriage, and restore their relationship to what they dreamed about on their wedding day.

FUNCTIONAL BEHAVIORS: SIX

Here are six functional behaviors for getting a marriage back on track. Introducing at least one of them will likely bring prompt improvement in a marital relationship:

1 Drop the “dysfunction” label: your brain is wired to believe what you tell it. Insisting that your marriage is dysfunctional will bring you to believe it. Here's a question to pose to yourself: “Do I have a good marriage with some dysfunctional times, or do I have a lousy marriage with a few good times?” It's the proverbial half-full or half-empty glass. Couples who are willing to find the good in their marriage and in their mate will

It isn't so much that they married the wrong person as that each one just stopped being the right person.

more easily resolve conflict, and have a more satisfying marriage. So start telling yourself that you have a great marriage: you and your spouse will begin to believe it. Any marriage can be turned around if the couple believes in it and is willing to save it and make it grow stronger. Jesus was right when He declared, “Everything is possible for one who believes” (Mark 9:23).

2 Pray like crazy for your marriage and your mate: God, the Creator, invented marriage. Therefore, it is both wise and absolutely essential to keep Him at the center of your marriage. We don't mean just paying lip service to this, but establishing and maintaining a meaningful relationship with God and constantly acknowledging His presence as individuals and also as a couple. Ask God to heal your marriage, and then expect a miracle. God is able to do “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine, according to his power that is at work within us” (Eph. 3:20). And here's another question: If you believe God is always present, would you say all the things you say to each other? Wouldn't you want to impress Him with how kind, patient, loving, and forgiving you are? Given our daily appeals to God to forgive our sins and favor us with His grace and mercy, how can we do less for our mate? Don't we want the same healing for our mate as we want for ourselves (2 Chron. 7:14)?

3 Learn and practice effective communication skills: however obvious this may seem, it is neither instinctive nor easy. Most of us have been developing, from birth, faulty or erroneous methods of communication. We bring our communication patterns—good and bad—right into

Forgiving someone who has harmed us is the hardest part of loving.

marriage. But even the good patterns that work with family and friends may not work in our marriage, with our spouse. Therefore, each partner needs to be willing to adjust their relational and communication styles in ways that can enhance the marital relationship. Disagreements happen in marriage mostly because couples are talking over each other, and neither partner has stopped to listen to the needs, wants, and hurts of their mate. Many marriage issues can be resolved by patient listening and commitment to understand each other. As James 1:19 counsels: “Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”

4 Find out what your spouse likes and keep doing it. And find out what your spouse doesn't like and quit doing it! Prior to marriage, couples take great pride in being their best selves—the best boyfriend or the best girlfriend. They pull out all the stops to find out what the other person likes, and shower them with their heart's desires. But after a year or so of marriage the special treatment fades away, each begins to feel taken for granted, and people begin to fear that they've married the wrong person. It isn't so much that they married the wrong person as that each one just stopped being the right person. To make matters worse, they begin to do the very things their spouse dislikes. The golden rule would go a long way toward turning these marriages from fading to flourishing: “Do to others what you would have them do to you” (Matt. 7:12).

5 Forgive often: marriage, life's most intimate relationship, may involve hurt sometimes—intentional or not.² Learning to forgive each other is learning to live together. Sometimes the

hurt is careless. But sometimes it is nasty retaliation for pain they may be experiencing that has left deep and lasting scars. Sometimes we can ignore an injury. But sometimes we neither can nor should. Forgiving someone who has harmed us is the hardest part of loving. But we cannot continue to truly love without it. Forgiveness is much stronger than always being trampled, absolving the guilty, or simply forgetting. Forgiving begins my healing from another's hurts and from the need to punish them. It also pushes us toward new and deeper union as God's power moves the guilty one to repentance through knowing I have forgiven them and they are able to forgive themselves: God's love wins us over because we come to appreciate that even as we are causing Him pain, He is extending pardon to us (see Rom. 5:8).

6 Laugh a lot: laughter abounds in physiological and neurological benefits: it reduces stress and blood pressure; stimulates the immune system; bonds couples together, and keeps the relationship fresh as they find things to laugh about and stop stressing about the small stuff. “A cheerful heart is good medicine” (Prov. 17:22).

FUNCTIONAL MARRIAGES

Functional marriages involve married couples willing to confront life's relational challenges and work together as teammates and allies. Together, couples must fight the enemy that threatens to destroy their oneness with each other and God. All humans struggle. Becoming united in marriage sometimes seems to augment that struggle after the honeymoon. But all marriages can experience ever greater joy and ever deeper love through the power and saving grace of Jesus: “We love because he first loved us” (1 John 4:19). 🌱

¹ For documentation on the blissful origins of marriage, see Genesis 2:18-25.

² We are not talking about physical pain and abuse. If you are experiencing any type of physical or emotional abuse in your relationship, please seek help from a qualified counselor or pastor. Without help, the abuse will most likely get worse. For more information, visit www.family.adventist.org; www.enditnow.org.

Willie and Elaine Oliver are the husband-and-wife team that directs the Department of Family Ministries at the world headquarters of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Reach them at family.adventist.org.

MENDED

First I blamed the stairs. Then I blamed the people around me for being in a hurry. Finally I had to admit that I simply wasn't paying attention.

Early morning, on a visit abroad for research and speaking engagements, I walk up the steps of the Exeter College library. On the last step the heel of my shoe catches the hem of my slacks, and I hear a ripping sound. Without the luxury to stop and assess the damage, I wait until I reach the library. The ripped hemline is too obvious.

That afternoon I walk into a small shop with a sign: "Mended." There are walls of spooled thread, fabric of every color and texture imaginable! I am greeted by Ana, the owner of the shop. She inspects the garment and says: "Your shoe only ripped the inside lining. Easy fix. Nobody will notice. Come back in the morning."

That evening I look out the window of the university guest room and see the sign: "Mended." As I take in the lovely scenery I feel a bit homesick.

I am weary of the presentation, a room full of professors, and peers that will question years of research. As soon as this fear begins to surface, I hear the soft wind from outside whistling against the glass windows of the room.

Far away from home, preparing for a presentation, I am overwhelmed with gratitude and humbled that my heavenly Father has brought me this far. *What else am I meant to learn here, God?*

In the morning I return to "Mended." I look closely at the stitching. *No evidence*

of damage at all! Ana blushes at the compliments.

She has owned the shop for 25 years, a family business she is keeping alive. In her small office I see pictures of her family, older generations, working in this same shop, details of how the shop grew over the years evident. Ana points at a picture of a young woman, sitting next to a sewing machine. It is her great-great-grandmother Elizabeth, the first to own the shop.

As I listen to the story it becomes apparent that with the legacy of Elizabeth's work came endless challenges *through the work*. Before the seamless mending, there were frayed edges.

Months after the shop opened, Elizabeth's husband died in an accident. Her 5-year-old son died of an unknown fever. Her eldest daughter died during childbirth, and the baby did not survive. Still, Elizabeth's faith kept her family strong. She would spend days sewing, always praying for one thing: "Mend me, dear God."

"When I took over the shop, I named it," says Ana, pointing to the sign at the door: *Mended* (as if the past tense speaks of an answered prayer for Elizabeth, for Ana, for me). "We are all a little bit torn, scared, frayed at the edges. God knows the need for a little reinforcement at the seams. He mends our lives. Gives us strength. We just have to pay attention to where He's leading us."

A day later I stand at the lectern and look out to the crowd, paying attention to where God has led me. *"Guide my words, heavenly Father, that the frayed edges do not distract anyone. Mend me, dear God."* 🌟

Dixil Rodríguez, a university professor and volunteer hospital chaplain, lives in Texas.



"WE'RE ALL A
LITTLE BIT TORN,
SCARED, FRAYED
AT THE EDGES."

ROMANS 1: WHAT DOES IT TEACH ABOUT HOMOSEXUALITY?

BY EKKEHARDT MUELLER

How fair would it be for God to make me this way and punish me for being what He made me to be?

FRAMING THE QUESTION

This question is specifically debated in our time in the context of discussions about homosexuality. While some interpreters find in Romans 1 a clear condemnation of all forms of same-sex sexual activity, others find no such condemnation in the passage. For them Paul “condemns perversion of what comes naturally.”¹ In this understanding those who self-identify as homosexual by nature, born that way, should not practice heterosexuality. And it would be equally improper for heterosexuals to practice homosexuality. According to this view, Paul’s insistence is that individuals live the way indicated from birth that they are meant to live.

Both of these groups are agreed that the passage is condemnatory, whether it be by the broadest condemnation of a



homosexual lifestyle or by the more limited rebuke of sexual practice that is contrary to a person's natural sexual orientation at birth. Violent or exploitative sexual behavior is also here condemned. The issue is not whether the passage is denunciatory, but rather what is being denounced.

WHAT WE KNOW

"Constitutional homosexuality," homosexuality understood as part of someone's original and permanent makeup, is sometimes held to be a phenomenon too modern for Paul to have been aware of. Paul would not have known of permanent, loving relationships with one partner of the same sex. Therefore he could not be expected to speak to a question he knew nothing about. Thus, finding a critique of such a reality in Romans 1 would be, at best, an anachronistic interpretation of the passage.

However, this argument does not find support in a review of Paul's world, and adopts an unrealistic view of Paul, the worldly-wise intellectual.² Paul's familiarity with Greek scholarship, and his freedom in citing Greek authors (Acts 17:28; Titus 1:12), make it fairly untenable to hold that he knew nothing of Plato's androgynous myth. The myth theorizes that at an earlier stage the human was dual, with "four hands, four feet, two faces, and two privy parts, that is, like two people back to back..." Some of these dual, primal creatures were male in both parts, others were female in both parts, and yet others (a third sex) part male and part female.³

According to the myth, insolence led these primal creatures to attack the gods, until Zeus took action and "divided these dual four-legged creatures into two-legged creatures. A dual male became two males, a dual female two females and the male-female (androgynous) became a male and a female. On this basis he [Plato] accounts for the differing sexual desires apparent in society, for each creature searches out its own or opposite kind, according to its original orientation. When dual parts encounter each other, they fall in love. By the creation of this myth Plato attempts to explain the attraction some men and women have for persons of the same sex."³

WHICH NATURE DOES PAUL MEAN?

In Romans 1 Paul shows that God's righteousness in saving people who believe in Him (verses 16, 17) is confronted by human unrighteousness (verse 18).

Paul's address to both Jew and Gentile, and his categorical language on the reality of sin, illustrate and confirm that the context of his thought and expression in Romans 1 is universal, all embracing rather than partisan, all-inclusive rather than in any way exclusive. All Gentiles are sinners (Rom. 1); Jews are all sinners (Rom. 2)—"there is no partiality with God" (verse 11)⁴; all, Jew and Gentile, are in rebellion against God and practice unrighteousness (Rom. 1:18), and are doomed and damned to death, except that through the faithfulness of Jesus Christ God has established a way to provide His righteousness to "all those who believe," "being justified as a gift by His grace through the redemption which is in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 3:22, 24); Abraham and David are examples of faith, and proof of hope for everybody "apart from works," showing that salvation from sin is equally for circumcised and uncircumcised (Rom. 4:6).

In Romans Paul is dealing with, and speaking to, all people of all times. His themes apply everywhere for everyone: Creation, the Fall, sin, and salvation apart from any Jewish particularity, apart from circumcision, apart from law, apart from works. What Paul says about homosexuality is to be understood within this universal context—for all people and all times.

Romans 1:20 refers to the world's creation and its created works. Paul's argument is that God can be known through creation. However, some replace Him with images human or animal, bowing to distortions of God's incorruptible glory (verse 23). The language is evocative of the Genesis creation account: animals listed, humans, the concept of "likeness/image," all echo Genesis 1:24-26. Romans 1:25 points out that the Gentiles worshipped created things instead of the Creator.

Romans 1:26, 27 further evokes Genesis 1:27 by concentrating on the same terms—namely, "male" (*arsen*) and "female" (*thelus*)—instead of using "man" and "woman." These clear references to Creation in the preceding verses require that homosexuality be understood in the same context, the context of Creation. "Idolatry and same-sex intercourse together constitute a frontal assault on the work of the Creator in nature,"⁵ no matter which form of homosexuality it is. The creation account points out God's intention for men and women: monogamous heterosexual marriage. Nature, as context for the chapter's discussion, means God's original creation.

Every human and all God's creation have been scarred by the cruel lash of sin.

MORE ON THE TEXT

The argument that the phrase “the natural intercourse” and its opposite, “against/contrary to nature,” in Romans 1:26, 27 are describing what is natural to an individual is alien to the book’s broad context as well as to standard use of the term *physis* (nature). The term *physis* is never used to mean constitutional homosexual makeup. In Romans the noun is found seven times, twice as part of the prepositional phrase *para physin* (against nature; Rom. 1:26; 11:24). In one of these an olive tree that is wild “by nature” (*kata physin*) becomes grafted “against nature” (*para physin*) into the cultivated olive tree. The nature God affirms is His original created order. Whatever is in accord with that original is *kata physin*. On the other hand, *para physin* refers to departure from the Creator’s original intent and establishment.

Joseph A. Fitzmyer states that “nature” for him [Paul] refers to “the order intended by the Creator, ... the order seen in the function of the sexual organs themselves, which were ordained for an expression of love between man and woman and for the procreation of children.”⁶ Departures from this order including idolatry and homosexuality, specifically mentioned here, are “against nature,” implying a negative moral judgment: “Homosexual practice is a violation of the natural order (as determined by God).”⁷ This includes all forms of homosexuality.

The mention of adult-adult homosexual intercourse (Rom. 1:27), dependent on Leviticus 18 and 20, shows that Paul saw Mosaic law as (1) applicable to New Testament times; and (2) includes female same-sex sexual activity, implied in the Old Testament.⁸ Since lesbianism typically was and is not violent or exploitive, it also implies that Paul included loving homosexual relationships by common consent.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Our opening question may now receive a clear answer from the Word of God. The nature God affirms is His original Eden creation. In that place

and time of flawless bliss, human sexuality is clearly defined as male and female (Gen. 1:27). The man (male) and the woman (female) are brought together by God in marriage, divinely blessed. In sexual intercourse the man and the woman, his wife, are joined together and become “one flesh” (Gen. 2:24).

Much has changed since God’s original and perfect work, and the changes show up in innumerable ways, including sexual attraction. Every human and all God’s creation have been scarred by the cruel lash of sin.

But though much is lost, God has preserved for us the record of His ideal for us. We still know of Eden. So we still know what He means by “according to nature.” And He has registered His commitment to restore our original nature, and restore to us the original nature of Eden that we lost through sin. Before the sun could set on the first day of sin on earth He spoke the promise that, by His sacrifice, we would be restored to our first dominion, to the way He always meant for us to be (Gen. 3:15; Micah 4:8).

Paul’s rejoicing, in the book of Romans, is because the truth of that restoration is available to “everyone who believes,” Jew or Greek (Rom. 1:16). God is not unfair. In Jesus He makes available to us all every provision necessary that we “may become partakers of the divine nature [*physis*], having escaped the corruption that is in the world by lust” (2 Peter 1:4).⁹

¹ James B. De Young, *Homosexuality: Contemporary Claims Examined in the Light of the Bible and Other Ancient Literature and Law* (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 2000), p. 10.

² Consider the warning by Anthony C. Thiselton, *The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, The New International Greek Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Wm B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 2000), p. 452: “Paul witnessed around him both abusive relationships of power or money and examples of ‘genuine love’ between males. We must not misunderstand Paul’s ‘worldly’ knowledge.”

³ Ronald M. Springett, *Homosexuality in History and the Scriptures* (Silver Spring, Md.: Biblical Research Institute, General Conference, of Seventh-day Adventists, 1988), pp. 97, 98.

⁴ Scripture quotations are from the *New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

⁵ Dan O. Via and Robert A. J. Gagnon, *Homosexuality and the Bible: Two Views* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 2003), p. 78.

⁶ Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *Romans, The Anchor Bible* (New York: Doubleday, 1992), vol. 33, p. 286.

⁷ James D. G. Dunn, *Romans 1-8*, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word Books, Publisher, 1988), vol. 38A, p. 764.

⁸ For those who dismiss Romans 1 as “a temporary Jewish purity rule rather than a universal moral principle,” De Young responds that “God cannot consign the Gentiles to punishment for breaking a Jewish purity rule” (*Contemporary Claims*, p. 159).

Ekkehardt Mueller is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.

John Carter, pastor for more than 55 years, has now visited Russia and Ukraine 49 times. He and his wife Beverley with The Carter Report team believe God has called them in a special way to minister to the people of the former Soviet Union. Over the past 26 years, millions have attended their Gospel meetings and hundreds of thousands have responded to the invitation to accept Christ.

Pastor Carter and his team have just returned from Russia where they experienced firsthand the new challenges of working in President Putin's new Russia.

"For a great and effective door has opened to me, and there are many adversaries."

~ 1 Cor. 16:9 NKJV



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And she's God's child.

Tamar was raped. Her tragic story is found only within the 39 verses of 2 Samuel 13. Tamar was raped by her half brother Amnon. He chose to express his sickening lustful passion toward his younger sister through a sinister plot concocted by their cousin.

UGLY STORY

Amnon's crafty cousin Jonadab could see that he was troubled. He drew him out, bugged him about his downcast face. How could he, a prince, be always looking so miserable? Wasn't he

getting a good night's sleep, or what?

Amnon explained: he was in a hopeless situation; in love that could never be satisfied; in love with his sister Tamar.

Amnon had it all wrong, Jonadab insisted. There was a way for Amnon to satisfy his incestuous craving: "I'll tell you what to do," he said. "Go back to bed and pretend you are ill. When your father comes to see you, ask him to let Tamar come and prepare some food for you. Tell him you'll feel better if she prepares it as you watch and feeds you with her own hands" (2 Sam. 13:5).¹

Amnon liked the idea. He acted sick. His solicitous father, the king, came to see him. Amnon asked for Tamar to come and serve him. "My sister," he called her: "Let my sister Tamar come and cook my favorite dish" (verse 6). Being served by his sister, watching her serve him—that would cure all his ailments. Woman as servant was no radically new idea. David agreed, and sent appropriate instructions to Tamar.

Tamar arrived, prepared the cakes for him as he requested, and tried to serve them to him. But Amnon had a developing request, a progression that still works today: from the telephone to the hotel lobby to the room upstairs, to . . .

Amnon sent his servants away and asked Tamar to feed him the cakes in his bedroom. Lured into Amnon's trap and recognizing his intentions, Tamar tried her utmost to get out of the bind. She had never been trained in escape strategies. She instinctively knew them.

Tamar's story is unfinished business

Against all the questions victims have to answer about why they didn't do this or that (get out of there, avoid the beast, dress modestly, etc.), or why they took this long to eventually voice their complaint, is the truth, put in the form of an entirely different question: How do so many of the vulnerable ever survive when being preyed on is the philosophy of the scholar, the default explanation of the scientist, the law of the culture? How come any of the victim class ever survive the ravages of the power class?

Tamar called on the best verbal de-escalation skills she had; she tried to reason with the pervert to prevent the rape: "No, my brother!" she cried. "Don't be foolish! Don't do this to me! Such wicked things aren't done in Israel" (verse 12). His sick attack—for he was indeed sick—would not benefit either of them: "Where could I go in my shame? And you would be called one of the greatest fools in Israel. Please, just speak to the king about it, and he will let you marry me" (verse 13).

But Tamar's pleas for mercy were muzzled out by her brother's perverted, animalistic quest for pleasure and wielding of power.

The trauma did not end with the rape. The aftermath was equally tragic. Amnon's burning passion for his sister suddenly transformed into violent hatred toward her. Anger is just lust turned inside out. She was berated, humiliated, and thrown out, banished from her brother's home. Tamar, the victim, was treated like the enemy: "The servant put her out and locked the door behind her" (verse 18).

Why? Was she a threat? So that locked doors, protracted and contorted reporting procedures, and aggressively insensitive, distrusting interviews were needed to protect the rapist from the threat of their own crude facts? Why did he need to lock the door? "She was wearing a long, beautiful robe, as was the custom in those days for the king's virgin daughters. But now Tamar tore her robe and put ashes on her head. And then, with her face in her hands, she went away crying" (verse 18).

SEQUEL OF DISGRACE

Your sister, your daughter, your mother, your wife, God's child, needs help, support, and intervention. She does not need additional pain. Neither she nor you nor God, her heavenly Father, needs an escalation in violence to fix the broken

and repair the shame. Tamar's only support and comfort came from another scheming sibling, her brother Absalom. For his help she would need to keep her disgrace and Amnon's dirty secret unmentioned for two years. Can you imagine? Two years of being forced to pretend as if nothing had happened. For years Tamar lived "as a desolate woman" (verse 20) in Absalom's house, with nowhere else to turn.

Their patriarchal inept father, David, was no help, paralyzed by his own conscience and history of criminal assault. But her brother Absalom would eventually find a way to fix everything: he would take up the role of vengeful sibling murderer. Two years after the rape he concocted his own evil scheme, with Amnon at the receiving end. Absalom threw a feast for all the king's sons. David, dubious about Absalom's generosity, hesitated to send all his sons, but Absalom eventually persuaded him to send Amnon. At the right moment in the proceedings Absalom gave his signal, and his men bore down on Amnon, slaughtering him at the height of the celebration.

It may surprise you. But when society will not give justice to the abused, victimized, and oppressed, their Father in heaven may turn their own cruelties upon them for the sake of His children. Ellen White wrote: "When parents or rulers neglect the duty of punishing iniquity, God Himself will take the case in hand. His restraining power will be in a measure removed from the agencies of evil, so that a train of circumstances will arise which will punish sin with sin."²

PRACTICAL STEPS

Our God is a God of justice. He is no murderer. He knows that the lawlessness in which the victimized take the law into their own hands to fix blood feuds is no effective solution. Tamar's violation was not "fixed" by Amnon's murder. Her grief has never been fixed. Her pain and agony were buried in the long history of unsolved family

abuse and suffering. Her name does not appear anywhere else in the Bible. Her voice was never heard from again. Remaining silent was not her choice of action; it was what she was told to do.

What happened to Tamar is the painful side of salvation history. The grand themes of the great controversy, worship, prophecy, the cross, and the Second Coming require significant attention in contemporary times. However, these themes often eclipse the pervasiveness of hurt and pain in our communities. Furthermore, there is discomfort in addressing stories that remind us of how sinful and debased we really are. Who wants to be reminded of the depth of sin into which family members have stooped? Or be reminded of the immoral passions and examples of lack of human decency exhibited among loved ones?

What happened to Tamar reveals everything that goes so wrong behind the closed doors of a religious home. Family secrets, generational sins, unrestrained immorality, and the big A word: Abuse. These criminal acts of sin mask themselves as abuse in many forms—physical, sexual, verbal, emotional, financial, and religious. It's all abuse, and it's all wrong. Countless numbers of daughters, mothers, sisters, wives, and children—all children of God—have been muted into silence by their controlling abusers.

Unfortunately, many habits of abuse originate in overbearing patriarchy. As Ellen White observed: "The husband and father who is morose, selfish, and overbearing is not only unhappy himself, but he casts gloom upon all the inmates of his home. He will reap the result in seeing his wife dispirited and sickly, and his children marred with his own unlovely temper."³

God's houses of hope and healing offer practical steps to address abusive situations, ways in which our daughters, sisters, mothers, and wives—God's children—can be surrounded with appropriate intervention:


- Create an environment that is safe for victims of abuse to speak out.
- Refer victims of abuse to professionals. Most Christian professional counselors remain out of the limelight and maintain strict confidentiality and trust.
- If you sense something is wrong, don't dismiss it. Collaborate with your church leaders and investigate.

- Educate and train leaders as often as possible to spot signs of abuse.
- Make intervention resources easily accessible. Numerous confidential agencies are available for victims of abuse.
- Require all church leaders (especially men) to take a domestic violence training course, such as End-It-Now, available through women's ministry departments of the church.
- Read Mable and Colin Dunbar's *No More Excuses—Domestic Violence: How Will Your Church Respond to the Crisis* (available on Amazon).
- Offer self-defense classes: these increase awareness, boost confidence, teach avoidance, and do a lot more to save potential victims from lurking perpetrators.

OUR STORY: REDEMPTION

Tamar's story is unfinished business. If we do nothing to address the atrocities of Tamar, painful silence will continue, and Absaloms will seek to fill the void of irresponsible fathers, kings, and leaders. Absaloms today still take matters into their own hands, silencing victims of abuse and looking for opportunities for revenge.

But Tamar, God's child, is not helped by further societal violence. She is helped by prevention. She, and we, are all helped by grace: grace offers pardon for evil, even Amnon's evil, if Amnon will repent; and it offers assurance of restoration for Tamars who have been undone.

So let's preempt the evil with the good of education, and embrace the grace that saves us all from ourselves. We all need forgiveness, for what we may never have done to Tamar we've done to God's Son. But He offers us Himself instead of our violent, murderous selves. We need Him, and need His grace. It comes to us free, God's unspeakable gift (Eph. 2:8; 2 Cor. 9:15). 

¹ Scripture quotations are from the *Holy Bible*, New Living Translation, copyright © 1996, 2004, 20015 by Tyndale House Foundation. Used by permission of Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., Carol Stream, Illinois 60188. All rights reserved.

² Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1890), p. 728.

³ Ellen G. White, *The Ministry of Healing* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1905), pp. 374, 375.

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ALSO IN THIS SECTION:

- » FROM ADULTERY TO REDEMPTION
- » NEW WINE, NEW CLOTH
- » PREDATORS IN THE PEWS
- » NEW ERA OF WHOLE-PERSON HEALING
- » STOP THE CLOCK!

ENGAGE



GOD HAS A PLAN FOR **THAT?**

On sexuality and being young? Yes, He does.

I was 17 years old. I was seated at a kitchen table with an Adventist couple as they shared how they encouraged their daughter to sleep with her boyfriends in order to know if they were truly sexually compatible. The idea was to help the young woman choose, based on who was best in bed. Turning toward me and my sisters, they actually said, “You should consider it.” I remember a strong wave of incredulity sweep over me at the suggestion. Although at the time I hadn’t done much research about premarital sex in the Bible, I could not shake the feeling that this advice was not biblical.

On another occasion a few of us from our youth group were



ANDREA JAKOBSONS

God created us as sexual He created us in His image

visiting another couple who served as our spiritual mentors. We asked them how far it was OK to go sexually before marriage. They responded with “Anything is OK, as long as it is not sexual intercourse.” Once again, I remember thinking about that advice and deciding that this, too, could not be biblical.

Instinctively, I figured that if God created sex, we were to glorify Him in our relationships. But how were we to do that? Where sex is concerned, what glorifies God before marriage?

NOT SUCH A NOVELTY

Perhaps the “almost anything goes” attitude should be a novelty in Adventist circles, but it might be more common than we think. I am a youth pastor, and as my youth confirm, sex is normalized and everywhere. Many Christian families realize this attitude is destructive; therefore, their teenagers are regularly told, “Don’t do it!”

In many schools sex talks include teaching teenagers about sexually transmitted infections, and how destructive an unwanted teen pregnancy can be. Christian society apparently wants to make sure young people understand that sex is so bad that it is downright dangerous. After all, it is usually brought up negatively, because if young people are scared enough, they won’t do it.

But all we need is to ask teenagers at any school—Adventist included—whether premarital sex is going on among their peers. They often answer in the affirmative. One of the greatest dangers of the scare-tactic approach is presenting sex as something ugly and having the image stay in the mind well into marriage.

VERY GOOD

How does the Bible view sex? As *tov me’od*, which means “very good.” After God finished creating, He saw that “it was very good.” Everything that God made, including the sexuality of the human couple, God called not just good, but very good. *Tov me’od* means goodness, wholesomeness, appropriateness, and beauty. Sex is beautiful; God created it that way. He could’ve made it completely unpleasant, something we’d only do to have babies, but He didn’t. He wants us to enjoy it.

God created us as sexual beings. He created us in His image as male and female. Sexuality is part of our identity. God brought Eve to Adam and performed the first wedding. In his book, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament*, Richard Davidson points out that the terminology “a man and his wife” (see Gen. 2:24) indicates a marriage relationship.¹ The first Friday evening of Creation week was the couple’s first Sabbath, but also their wedding night.



beings. as male and female.

After the marriage ceremony God states, “Therefore a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and they shall become one flesh” (Gen. 2:24, NKJV).² “A man shall leave [azav]”: the verb literally means to abandon and forsake. Since in ancient cultures the wife customarily left her family, God wanted to reiterate that it is not just the woman who leaves, but the man as well. They are to have a relationship that is guarded and separate.

The verse continues with the words “be joined [*davaq*] to his wife,” which refers to the marriage covenant and marriage vows. *Davaq* implies strong personal attachment or clinging to one another, and is used in the Bible for covenant bond with God. Only after that, it says, do they “become one flesh,” referring to sexual intercourse.

Most important, the initial ‘therefore’ indicates that this verse serves as a pattern for all

relationships in the future—not just in Eden, but always. The pattern is: leave, get married, then have sexual intercourse. First, it is an exclusive relationship about commitment. Second, it’s permanent. Only then does it get intimate.

Unfortunately, Satan has always tried to destroy whatever God established. He has tried to convince the human race that we can do whatever we want and still be happy. This blinds us to the realization that doing whatever we want leads to bondage to Satan rather than greater freedom.

BUT WHY WAIT?

Why should we leave sex for marriage? Because it has consequences. It creates oneness.

Davidson calls the experience of husband and wife becoming one flesh as “wholeness—in all the physical, sensual, social, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of life.”³ Sex is not simply about physical compatibility, but rather about a harmony in all aspects of life. Notice that the verse doesn’t say “be” one flesh, but rather “become.” This is a process. Over time, married couples become one and experience wholeness more deeply.

Do we have any proof that God's way is the best? Jeff and Shaunti Feldhahn and Erica and Lisa Rice interviewed young men and women (both Christian and non-Christian) who had had premarital sex and asked them to share how it impacted them and their relationships. The males first said that for a guy, sex did not equal love or commitment to the girl. They observed, "Girls use sex to get love, and guys use love to get sex."⁴ Males reported that as soon as they had sex they began to doubt whether they could trust the girl. Sixty-four percent of guys said they started to wonder whether the girl was trustworthy, and whether that relationship was worth it.⁵ In other words, for a guy who has had sex before marriage, there is a greater possibility that the relationship is broken off shortly after because the foundation of trust that is important for any relationship was shattered.

What about the impact of premarital sex on young women? Eighty-five percent of girls used negative words to describe how they felt afterward: "clingy, possessive, controlling, regretful, dirty, wanting to change the guy, etc."⁶ The theme that emerged is the girls essentially saying to the guys, "From now on you cannot spend time with anyone else; you are mine." It shouldn't be surprising that the reaction of the girls is so strong, since as stated above, God created sex to create oneness between couples.

Fascinatingly, the study showed that above everything else, a girl wants a guy who will be her hero and protect her, not push for sex. Seventy-five percent of girls (Christian and non-Christian) stated that in a make-out situation they always hope the guy will not try to go all the way.

But let's get back to the original question: What should a young person do in order to glorify God before marriage? When speaking with youth on this topic, this is what I recommend:

Set boundaries you will not cross. Nine out of 10 Christian guys agreed they would like to marry a virgin. And 69 percent of all guys (Christian and non-Christian) would like to marry a virgin. Yet 82 percent of guys report difficulty with bringing things to a halt sexually.⁷ That's why in a relationship it is important to set a line beyond which you will not go. The line needs to be talked about. Don't be afraid to bring it up. It's better to be embarrassed when talking about it than to have to look back and regret the decisions you make. Once you cross

a line, it is very difficult to backtrack. Know where you need to go before God, and stick with it.

Help each other out. Don't just expect the other person to be the strong one.

Don't believe anyone who tells you, "This is OK, it's not sex." No married couple will say, for example, that oral sex is not sex.

Spend time in God's Word so that your desires are shaped by the character of God.

If you have messed up, ask God for a do-over. Ask for His forgiveness, and believe that He has forgiven you. Then ask for strength every day as you start over. God is a God of grace, but He is also a God of power. He helps us "walk uprightly" (Prov. 15:21, NKJV).

LOOKING AHEAD

Will saving yourself for marriage guarantee sexual and marital bliss? Although the guidance of the Bible is given for our happiness, just because we do everything "right" doesn't always guarantee everything will turn out perfect. Marriage is a lot more complex and involved than simply doing "everything right" before your wedding day.

More guidance is needed during the course of marriage, and couples should never assume that "it will just work out" if they are not willing to put as much effort into building their relationship once they get married as before. Both individuals should always be about the business of bettering their marriage.

Sexual feelings are normal, created by God. But acting on them has its time and place. Those struggling to stay sexually pure shouldn't worry; we are not alone. We can commit ourselves to God's plan and remember that anything worthwhile in life is not easy. But God loves us enough to bless our efforts. 🍀

¹ Richard M. Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh: Sexuality in the Old Testament* (Peabody, Mass.: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 2007), p. 45.

² Bible texts credited to NKJV are from the New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ Davidson, *Flame of Yahweh*, p. 37.

⁴ Shaunti Feldhahn and Lisa A. Rice, *For Young Women Only* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2006), p. 154.

⁵ S. Feldhahn and L. A. Rice, p. 156.

⁶ Jeff Feldhahn and Eric Rice, *For Young Men Only* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: Multnomah Books, 2008), pp. 130-134.

⁷ S. Feldhahn and L. A. Rice, pp. 145-160.

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FROM ADULTERY TO REDEMPTION

The evangelist to whom these letters were written sometimes conducted several series of meetings in one area, then moved to the next while his wife remained to follow up and give Bible studies. The situation was far from ideal. The evangelist ended up committing adultery, rejecting the counsel of Ellen White and General Conference leaders, and losing his ministerial credentials. A few years before he died, he returned to the Lord.—Editors.

*Words of encouragement
to a hurting soul*



You will see before this reaches you that the Lord has again visited His people by giving me a testimony. In this view I was shown that you were not standing in the clear light and you are in danger of bringing a reproach upon the cause of God by moving as you happen to feel. It is Satan's intent to destroy you. He is seeking to keep your mind in a constant state of agitation, stirring it up that it may cast up mire and dirt instead of the peaceful fruits of righteousness. . . .

But . . . I was shown that you now should be very circumspect in your deportment and in your words. You are watched by enemies. You have great weaknesses for a man who is as strong as you are to move the crowd. As you are now separated from your wife there will be suspicion and jealousy, and falsehoods will be framed [even] if you give no occasion.

But if you are not cautious, you will bring a reproach upon the cause of God which could not soon be wiped away. You may feel, as I saw you had felt, that if you were not going to live with your wife, you wished to be free from her. You are restless, uneasy, and unsettled. Satan is tempting you to make a foolish man of yourself. Now is the time for you to show yourself a man, to


exhibit the grace of God by your patience, your fortitude, and courage. . . .

DANGER IN CONFIDANTS

You need to consecrate yourself to God, and not dwell upon your troubles. Be careful how you are enticed to make women your confidants or to allow them to make you their confidant. Keep aloof from the society of women as much as you can. You will be in danger. Remember, we are living amid the perils of the last days. Almost everything is rotten and corrupt.

Look to God, pray, oh, pray, as you never have before to be kept by the power of God through faith. In God you can stand untainted, without a stain or

**You need to consecrate
yourself to God, and
not dwell upon your
troubles.**

blemish. Fasten your hold upon God. Look to Him in faith that you may be a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. God will bring you off victorious if you will live a humble life of prayer and dependent trust (Letter 23, 1871). 

This excerpt is taken from the book *Testimonies on Sexual Behavior, Adultery, and Divorce* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1980), pp. 166-168. Seventh-day Adventists believe **Ellen G. White** (1827-1915) exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.

NEW WINE, NEW CLOTH

The 500th anniversary of the religious revolution we know as the Protestant Reformation is now history. Contemporary Christian historians suggest that since the inception of Christianity, major shifts in worldview occurs about every 500 years that significantly re-form Christianity's style and content. In these times of unprecedented change in our nation and denomination, it matters how we teach and preach the bottomless depths of God's Word.

As we prepare to teach the next generation what He has done for us, we can learn significant lessons from Matthew 9:14-17.

This incident shows Jesus in conflict with current opinion and practice because He didn't conduct His ministry as the Pharisees thought He should. The disciples of John the Baptist also failed to understand His unusual style of spiritual leadership.

Jesus and His disciples were at a banquet given by Matthew, the wealthy but despised tax collector. Outside were Pharisees, upset that Jesus seemed to be enjoying the company of outcasts. Also present were disciples of John the Baptist, whom the Pharisees quickly influenced to think critically of Jesus. Their question wasn't just why Jesus was eating and celebrating with sinners, but why Jesus and His disciples were celebrating at all.

When they noticed Jesus and His disciples not conforming to traditional practices, John's disciples were troubled. They insinuated that Jesus, with His disciples, was not seeking God or demonstrating sincerity for the law by refraining often from food. In a fit of envy they asked, "Why do we fast often, and you do not?"

Jesus replied by underscoring His radical reformation message, His re-formation mission of good news, great joy, and peace to humanity. He encouraged His disciples to celebrate while He was still with them, because there would come a time that they would need to fast. Then Jesus completed the dialogue with John's disciples with two simple parables: one about wineskins, the other about fabric.

The old, hard, inflexible wineskins represent Judaism, and any religious institution that boasts a form of godliness but lacks the spirit thereof. The new wine represents the Holy Spirit, whom God promised to no longer trickle down on a few chosen prophets or priests, but would pour out on all people of future generations. Old wineskins would be insufficient for this new wine that is always bubbling with power and promise. Old wineskins would burst, and the new wine would spill out and be wasted and lost.

The old garment also represents religious institutions, such as Judaism. New cloth, woven with colorful fibers, represents the diversity of people whom we are commissioned by Christ to bring into His fold. To put this patch of new, strong cloth on the old, worn-out garment would cause it to shrink, rather than expand, when soaked in the brine of legalism and traditionalism. It would rip itself away from the worn portion, or cause a schism, as the original word connotes.

Answers to our appeals for revival and reformation will be like new wine and will require the new wineskins of re-formed hearts and minds from inside out, rooted in a radical commitment to Jesus Christ. ▀

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

**CURE FOR THE
COMMON LIFE**
HYVETH
WILLIAMS



**IT MATTERS HOW
WE TEACH AND
PREACH THE
BOTTOMLESS
DEPTHS OF
GOD'S WORD.**

DAVID FOURNIER

During the past 20 years news headlines have regularly featured stories of criminal convictions of priests, pastors, and other religious leaders for sexually abusing children and youth. And yes, that includes Seventh-day Adventist clergy, teachers, and others. Our denomination has made great strides in prevention and education in this area during the past several decades. But in spite of those efforts and the resulting reduction in these incidents, reports of abuse still remain, sometimes coming to light many years after the abuse has happened. The recent torrent of stories of sexual abuse provides powerful confirmation of this fact. What do we do?

RAMIFICATIONS

It is hard to imagine the impact of sexual abuse upon a child, and the pain and damage endured regardless of the perpetrator. Studies indicate that the effects on the abused individual are potentially long-lasting and profound, including effects on physical and mental health, addiction, and other life-damaging consequences.

PREDATORS IN THE PEWS

The Centers for Disease Control (CDC) shares a great deal of information¹ on the effects of abuse: “In one long-term study, as many as 80 percent of young adults who had been abused met the diagnostic criteria for at least one psychiatric disorder at age 21. These young adults exhibited many problems, including depression, anxiety, eating disorders, and suicide attempts.”²

“Those with a history of child abuse and neglect are 1.5 times more likely to use illicit drugs, especially marijuana, in middle adulthood.”³

The effects do not stop with only the abused person; family and friends of the victims suffer greatly as well.

*How do we protect
our children even in
our “safest” places?*

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There is yet room for us to grow in how we process and react when any type of abuse is suspected or discovered.

Moreover, if the victim's family and circle of friends realize the abuse was at the hands of a religious leader, the subsequent handling of the event often hurts the victim and family and creates a negative impression of the church and religion in general. The reputation of the church is often damaged, and the image of abuse by a religious leader that is so often depicted in popular culture and the media is reinforced. The very organization that should, through God's grace, be a place of hope and healing is then looked upon as complicit with the perpetrator.

THE BRIGHT SIDE

The good news is that there has been increased awareness about this issue. Through frank conversations, the work of diligent volunteers, committed church leadership, organizations such as Adventist Risk Management, Inc. (ARM), and such banner campaigns as EnditNow.org,⁴ improvements have

been made. Policies and guidelines have been implemented, including enhanced training and background screening. Where these are followed, the church has created a safer place for children and kept them from contact with predator adults. Despite these good efforts, there is yet room for us to grow in how we process and react when any type of abuse is suspected or discovered. We should be particularly attentive with respect to the prevention of child-on-child abuse.

ARM handles most of the claims brought against church entities involving accusations of abuse. Of the approximately 160 cases of sexual abuse handled by ARM during the past decade, 50 of these cases involved child-on-child abuse. It is important to note that many cases go undetected or unreported to ARM because not all instances of sexual abuse become claims.

It should be noted that most general abuse prevention techniques are ineffective in preventing child-on-child sex abuse. Screening children will not detect a child who has abused in the past. Moreover, children are with other children in nearly every kind of normal church activity: Pathfinders, Sabbath School classes, and on the playground. The rules and strategies we have developed for preventing abuse for adult-child interactions may be ineffective with the potential for child-on-child abuse.

THE RIGHT DEFENSE STRATEGY

It is important to build the right strategy to prevent abuse and defend your organization against perpetrators. When it comes to abuse of children by adults, the steps the church has taken are largely effective. They include criminal background screening, awareness training, windows in doors, the two-adult rule, and reference checks. These measures help to harden the defenses of your organization against a perpetrator seeking to prey on your young and vulnerable. But they may not do much to guard against the trusted perpetrator already in your midst.

Building an effective defense against child-on-child abuse requires different techniques and methods. The predators in these cases are likely classmates, bullies, fellow Pathfinders, or even friends from within the local church. The victims in these cases are children ranging in age from teenagers to very young children. It is important to remember that the perpetrator of the sexual abuse in this case is also a minor and in many

cases, a child who is close in age to the victim. The actions take place with any combination of genders, including boys abusing boys or girls, as well as girls abusing boys or other girls. The range of misconduct includes inappropriate touching, sexual acts, sexual intercourse, and sodomy.

To build and maintain an effective stance against this, we must understand the various scenarios in which abuse can take place:

- a children's ministries party at a church member's home;
- Pathfinders involved in abuse on a bus during a trip;
- Pathfinders engaging in abuse during a camping activity;
- bathroom abuse incidents;
- bullying scenarios where sexual abuse is the goal.

THE LESSONS OF EXPERIENCE

We can learn some lessons from these abuse scenarios that ARM has dealt with. The ages represented in these situations ranged from 6 to 17. Both genders are represented, both as abused and as perpetrator. We now know that we cannot make assumptions about the "safety" of a person based on age or gender. Too often those assumptions are challenged by our experience and reality.

We can also learn a great deal by examining the scenarios and locations where these incidents can take place. We cannot conclude that we should stop meeting at church members' homes, or no longer take bus trips or use bathrooms. Rather, we need to understand the supervision gaps that are taking place in these situations. We are clearly failing our children in these gaps; but by understanding how that happens, we can end it.

What happened at the children's ministries party at the church members' home that caused a gap in care for these children? Were there some assumptions made about who was responsible for supervision? When we are on-site at our church or school we ensure that all children are accounted for, so shouldn't we do the same when conducting an activity off-site?

What happened on the bus? Where were the adults? Was the driver the only supervisor? Were the adults sleeping, or just not engaged? As we plan these activities, let us not compromise on effective supervision.

Many of the scenarios involved bathrooms, and

several involved camping activities as well. Ideally, bathrooms are private places. Using a bathroom necessarily requires privacy, and these scenarios are thereby more challenging to supervise. When children are sent to the bathroom, it is good to have regular supervision in the hallways that ensures children know they are monitored as to how long they have been in there and who is in there at that time. Children need to be aware that an adult is actively engaged and will intervene if something is not as it should be.

Scenario 5 involved a boy who acted out in response to a girl who was bullying him. His reaction was inappropriate and considered abuse, but neither behavior was good. Bullying can range in severity from the insignificant to full-fledged abuse. Allowing even light bullying to take place creates a culture that is friendly to perpetrators, as in this case, where the bullying behavior escalated into an abusive incident.

What can we learn? Overwhelmingly the challenges we faced with these incidents were gaps in supervision. Effective supervision involves adults who are informed and prepared, are vigilant, but are also educated to know what to watch for, and are empowered to act on communicated expectations. We must set high standards for our adult volunteers, as well as for young people, then be willing to follow up on those expectations.

Guidelines on how to conduct effective supervision can be found in the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual* and the *General Conference Working Policy*. Often your conference or local church will have developed a child protection plan that provides the needed guidance. ARM also has information on child protection,⁵ including resources on "safe touch" and "supervision."

IMPROVING OUR RESPONSE

When an allegation of abuse arises in a church or school setting, the response must be timely, positive, and as confidential as possible. Like other acts of abuse, the incident should be reported to the police or designated government organizations. Do not dismiss the incident because the alleged perpetrator is another child or minor. Appropriate civil agencies must be notified and allowed to investigate the matter with the cooperation of the church or school.

Once an act of sexual abuse involving a child is

discovered, it is essential to notify the child's parents promptly and carefully. Parents should be advised of what happened and assured the matter has been reported to authorities. Next, while giving the child support and comfort, avoid questioning beyond the basic information needed to file a report with authorities, especially without the parent present. You are not an investigator. Questioning a child in such a situation should be done only by those trained to do so. As for the authorities, it is best to work as cooperatively with them as possible and not get ahead of their investigation by making statements that reveal the identities of the victim or the perpetrator. Share information on a need-to-know basis only.

For example, in a school setting it may be mandatory that the victim's and perpetrator's teacher be informed if a child is still attending classes. The teacher can then appropriately relate to the child under these circumstances. However, announcements of names and details at a staff meeting, or more public forums, may raise other liability issues for the organization and be detrimental to the children involved. Use legal counsel in these sensitive situations.

WORKING WITH THE PERPETRATOR

We need to remember that God's Word and our church's principles condemn abusive conduct. The church should follow through with fair, decisive discipline. Priority should be given to protection of the vulnerable rather than the perpetrator.

We are often surprised when a respected and loved member of our congregation is found to have engaged in this type of conduct. But hesitation to hold perpetrators accountable may be perceived as a lack of support for victims. It sends a message that the perpetrator is more important to the church than those who are abused. It also may communicate that abusive behavior is condoned. This cannot be our position. The cruelty and immorality of sexual abuse violates both God's commandment against adultery and His law against murder (Exodus 20:13, 14; Matthew 5:21, 28). Sexual abuse, any act of sexual intimacy outside of a marriage relationship, and/or nonconsensual acts of sexual conduct within a marriage, whether those acts are legal or illegal, disrupt the marriage institution⁶ and the Christian home, and violate biblical standards of moral conduct. Such acts include but are not limited to child

sexual abuse, including abuse of the vulnerable.

The church has a common theme of forgiveness and restoration. There is a process for restoration available to perpetrators. But priority must be given to protecting the vulnerable and to recognizing the consequences that follow this type of behavior. Under no circumstances should we transfer a perpetrator elsewhere, as though they are a member in good standing. When we do this, we expose an unsuspecting congregation to risk. Ultimately the whole church suffers when we try to pass the problem along. That is not a solution.

AIMING FOR A HIGHER STANDARD

We have such a great opportunity and responsibility with the children of our church and our guests. They are the most vulnerable, but they also hold the most potential for the future. Jesus spoke clearly: "Whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea" (Mark 9:42, NKJV).⁷ There is no room for doubt here that God takes the protection of the vulnerable very seriously, and expects us to do the same.

God asks us to always treat our children in a responsible and loving manner. Let us take this as a calling to treat them in a godly manner, and ensure they experience the fruit of the Spirit in our families, our communities, and our churches and schools. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law" (Gal. 5:22, 23, NASB).⁸

¹ <https://www.cdc.gov/violenceprevention/childmaltreatment/consequences.html>

² A. B. Silverman, H. Z. Reinherz, R. M. Giaconia, "The Long-term Sequelae of Child and Adolescent Abuse: A Longitudinal Community Study," *Child Abuse and Neglect* 20, no. 8 (1996): 709-723.

³ C. Widom, N. Marmorstein, H. White, "Childhood Victimization and Illicit Drug Use in Middle Adulthood," *Psychology of Addictive Behaviors* 20, no. 4 (2006): 394-403.

⁴ An initiative of the Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) and the General Conference Women's Ministries department.

⁵ <https://adventistrisk.org/en-US/Safety-Resources/Church>

⁶ Which the Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual (2015), p. 62, defines as "a public, lawfully binding, monogamous, heterosexual relationship between one man and one woman."

⁷ New King James Version. Copyright © 1979, 1980, 1982 by Thomas Nelson, Inc. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

⁸ *The New American Standard Bible*, copyright © 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995 by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

David Fournier is chief client officer for Adventist Risk Management.

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RENDERING BY CALLISONRTKL

Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center in White Oak, Maryland, will expand access to care in the Washington, D.C., region.

NEW ERA OF WHOLE-PERSON HEALING

Adventist HealthCare campus expands care, preserves legacy

About a mile from the Seventh-day Adventist Church world headquarters, a new health ministry is coming to life that will expand care to the community and continue the legacy that the early Adventist Church shaped more than a century ago.

Adventist HealthCare Washington Adventist Hospital's newly constructed hospital will be located six miles north of its 13-acre Takoma Park, Maryland, campus. The new location, on 48 acres in White Oak, Maryland, will allow Washington Adventist to offer private patient rooms, additional outpatient health services, and doctor's offices on campus. Patients and ambulances will use major roadways for easier access to the hospital. There will also be additional public transportation routes.

The relocated hospital will also have a new name, Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center, when it opens in the summer of 2019. The existing

Takoma Park campus will offer 24/7 urgent care, primary care, and other services.

"Through the years we have been blessed to help many in our community with our quality care and compassion," said Terry Forde, president and CEO of Adventist HealthCare, which operates Washington Adventist Hospital. "That will remain at the core of what we do as we extend our mission at Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center."

A CENTURY OF CARE AND COMPASSION

Adventist HealthCare's new hospital extends a health ministry that began more than 110 years ago with the founding of the Washington Sanitarium in 1907. Adventists purchased the property in Takoma Park for \$6,000. Ellen White and her husband, James, used proceeds from her book *The Ministry of Healing* to help with the purchase. The san-

itarium began with 40 beds, 12 staff members, and a focus on healing through wellness, pure food, and relaxation in nature. Daniel Kress, M.D., the hospital's first medical superintendent and surgeon, and his wife, Lauretta Kress, M.D., Montgomery County's first female doctor, were instrumental in establishing the hospital's mission and clinical foundation.

From the beginning, Washington Adventist Hospital founders spoke out about the dangers of tobacco. Dr. Lauretta Kress lectured and wrote advising expectant mothers in the Washington, D.C., region not to smoke. Decades later the message of maintaining good health through good habits led hospital physicians to develop a successful quit smoking program well ahead of public health campaigns.

The Kresses also built much of what we have come to expect from any modern hospital, including maternity services and the emergency department, which set the stage for the hospital to begin one of the region's first cardiac centers in the 1960s.

"Over time, the hospital's mission to heal—mind, body, and spirit—has remained as we've grown to serve the needs of our changing community," said Geoff Morgan, project executive for Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center. Morgan joined Washington Adventist Hospital 35 years ago as a clinician in the pulmonary and critical-care service areas.

ROOTED IN FAITH AND COMFORT

The legacy established by the Whites and Kresses will live on at Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center through a focus on natural healing elements.

Patients, visitors, and staff will take in the natural surroundings and fresh air from a green roof garden. Private rooms with large windows and lake views will offer patients natural light and landscape views, which contribute to healing. An outdoor walking trail will also provide a fitness and wellness area for the surrounding community to enjoy.

The new name, Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center, is connected to the hospital's current health and healing outreach. The White Oak tree is a symbol of faith and comfort. The Hebrew name for an oak is derived from the word "providence," meaning divine guidance, and frequently linked to God's ability to "see ahead." The White Oak is also Maryland's state tree and is

valued for its strength, quality, and resiliency.

The White Oak area, where the U.S. Food and Drug Administration (FDA) is located, is becoming nationally known as a hub of life sciences and health.

STATE-OF-THE-ART HEALING

Construction is now under way inside the new hospital after its seven-story exterior was completed late last year. During the design process nurses and physicians worked closely with the architects to create an environment focused on providing quality, compassionate care.

In addition to featuring the latest equipment and tools, the new space that's being created to help people heal will also have a meaningful impact. From testing and procedural areas to nursing units and the emergency department, patients and their caregivers will be able to discuss care plans and rest in privacy and comfort.

"We worked with the architects to thoughtfully design our new home in a way that allows us to provide compassionate care for patients at every step of the way," said Rose Melendez, who has worked at Washington Adventist Hospital for



The Washington Sanitarium opened in 1907 with the assistance from proceeds of Ellen G. White's book, *The Ministry of Healing*.

nearly 30 years and serves as the project manager for the hospital's transition to White Oak. "We pray the new hospital will enhance the lives of our patients, their families, and our caregivers."

TRANSFORMING THE COMMUNITY

Medical innovation will also take place beyond the hospital walls.

Once in White Oak, a decade-long collaboration



The new hospital will feature natural healing elements such as rooms with lake views and an outdoor walking trail.

between the FDA and Adventist HealthCare will expand. As neighbors, FDA researchers can more readily observe medical procedures in the hospital setting and collaborate with clinicians on innovative ideas to advance patient safety and public health.

Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center will have a significant impact on the region. According to Stephen S. Fuller, director of the Center for Regional Analysis at George Mason University, the hospital will create 7,500 jobs between construction and ongoing operations. Construction alone will contribute \$845 million to Maryland's economy.

"The new Washington Adventist Hospital is a major milestone in revitalizing the eastern part of Montgomery County and fulfilling White Oak's potential as a global health innovation hub," said Montgomery County executive Isiah Leggett. "We are proud of our partnership with the hospital in making health care more accessible to our residents, while bringing quality jobs to the White Oak area."

The hospital's philanthropic partnerships with supporters across the region have also played an important role in making Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center a reality. To date, the hospital's capital campaign has raised approximately \$7 million of its \$20 million goal.

"We are thankful for our generous donors," said Christy Swanson, director of the Washington Adventist Hospital Foundation. "Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center will heal in so many ways, through the outstanding care it provides, jobs it creates, and long-lasting impact on improving lives."

Physicians and physician groups associated

with Washington Adventist Hospital have contributed more than a third of the amount raised. Cynthia Plate, a surgeon and past president of the hospital's medical staff, is among that growing group and also a member of the capital campaign's Physician Partners Committee.

"We have a rare opportunity to be part of something very special that will change the entire region for the better," Dr. Plate said. "I am excited and honored to be part of it from the ground floor up."

A NEW CHAPTER

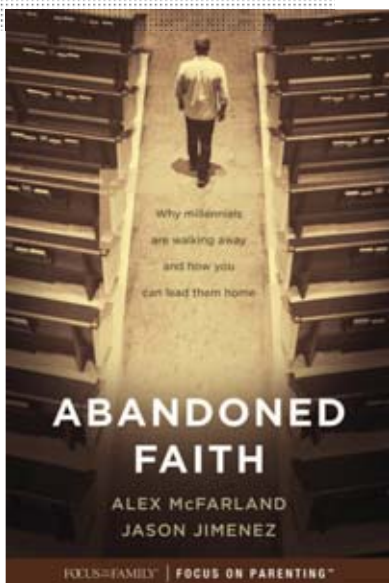
When the Washington Sanitarium opened its doors in 1907, the vision of introducing patients to new ideas of health and wellness through nutrition, good habits, and faith became a reality in the Washington, D.C., region. The legacy of physical, mental, and spiritual healing has underpinned the mission at the sanitarium, Washington Adventist Hospital, and in 2019, Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center.

"We're fortunate to be standing on the shoulders of those who have gone before us and working to ensure that our mission is as meaningful today as it was in the beginning," said Erik Wangsness, president of Washington Adventist Hospital. "We feel blessed to be able to carry forward the message of health and wellness to the community we serve." 🏹

To learn more about Adventist HealthCare White Oak Medical Center and stay current on the project, visit www.OurCommunityTransformed.org.

Maura Zehr is communication manager for Adventist HealthCare, headquartered in Gaithersburg, Maryland.

CLOSER LOOK



Abandoned Faith

Abandoned Faith: Why Millennials Are Walking Away, and How You Can Lead Them Home, by Alex McFarland and Jason Jimenez, Tyndale House Publishers, Carol Stream, Illinois, 2017, 267 pages. Paperback, US\$9.48; Kindle \$8.54. Reviewed by Stephen Chavez, *Adventist Review*.

It's no secret that millennials are leaving the church. And Adventists aren't the only ones grappling with the phenomenon of young adults born between approximately 1976 and 1994 who are failing to engage in traditional, institutional Christianity. In fact, research indicates that among those who describe themselves as atheists, agnostics, or "nothing in particular"—"the nones"—a significant number of them are millennials.

This reality is addressed by Alex McFarland and Jason Jimenez in their book *Abandoned Faith*. The authors, specialists in Christian apologetics and family ministries, offer their observations and suggestions for addressing this situation.

The book is divided into four sections: What Went Wrong; Forces Shaping Our Sons and Daughters; Steps to Mend to Move Forward; and Winning Back Your Millennial Child. Each chapter in its respective section is carefully crafted to blend sociological research (fully documented), contempo-

rary and biblical case studies, and scriptural counsel.

The reason millennials are leaving the church is summed up in this sentence: "Too many Christians have forgotten that the goal of the church is to help people follow Christ [rather] than [just] show up for an hour on Sunday." And it isn't just the church that is blamed for millennials' disinterest in organized religion. Other causes include the changing influence of the home and changes in culture.

The thing that takes the greatest hit in terms of blame is inauthenticity on the part of such authority figures as parents, church members, and religious institutions. The authors point out that millennials don't want to be preached to; they want to engage in conversations. They don't want to be numbers on somebody's tally or report card; they want to belong to a cause that's greater than themselves. They don't want to be a cog in a piece of machinery; they want to be part of the body of Christ.

A recurring theme in the book is the guilt felt by parents who come to realize (too late) that their children's interest in Christianity is waning or absent altogether. The authors' suggestions for remedying the situation are helpful, but certainly not guaranteed to produce positive results in every case. Let's face it: young adults in university, or in their first jobs, are less likely to conform to parental influence than when they were younger.

The ideal audience for *Abandoned Faith* is not those whose children have already abandoned their faith; it's for parents, family members, church members—indeed, all Christians—who are determined to live their faith, not just talk about it. 🍷

STRENGTH FOR THE JOURNEY

We asked our readers: Thinking about 2018, what will be your North Star? On which Bible verse will you chart your course? Here are some of their responses.

PHILIPPIANS 4:13:

"I can do everything God asks me to with the help of Christ who gives me the strength and power" (TLB).¹

BARBARA D., CALIFORNIA.

EPHESIANS 4:13:

"Until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ."

BLAINE F., INDIANA.

ISAIAH 46:3, 4:

"You whom I have upheld since your birth, and have carried since you were born. Even to your old age and gray hairs I am he, I am he who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you."

CARROL G., WASHINGTON.

ACTS 13:47:

"For this is what the Lord has commanded us: 'I have made you a light for the Gentiles, that you may bring salvation to the ends of the earth.'"

RUBEN J., PERU.

2 CORINTHIANS 5:21:

"God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

CHRIS D., WASHINGTON, D.C.

DEUTERONOMY 31:8:

"The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

LYNDA D., ARIZONA.

ECCLESIASTES 12:14:

"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."

DANIEL D., MICHIGAN.

HEBREWS 4:14-16:

"Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has ascended into heaven, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet he did not sin. Let us then approach God's throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."

JEAN T., TEXAS.

DEUTERONOMY 33:26, 27:

"There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

JEANNE L., IDAHO.

2 CORINTHIANS 3:17, 18:

"Now the Lord is the Spirit, and where the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. And we all, who with unveiled faces, contemplate the Lord's glory, are being transformed into his image with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit"

KEISHA M., MARYLAND.

JOHN 14:27:

"Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid" (ESV).⁴ With all the crazy stuff happening, I am counting on God's peace to carry me through. I can rely on His promises 365 days in 2018.

WILLIE O., MARYLAND.



PSALM 18:30:

“As for God, his way is perfect: The Lord’s word is flawless; he shields all who take refuge in him.”

EMMANUEL A., GHANA.

EPHESIANS 2:8-10:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast. For we are God’s handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.” I am saved by Jesus. Jesus creates good works for me to do. It is Jesus. It is Jesus. It is Jesus. That’s my passage for 2018.

KERMIT N., MARYLAND.

MATTHEW 6:33:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”

CHERYL B., MARYLAND.

JOB 19:25:

“For I know that my Redeemer lives, and He shall stand at last on the earth” (NKJV).²

LOVINGSON K., INDIA.

HABAKKUK 3:17, 18:

“Though the fig tree does not bud and there are no grapes on the vines, though the olive crop fails and the fields produce no food, though there are no sheep in the pen and no cattle in the stalls, yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will be joyful in God my Savior.”

NATHAN K., TEXAS.

MATTHEW 7:12:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

RICH D., CALIFORNIA.

MATTHEW 25:37-40:

“Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me’” (Message).³

LESLIE K., TENNESSEE.

1 PETER 4:10:

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.”

RON D., MARYLAND.

PROVERBS 16:3:

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”

TINA G., NEVADA.

MARK K. OF UTAH, AND TONI S. OF ALASKA, BOTH CHOSE THE SAME VERSE—JEREMIAH 29:11:

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

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⁴ Scripture quotations marked ESV are from *The Holy Bible*, English Standard Version, copyright © 2001 by Crossway Bibles, a division of Good News Publishers. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

Stop the Clock!

We all have experienced moments of utter disbelief, when a certain piece of information we receive just doesn't make sense. The sudden death of a beloved friend at 35 years of age. The senseless murder of people worshipping in a church. The unexpected and heart-breaking diagnosis of a teenager ready to conquer the world.

When life stands still and questions haunt our hearts, we wish we could stop the clock and gain perspective of things unspeakable and questions unanswerable.

But then life reboots, and it's back to normal again. We soldier on; we refocus our attention; we continue our journey. And, slowly but surely, we forget. We get sidetracked by the many screens surrounding us. We begin, once again, to rush at life and its big and small challenges.

Januaries are particularly susceptible to this cyclical behavior. As the old year ebbs away and we are surrounded by friends and family, we generally have a bit more time to reflect on and digest life's curveballs. Often we commit to change ("I will hit 14,000 steps every day on my Fitbit" or "No more chocolates for me!" or "I will spend more face time with my wife"), yet struggle to make these changes stick.

New Year's resolutions, unfortunately, do not have a long shelf life. British researchers found that 63 percent of all respondents failed to keep a New Year's resolution, and 80 percent of those did so within the first three months.¹

We don't need resolutions—we need a change of rhythm. Rhythm and measures help musicians to play together. Rhythm offers a healthy way to face realities and

questions that go beyond our immediate comprehension. Rhythm is transforming in itself and helps us to remember what's really essential.

I have written before about God's Sabbath rhythm. Most of us have not (yet) really discovered its countercultural and radical power. It goes beyond a mere 24-hour period. It represents a pattern of life where I can step back and find healthy engagement, surprising resolution, true rigor, and sparkling joy in the great "Thou" waiting for me to slow down and pay attention.

So how do we move from resolution to rhythm? How can we pick up God's rhythm in the midst of a noisy, distracting, and often disorientating world?

First, I need to start listening. Nehemiah 8 tells the story of God's people coming together to listen to God's voice found in His Word. For hours they listened in community, "And all the people listened attentively to the Book of the Law" (Neh. 8:3). I wish I could have seen this.

Second, I need to express my distractions, frustrations, disappointments, and, yes, also joys in that quiet place before God. Some people like to write down their prayers; others enjoy walking in nature and speaking audibly. I have noticed that when I do this, I have more space for God and can listen more carefully to what He wants to impress on my heart. Listen—and talk; listen—and talk; listen—and only then talk. "I love the Lord, for he heard my voice; he heard my cry for mercy. Because He turned his ear to me, I will call on him as long as I live" (Ps. 116:1, 2).

That's the kind of rhythm change that will survive more than three months. So stop the clock! 🍂

¹ <https://www.theguardian.com/news/datablog/2015/dec/31/how-long-do-people-keep-their-new-year-resolutions>.

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MATTHEW 7:12:

“So in everything, do to others what you would have them do to you, for this sums up the Law and the Prophets.”

RICH D., CALIFORNIA.

MATTHEW 25:37-40:

“Then those ‘sheep’ are going to say, ‘Master, what are you talking about? When did we ever see you hungry and feed you, thirsty and give you a drink? And when did we ever see you sick or in prison and come to you?’ Then the King will say, ‘I’m telling the solemn truth: Whenever you did one of these things to someone overlooked or ignored, that was me—you did it to me’” (Message).⁴

LESLIE K., TENNESSEE.

1 PETER 4:10:

“Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others.”

RON D., MARYLAND.

PROVERBS 16:3:

“Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans.”

TINA G., NEVADA.

MARK K. OF UTAH, AND TONI S. OF ALASKA, BOTH CHOSE THE SAME VERSE—JEREMIAH 29:11:

“‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future.’”

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