

JANUARY-MARCH 1995

# CQ

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

## GREAT CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE



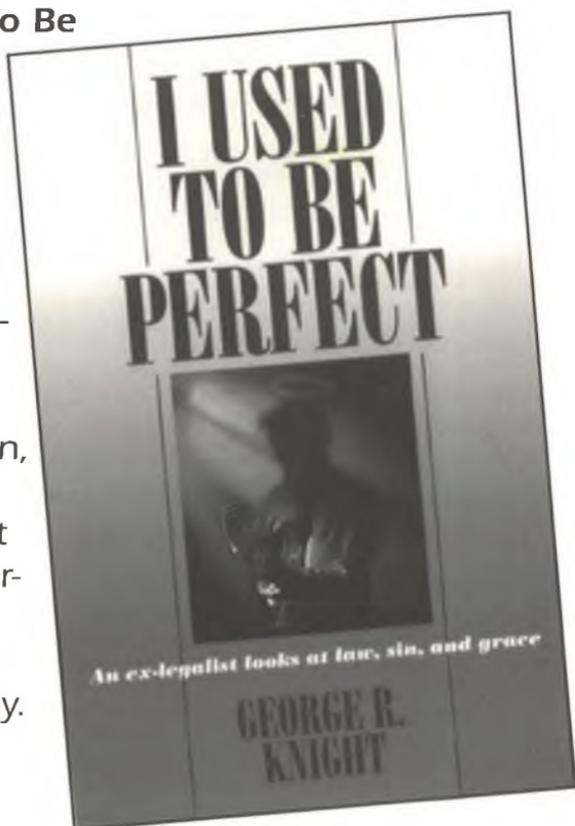
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# GREAT CHAPTERS OF THE BIBLE

JANUARY — MARCH 1995

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## This Quarter's Artist



Born in Warsaw, Poland, Paul Kot showed a talent and interest in art early in his life. He matriculated from art school in 1980 and became an art teacher in 1985. After arriving in South Africa in 1988 on holiday, Paul decided to extend his stay in Africa to capture its natural beauty and abundance of wildlife through art and photography. Currently compiling his own collection of African wildlife photography for publication as a book, he also works as a freelance photographer. His favorite art media include oil, pastel, and pencil sketches. He signs all artwork under his Polish name "Pawel."

# Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

## Facts You Should Know

*CQ* is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that, because *CQ* deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than 200 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 39,000.

## Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read remaining sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

**"Introduction"** (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

**"Logos"** (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

**"Testimony"** (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

**"Evidence"** (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.

**"How-To"** (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

**"Opinion"** (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

## *CQ* and the Church

*CQ* is the General Conference–approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

# LOVE'S GREAT LYRIC



**“And now abide faith, hope, love, these three; but the greatest of these is love” (1 Cor. 13:13, NKJV).**

# Incomprehensible Love

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rom. 5:5**

“And hope maketh not ashamed; because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given unto us” (Rom. 5:5).

“There is no love like a mother’s love.” “Greater love hath no man than this.” “Love conquers all.”

At one time or another we have all heard the above quotations, and we admired the beauty of these words. But have we ever stopped to give thought to the force that inspires not only these words but the actions described therein? God’s love would be totally incomprehensible to human understanding if not for the vivid example of this love demonstrated throughout the pages of history, culminating, most notably, in the ultimate sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ.

Describe in your own words what these statements mean to you: “God is the beginning of love.” “The incomprehensible love of God.”

Do you believe a person can demonstrate incomprehensible love without a personal experience with Christ? Have you ever come close to realizing that the

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## “While we were yet sinners,” Christ died for *me*.

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life you have could be so easily snatched from you and that it is only because of God’s great love that you are given daily a new lease on life?

“While we were yet sinners,” Christ died for *me*. Wow, what a thought—love so strong it breaks through our sin-hardened hearts. The Spirit of Prophecy tells us, “By beholding we become changed.” In other words, by accepting His love, we become one with Him. He is love; therefore, as we know Him personally, His love fills our hearts. And because His love fills our hearts, we are now able to give love. This is not just a verbal love, through fancy words, but a deep love demonstrated in action. Forgive and forget is no longer a mere phrase; it becomes a reality in our lives. In Christ we become so much more than we had ever imagined we could be. Because of His love, we no longer dwell within ourselves but in God, and because of His love we no longer think spiteful thoughts; we become magnanimous, bigger than life.

As we learn of God’s love, our life deepens and grows. We feed on His understanding of what this incomprehensible love is, and we can depend on it because it is based on a God whose love never changes. God therefore is not only the beginning of love; He and His Word (the Bible) are its completion.

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*By Dan Santiago, a trucking businessman, and Mark Taylor, a floor installer from Atlanta, Georgia.*

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# The Meaning and Reality of Love

## LOGOS

**1 Cor. 12:4-11, 27-31; 13:1-13; 14:1**

What is agape love? How can I fully understand the concept of the unconditional love demonstrated by Christ and His life and through His death? How can that kind of love become a part of me?

### **1 Cor. 13:1-8**

First Corinthians 13 takes us down to the root of the meaning of *agape love* and uncovers the reality of its practice in our lives. Our text is divided into two sections: verses 1-3 look at how a person demonstrates his own ideas of love for what he wants to be true; verses 4-8 show how Christ demonstrates His love for humanity ideally in what He knows to be true.

### **1 Cor. 13:1**

*"Even though I can speak powerfully in all languages and can pray eloquently, but have not devotion or warmth, I'm no better than a dog barking all night long or a trumpet played loudly and off key for hours."*

Key words: "tongues of men and of angels" (KJV). How do these words apply to the following: Billy Graham, Rush Limbaugh, Adolph Hitler, H. M. S. Richards, Bill Clinton?

### **1 Cor. 13:2**

*"And if I have prophetic powers like John the Revelator and Daniel the prophet or have a photographic memory coupled with the deep, profound wisdom of Solomon, or even if I had an amazing faith that could change the course of nature like Elijah, but I don't really care about people and their needs, I am no more than a cretin maggot."*

Key words: *prophecy, understand all mysteries, faith, so that I could remove mountains* (KJV). Why is the contrast so great in this text? Should love eclipse all other virtues? What are some guidelines you use to determine how agape love is distinguished above all the fanfare of life?

### **1 Cor. 13:3**

*"And though I win the lottery and give all the proceeds to the poor or make a statement about human injustice and in a crowd douse myself with gasoline and light a match, but have not true compassion and a genuine concern for the welfare of others, I am a big zero, a waste, a L-12 (loser 12 times)."*

Key words: *give all I possess to the poor and surrender my body* (NIV). Describe what Jesus told the rich young man to do with his belongings (Matt. 19:16-22). What is the difference between this text and 1 Corinthians 13:3?

### **1 Cor. 13:4**

*"Love is patient, kind, it is not jealous, does not brag, it is not arrogant or proud, and looks for ways to be constructive."*

If you look in a Bible concordance, you will find more texts on the word *love* than you would ever want to look up. Read only the following four texts: John 14:15; Rom. 13:9; 1 Cor. 13:13; Gal. 5:22.

### **1 Cor. 13:5**

*"Love is not rude, is not self seeking, is not easily angered, and it keeps no record of wrongs."*

Ponder these questions for a few minutes: What if everybody you knew never said a rude thing about you or anyone else? What if people in general were always helping other people out? What if when you did something really bad to a friend he or she forgave you and never reminded you of what you had done? What if when you went to buy a car the seller didn't give you any hassles? If the love in our hearts is the mirror image of 1 Corinthians 13:5, we will be true Christians.

### **1 Cor. 13:6**

*"Love does not rejoice in evil, but in truth."*

Think about the following true-false questions:

- When we look at people the way Jesus does, we have the "true kind of love."
- When we watch questionable movies, we are living that "true kind of love."
- When we gossip about people, we are living that "true kind of love."
- When we make cash pledges to our church and don't actually plan to stick to them, we are living that "true kind of love."

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## **First Corinthians 13 takes us down to the root of the meaning of *agape* love.**

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### **1 Cor. 13:7**

*"Love knows no limit to its endurance, no end to its trust, hopeful and ever patient."*

Christ as our example has made true love the biggest test in our lives.

### **1 John 4:7, 8**

Christ gave us the Holy Bible as a guide to point us down the right path, and if we follow Him we will know what it means by "no limit to [Christ's] endurance, no end to [Christ's] trust," and finally Christ is always "hopeful and patient" with us.

### **1 Cor. 13:8**

*"Love will never come to an end. The time will come when we will outgrow prophecy. If there are unfamiliar languages, they will stop. Knowledge will be swept away."*

First Corinthians 13:8 talks about a time when the special gifts and power that God gave us will come to an end. Do you think this special time will take place while we are here on this earth? Is the love that Christ gives us going to make us perfect and complete, or is it going to confuse us all the more? I think if we study and pray, Christ will show us the true meaning of love.

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\* All scriptural references are paraphrased.

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*By Bill Levin, pastor of the Atlanta (Georgia) North SDA Church, and Roy Bame, a customer-relations representative for Larson-Juhl Company, Atlanta, Georgia.*

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# No Greater Love

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 15:13**

Many a story today can be told of the ultimate sacrifice, the giving of one's own life in the attempt to save another's. These instances give us some idea as to the love Christ showed when He paid the price for our salvation—the giving up of His own life so we may live. Christ's actions clearly show us that He not only spoke about love but lived by it also. Out of all the qualities of character, love is the one used to describe the very nature of God.

Love lived out in the life is the greatest test of the sincerity of one's Christianity. "For I was an hungred, and ye gave me meat: I was thirsty, and ye gave me drink: I was a stranger, and ye took me in: naked, and ye clothed me: I was sick, and ye visited me: I was in prison, and ye came unto me. . . . Verily I say unto you, inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have

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**Out of all the qualities of character, Love is the one used to describe the very nature of God.**

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done it unto me" (Matt. 25:35-40). "He whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men is not a true disciple of Christ."<sup>1</sup>

"Beloved, let us love one another: for love is of God; and every one that loveth is born of God, and knoweth God. He that loveth not knoweth not God; for God is love" (1 John 4:7, 8). Christ's mission here on earth was for our salvation, but through His actions we learn a practical side to Christianity. Christ not only told us how to live a Christian life, but He showed us also.

"Love is the golden chain which binds believing hearts to one another in willing bonds of friendship, tenderness, and faithful constancy, and which binds the soul to God."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. How can we display love for one another in our lives today?
2. How do we continue to display this love characteristic even after all the pain and disappointment that we receive each day?

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1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 318.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 187.

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*By Frank Small, manager of information systems for a telecommunications company in Atlanta, Georgia.*

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# How Great Is Love?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: 1 Cor. 13:13**

In all of the times you have heard or read 1 Cor. 13:13, did you ever come away fully appreciating the importance Paul was trying to place on love?

In the Greek, the word associated with faith is *pistis*, which is synonymous with the word *trust*. This noun and its corresponding verb, *pisteuo*, are used throughout the New Testament and provide insight into the main elements of faith, namely:

1. A complete acknowledgment of God's truth (2 Thess. 2:11, 12).
2. A personal surrender to God (John 1:12).
3. Actions resulting from acceptance of and surrender to Him (2 Cor. 5:7).

Faith, therefore, goes beyond simple belief, which is merely a good faith opinion held without corresponding proof. Faith rests, not on our beliefs, but on God Himself.

The Greek word for hope is *elpis*, which refers to a favorable and confident

## Faith, therefore, goes beyond simple belief.

expectation. The New Testament places tremendous importance on hope. Romans 8:24, KJV, says, "For we are saved by hope"; Hebrews 6:19 refers to hope as "an anchor of the soul, both sure and steadfast"; and, referring to the hope of Christ's return, 1 John 3:3 states that "every man that hath this hope in him purifieth himself, even as he [Christ] is pure."

Given the importance placed on both faith and hope and their integral ties to our salvation, the importance of love becomes clearer as it is ranked above both these aspects of life. So the question then becomes, what is love, that it is placed at the zenith of the qualities of life?

*Agape* and its corresponding verb, *agapao*, are the Greek words used in the New Testament to describe love in Christianity. Unfortunately, these terms present no black-letter definition for love. In fact, true love seems to defy all intellectual interpretation or explanation, especially since the term *agapao* as used in reference to God describes a deep love from a perfect Being toward entirely unworthy objects. Yet this is not surprising, since love is synonymous with the character of God, and who among us can provide a clear definition of God? Therefore, the Bible presents love the only way it can be observed and appreciated—through the actions it precipitates (John 3:16; 1 John 4:9, 10).

## REACT

1. Is it possible to have faith and/or hope without love? What about love without faith or hope?
2. What makes love greater than faith? Than hope?

*By Jeff Jones, a CPA and attorney, and Wendy Wheeler, who works for Turner Broadcast Communications, Atlanta, Georgia.*

# The Greatest of These . . .

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: 1 Cor. 13:13**

Once my apartment was broken into. I couldn't believe God had allowed it to happen. I began securing my home, only to have it burglarized again three weeks later! Then I began to realize how much importance I placed on material things. The events I blamed God for were not so terrible after all, but were, in fact, valuable lessons of His wonderful love. God allowed these things to happen to point out that His values will always be in conflict with the world's values.

Oswald Chambers's *My Utmost for His Highest* furnishes three suggestions for implementing His values in everyday life.

**1. Surrender everything to God, not out of duty, but purely because you love Him.** "If human love does not carry a man beyond himself, it is not love.

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### **If you are in love with someone, do you always have to remind yourself that you love them?**

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If love is . . . always sensible and calculating, never carried beyond itself, it is not love at all."\* When Mary Magdalene poured out her love through her gift of precious oil, Jesus carried that precious memory to His death. She surrendered all. Think of the emotion that we could put in Jesus' heart by doing things for Him for no other reason than to do for Him!

**2. Give up focusing on our own personal holiness.** If we are proud of our good deeds, of our usefulness to God, our emphasis is in the wrong place. It is not our usefulness that is of value to God, but we ourselves! Instead of trying to manufacture our own righteousness, if we abandon ourselves to Him, He has the freedom to work through us, and *that* is how true righteousness is produced.

**3. Be spontaneous!** If you are in love with someone, do you always have to remind yourself that you love them and try hard to prove that you love them? No! Your love will come naturally, simply because you do love them. Wouldn't you like to respond to Jesus in love like that?

The greatest power God has given to this world is love. It is who He is, and He has given us glimpses of this love, which we are not able to comprehend (see Rom. 5:8). Through Jesus, God has given us a way to let the true love of heaven infiltrate our hearts. Won't you choose the love He offers?

## **REACT**

1. Examine your values. What motivates you?
2. If you realize you are not being motivated by love, what can change this?

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\* Oswald Chambers, *My Utmost for His Highest* (Westwood, N.J.: Barbour and Company, Inc., 1935), pp. 36, 37.

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By Jan Levin, a legal secretary and nursing student, Clarkston, Georgia.

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## Whispers of Love

### OPINION

**Key Text: 1 Cor. 13:8**

Is God's love too immense for mere mortals to grasp, to understand? First Corinthians 13:13 states that love is humanity's greatest aspiration, and 1 John 4:8 adds that God is love. God's greatest expression of love is the sacrificed blood of Jesus Christ. If God's love is like tumultuous thunder, humanity's love is like a whisper, barely audible. Yet people try to emulate that love with whispers of love. They are expressed in many facets of life. Whispers of love are found in the home. Parents may be disappointed in their children. They may recognize their own sinful traits in their offspring. Yet, as parents clasp the hand

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### **Humanity's love is like a whisper, barely audible.**

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of hope, they see their children as the Father sees them: very needful of comfort, understanding, acceptance, and love—whispers of love.

### **REACT**

1. Define the word *love* in your own words.
2. Why is *love* so difficult to define?

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*By Steven Pflueger, an architectural engineer, and Mike Penno, a builder, from Atlanta, Georgia.*

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# SUBSTITUTIONARY EXECUTION



**“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).**

# Soldiers, Virgins, and Lambs

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 53:12

During the American Civil War, a man was condemned to die for sleeping on guard duty. He requested to say goodbye to his wife and family. Of course, he could not be released from prison, but his brother volunteered to stand in his place while he went to say his goodbyes. Permission was given on the agreement that, should he fail to return, his brother would face the firing squad.

On the day of death, as the innocent brother was led to the appointed place of execution, a horse and rider blazed into the camp. His brother had returned. Whom do you know who would be willing to die in your place?

In many cultures we have seen the idea of some kind of substitution or sacrifice to please the gods and ensure their favor. Whether it is throwing virgins over a cliff or placing innocent babies on the red-hot hands of a huge idol, humanity seems to feel that some kind of sacrifice is required. Generally the emphasis is based on the presumed purity of the sacrifice. Why is the sacrifice never made

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## Why is the sacrifice never made of crotchety old men or sour old women?

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of crotchety old men or sour old women? Rather, the young, the beautiful, the innocent. Could it be that every culture wants to give of their best to their god or gods, hoping to gain their favor or appease their anger?

What a difference we find in the one true, living God—no angry God who waits to see whether we can somehow win favor. Not this God! He loves even those who turn their backs on Him. We were unable to bridge the gap between ourselves and God. We, children of Adam, were under the same laws as the rest of creation (Gen. 1:11, 12, 24). Like things produce like things. Evil could only bring forth evil—an unchangeable law of nature.

No wonder God became the Lamb to be sacrificed. He knew it was of no use to expect sinful humanity to come up with some worthy sacrifice. He knew that only He had the ability to take the first step. The lamb's throat was slit. Its life blood flows for you and me. What kind of Being would do that for another? Why would He do it?

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*By Daniel M. Davis, a nursing student and lay-pastoral assistant, Pembroke (North Carolina) Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

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## Three Looks at the Lamb

### LOGOS

Isa. 52:13–53:12

New Testament history of Christ is not a truly complete biography of His life. It records only 44 days of His ministry. More than 50 percent of Christ's story is about the cross. Even the stories told reflect at least 75 percent on the meaning of the cross. Our Scripture lesson in Isaiah is similar in literary composition. The prophets of both testaments do not present the actual details of our Lord's life and story, but more a painted picture of the suffering, sacrifice, and gift to sinful humanity. Isaiah paints three perspectives as he looks toward the Lamb.

#### The First Look: Our Condition and Need (Isa. 52:13–53:6)

The first look is a humbling look, because it reveals our condition. We see ourselves there. We see that Christ was there *as* us, and God judged Him *as* us. Therefore, the Christian doesn't work *for* victory, but works *from* victory. We stand in awe because we realize our condition, feeling undeserving and unworthy. Therefore, we are speechless because of the great gift and sacrifice. Even the most exalted and powerful people stand in awe before Him (52:15).

Verse 4 mentions the consequences of sin, not sin itself.<sup>1</sup> Christ died for our sin, not our diseases or sicknesses. The consequence of sin is death, an ultimate separation from God—a sorrow so deep that life is not worth living, so painful that Judas, with his strong pride, could not accept that he was wrong and needed a substitute, a Saviour.

The lamb and the cross humble both the most lowly and the most prestigious person—if only they pause to look at the Lamb. “The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld.”<sup>2</sup>

#### The Second Look: God's Authentic Response (53:5, 7-9)

By His gift (wounds, stripes, death) we see God responding. To look again, we must see the substitute: a perfect, sinless God paying the price of our sinfulness—a gift of God that is totally undeserved (Heb. 7:25). “Christ was treated as we deserve, that we might be treated as He deserves. He was condemned for our sins, in which He had no share, that we might be justified by His righteousness, in which we had no share. He suffered the death which was ours, that we might receive the life which was His. ‘With his stripes we are healed.’ ”<sup>3</sup>

That is an authentic response by God Himself. The lamb symbolizes sacrificial love and the promise of forgiveness from God to all who look at the Lamb and accept the gift.

#### The Third Look: The Claims of the Cross and Our Response (verses 10-12)

This is a picture of hope and promise. As we look at the Lamb, we see that He made intercession *for* us. “Let the repenting sinner fix his eyes upon the ‘Lamb

of God, which taketh away the sin of the world' (John 1:29); and by beholding, he becomes changed. His fear is turned to joy, his doubts to hope. Gratitude springs up. The stony heart is broken. A tide of love sweeps into the soul."<sup>4</sup>

Our response (Phil. 2:12, 13) is experiential, involving a divine-and-human cooperative relationship. The response is *not* like other religions (Hinduism, spiritualism, etc.) that take possession of the life. It is a divine-human cooperative relationship. "Christ in you" is the Divine working, refining, changing, and growing of a person into spiritual adulthood. It is "the work of a lifetime."<sup>5</sup> Does not correct doctrine lead to correct behavior? Either we will experience the judgment

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## **The New Testament records only 44 days of Christ's ministry.**

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at the cross or at the end. How have you responded to the cross? Do you see that *you* should be there instead of Christ the Lamb?

### **REACT**

1. What is the difference between Christianity and other religions?
2. What is the difference between Seventh-day Adventist Christianity and Protestant or Catholic Christianity?
3. Describe in your own words the "divine-human cooperative relationship."

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1. Edward J. Young, *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 3, *The Book of Isaiah* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing, 1972), p. 346.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 25.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 439.

5. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 317.

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*By Chaplain (MAJ) Robert R. Davidson, clinical supervisor and director of the Chaplain Family Life Ministry and Training Center, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.*

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## When We All Get to Heaven, What Will *You* Do?

### TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Isa. 53:4-6

In the seventies I heard a sermon by Morris Venden with the following illustration. "One time I gave an anonymous, one-question quiz to high-school students: 'When you get to heaven, what will be the first thing you'll do?'"

"As I read over the various answers, they strangely fell into a similar category: 'When I get to heaven, I'd like to see who else got there'; 'I'd like to see who didn't get there'; 'I'd be so surprised I don't know what I'd do'; 'I'd like to ride a lion'; 'I'd like to see my house'; 'I'd like to start asking questions.' And on and on and on.

"My heart was sinking, until I came to one that I'd been hoping to see: 'When I get to heaven, the first thing I want to do is to cast myself at the feet of Jesus and thank Him for making it possible for me to be there.'"<sup>1</sup>

This illustration shows how necessary it is "to spend a thoughtful hour each

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### He taunted it, spit on it, struck it with a stick.

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day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point and let the imagination grasp each scene, *especially the closing ones*."<sup>2</sup> By doing so we keep focused on the meaning of heaven and what our Saviour did for each of us so we may spend eternity with Him.

"I invite you *to look* to the Man of Calvary. Look to Him whose head was crowned with the crown of thorns, who bore the cross of shame, who went step by step down the path of humiliation. . . . Day by day let us sit at the feet of Jesus, and learn of Him, that in our conversation, our conduct, our dress, and in all our affairs, we may reveal the fact that Jesus is ruling and reigning over us."<sup>3</sup>

Years ago I saw several presentations of "The Face of Christ" by Gilbert Amelio, in Takoma Park, Maryland. He started with a mound of clay. With his movement synchronized to classical music, he sculpted the head and shoulders of Christ. Once it was completed, Amelio assumed the role of a Roman soldier. He taunted it, spit on it, struck it with a stick, and even threw red food coloring on it to simulate bleeding. The first time I saw this, I felt it was almost sacrilegious. Then, as I pondered its significance, I realized that no matter how bad this appeared to be, it paled in comparison to Christ's suffering for our salvation.

"Those who are lifted up with pride, whose souls are filled with vanity, should look upon this picture of their Redeemer, and humble themselves in the dust."<sup>4</sup>

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1. Morris Venden, "How to Make Christianity Real" (Arroyo Grande, Calif.: Concerned Communications, 1977), p. 132.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

3. "Confessing Christ," *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, May 10, 1892.

4. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1147.

# Behold, My Servant

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Isa. 52:13**

Capture the impression that Isaiah as a young boy had while watching the death of the sacrificial lamb. It was his turn as a young Israelite to bring his dearest lamb, given him by his father to care for, and now he had to bring it to the altar of sacrifice. Nothing is more powerful and moving than having to go through a real-life situation. Writing under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Isaiah can now draw us nearer to God by telling us of the suffering Saviour and His glorious work.

Chapter 53 of Isaiah is one of the most powerful Messianic prophecies presenting Christ as the sinless, substitute Lamb for those who believe in Him. Isaiah wrote this prophecy some 700 years before Jesus was born in Bethlehem to point us to the Lamb. God knew all that His Son was to endure, and He gave this message to Isaiah to hand down to future generations.

This wonderful message begins with “Behold, my servant” (13:52), the same

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## **Nothing is more powerful and moving than having to go through a real-life situation.**

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person whom He continues to speak about in chapter 53. No other chapter gives so vivid a presentation of His promised atonement in providing salvation for all the redeemed.

Isaiah directs our attention to the work of the Suffering Servant; then he describes the exaltation that followed His humiliation. The introductory expression, “So will he sprinkle many nations” (52:15, NIV), might not mean much to those who know nothing of the religious observance God prescribed for the Israelites. But there is great importance in the ceremonial cleansing by sprinkling blood, oil, or water in a spiritual cleansing. The apostle Peter showed he understood the meaning of this verse when he wrote to the believers in many nations, calling them “elect . . . unto . . . sprinkling of the blood of Jesus Christ” (1 Pet. 1:2). Thus this clause summarizes the atoning work of Christ.

Sin brings death, but sinners do not have to die their own death. God revealed to Isaiah that He would come down to earth and die for us on the cross and be the “Lamb of God, who taketh away the sin of the world.” It is evident that when Isaiah sacrificed the substitute lamb, he saw the good news of salvation communicated by God in Eden. Its blameless blood flowed, pointing forward to Jesus, who would come and lay down His life for us as God’s sacrificial lamb. Though “we like sheep have gone astray,” on Calvary, Jesus won back everything. If we entrust our lives to Him now, we will live forever with Him.

## **REACT**

In what creative ways can someone in the 1990s gain a greater appreciation for God’s sacrifice on the cross?

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*By Chaplain (CPT) John Borges, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.*

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## Troubled, but Never Alone

### HOW-TO

Key Text: Isa. 53:8

“I don’t like being married, and I think we should divorce. I don’t mean to hurt you, but I’m just not happy. I wasn’t ready for marriage; it was a mistake.”

I could not believe my ears! Prior to hearing those words, I thought I was on top of the world. I was married to the most beautiful, kind, spiritual woman in the world. We had good jobs, a brand-new house, and a caring church family. It was too idyllic to end in a divorce!

“I don’t mean to hurt you . . .” With those words, her moving out of the house, and the procession of steps that would forever sever the legal and emotional bonds of matrimony, I was crushed. I still loved her! How could she *not* hurt me by doing this? I felt more broken than any other person had ever been.

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### “I don’t like being married, and I think we should divorce.”

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At some time all of us have experienced terrific emotional grief—feelings of loss, sadness, injustice. Because of these significant emotional events, we’ve felt ready to throw in the towel.

Through my grief I was drawn closer to Jesus and opened my heart to take in more of the Holy Spirit. The Lord gave me comfort and, through Scripture, led me to see that there is One who has suffered greater loss and felt more pain than I did.

When we are feeling so torn and broken, we should turn to Psalm 69. Through prophecy, the Saviour declared, “Reproach hath broken my heart; and I am full of heaviness: and I looked for some to take pity, but there was none; and for comforters, but I found none” (verse 20). While He was on the cross, Jesus felt more emotional torment than any of us will ever know. He who is perfect and without sin bore the iniquities of each generation before Him and those to come after. Yet, despite the tremendous grief, guilt, and feeling of isolation, Christ found comfort in the penitent thief on the cross (Luke 23:39-43). Our Substitute (Isa. 53:8) ignored His own suffering and beseeched the women of Jerusalem to weep not for Him, but for themselves, their children, and the fallen city He so loved (Luke 23:27-31). In His final moments of mortal life, His heart went out to His suffering mother, instructing John to take care of her (John 19:25-27).

By way of the cross, Jesus showed us that *nothing*, no matter how bad it seems, leaves us without hope (Rom. 8:28). His love and concern for others during His entire life on earth, and especially during those nine hours on the cross, serve as a paradigm for us, showing that our Father will never shun us and that we need to think of others’ suffering rather than our own pain. In times of distress and gloom, we need only to turn our eyes to the cross for hope and comfort.

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*By TSGT Steve Schultz, a safety technician with the U.S. Air Force, Pope Air Force Base, North Carolina.*

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# Let's Get Real About the Cross!

## OPINION

**Key Text:** Isa. 53:6

Do you ever wonder why we put things off? We delay studying for a test, finishing the lab assignment, reading the book, making an apology, even writing this article.

Maybe it is because we think we have more time than we do. The tendency is never to get around to the cross. King Agrippa put it off: "Almost thou persuadest me" (Acts 26:28).

During Desert Shield and Storm, before we crossed into Iraq, hundreds of soldiers of all faiths, even "no faith," were asking for a cross of some type. At the last services and Communion, many more soldiers asked for a cross. Several asked for another cross to add to the two or three already hanging on their dog

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## Several asked for another cross to add to the two or three already hanging on their dog tags.

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tags. Did they think of it like a lucky rabbit's foot? Probably. Others just felt there was some power in that cross. Well, there really is, isn't there?

I mingled with hundreds of family members and soldiers during their last hours before deploying to Mogadishu, Somalia. I conducted a service of prayer and gave a message of encouragement and hope. Several couples requested prayer. Dozens of Bibles went into rucksacks, and many more crosses were placed on dog tags. As I was setting up for the service, one soldier fell on his knees when I brought out a large cross for Communion service. He was crying and whispering as I put my hand on his shoulder. I reassured him that he was at the best place he could be—at the foot of the cross.

One week later some of these soldiers were ambushed, wounded, and had their vehicles blown out from under them. Were any of those who prayed at the cross or attended the service involved in the ambush? I wonder whether the soldier who was kneeling and weeping was one of those ambushed? At the time of this writing, I don't even know their names. I think it would be safe to say that a lot more of them will be becoming serious about the cross!

Is the cross just "hanging around your neck," or are you daily kneeling at its foot (see Isa. 53:11)?

## REACT

1. In what ways have I demonstrated "foxhole religion" in my own life?
2. Of what practical benefit is the cross in everyday life?

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*By Chaplain (CPT) Jeff Fisher, Fort Bragg, North Carolina.*

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# HALL OF FAME



**“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb. 11:13).**

# Faith and Monsoon Clouds

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Heb. 11:1**

I was desperate to see Halley's Comet. I waited for the night the experts had declared was the optimum viewing time. Wakened by my 3:00 a.m. alarm, I clambered onto the roof of our mission house in the warm Sri Lankan air, excited by imaginations of a magnificent sight. Looking up, I saw it, huge and expansive in the night sky—thick clouds. How in the world could I have forgotten monsoon? The clouds would be there for months. Crestfallen for a moment, I remembered something. Jesus said that even a minute amount of faith could move mountains! My problem was only a few puffy clouds!

I prayed earnestly, "God, You know I've wanted to see that comet. I know You are a powerful God, and even mountains are not a problem for You. I believe You can move these clouds. Amen." Waiting 20 minutes, I looked up again, confident that God rewards the faithful. I was amazed. That cloud had not moved an inch.

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## **A university professor, he was thrown into prison for not joining the Communist party.**

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I gave God another chance to do it, but eventually headed for bed.

Years later, while working as a minister in Albania, I was talking to the president of the Ex-Prisoners Association. A university professor, he was thrown into prison for not joining the Communist party. He was tortured for 10 years; electrodes were put into incisions in his arms and legs, and current was run through him. All his toenails and fingernails were pulled out. When released, he was made to sweep streets. He didn't tell me too much more. What astounded me was that he sounded neither resentful nor angry. Indeed, he was hopeful for the future! "You don't sound bitter for what happened to you," I said. "What kept you going?"

"Faith," he replied.

"Faith in what?" I probed.

"Faith in God," he said softly. I felt awed.

Such experiences often make us disturbed, yet a little intrigued by faith—disturbed when our faith doesn't seem to work and intrigued by the Abrahamic, out-of-this-world experiences of others. Often the more we think about such things, the more we're frustrated. Our lives don't seem to provide much opportunity for great faith to make even a guest appearance!

I once heard, "It's not great faith that counts, but faith in a great God." Not great people making the incredible look simple, but a great God using simple people to perform the incredible—not for their own glory, but to inspire others for His. This week, may we glimpse a vision of a great God. Then perhaps the unseen and the distant will one day become a reality.

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*By Gavan Anthony, a pastor in the South England Conference, Watford, Hertfordshire, England.*

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# Preserving Faith

## LOGOS

Heb. 10:35-37; 11:1-40; 12:1, 2

### Context

If, as some of the ancient Church Fathers suggested, the book of Hebrews began life as a résumé of a sermon or series of sermons of Paul, we hear the preacher at his rhetorical summit in chapter 11. As he ascends to his oratorical peak, the names of heroes and historic episodes pour out in a cascade. The minds of his hearers catch at a name, skitter away in imagination, and come racing back. The pace is *presto*, the emphasis *crescendo*, until the preacher is out of breath and pauses. “What shall I more say?” (verse 32). But there are yet more heroes of faith and more inspiring deeds that cannot be overlooked. The congregation sits on edge of pew until the preacher climaxes his litany in his punch line: Like them, let us, “run with perseverance.” Don’t give up. Hold on!

From a homiletic perspective, this chapter illustrates well the preacher’s preparation. He is acquainted with the needs of his congregation, and his language is inclusive. He identifies with his hearers (10:39), and he has read widely.

Our chapter this week also illustrates the book of Hebrews’ pastoral purpose. It is not a systematic theology. It is a pastoral document. Some believers have given up their faith (see verses 35-39). The delay in the Messiah’s return has persuaded them that they must have been deceived in becoming Christians. Anxious that more of his hearers will become drawn to their former Judaistic faith, he has in earlier passages labored carefully to emphasize the superiority of the Christian way with its better priesthood, better sanctuary, better services, and better promises. Now he appeals to them, “Do not throw away your confidence” (verse 35, NIV). You need to persevere. If it seems that time drags on and the promises of God will not be fulfilled, live by faith. God’s promises are sure.

“But how can you be so sure?” the preacher imagines his congregation asking. “Nothing has happened yet! Isn’t this just whistling in the dark? What does it mean to believe or to live by faith?”

### Faith: Defined or Described?

“Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see” (11:1, NIV). This is the only place in Scripture that approaches a definition of *faith*. But it is not really a definition. It is much more a description of some of its functions. Hebrews 11 does for the concept of faith what Paul did for the concept of love in 1 Corinthians 13. Neither is easy to define. Both are best understood by observing what they do.

The word translated “substance” in the Authorized Version is the Greek term “*hupostasis*.” The word can be translated in various ways. Does it mean something objective, like the real essence of something as contrasted with something that only seems to be so? Does it mean “guarantee,” as some suggest, or does it have a more “subjective” meaning, like “assurance” or “conviction”? Hebrews 11:3b, 7a, and 27b would suggest that the preacher is concerned with our attitude to things that are not seen. Just as physical eyesight produces conviction or evidence of visible things, so faith is the organ that enables people (like Moses, in

verse 27) to see the invisible order. "Conviction" would seem the best translation.\*

Our author-preacher asserts that faith is a profound conviction that puts the statements of God to the proof by acting upon them and in the acting finds their reality. Faith is not just a mental assent. It is active. Thus it becomes the key that opens to us all the treasures of God.

### **Faith Illustrated**

Faith is best understood by looking at the people who exhibited it, says the author of Hebrews. Just look what it did in the lives of these heroes of the past. Reading the list is like taking a walk around the chapels in Westminster Abbey. Here are the wise and the famous of all ages.

These pioneers and pilgrims, 16 of whom he mentions directly by name and 20 or more to whom he only alludes, are a distinguished cast. There are the predictable names like Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Moses, and David. Then these

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## **The delay in the Messiah's return has persuaded them that they must have been deceived in becoming Christians.**

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are some lesser-known heroes too, like Jephthah, Rahab, Judith, and Eleazer of Maccabean times.

The reason these people are mentioned in this catalog of spiritual heroism is not that they were perfect through their entire lives. The list should not discourage us. They were not super-saints! Rather, they were people who trusted God. Confident in the Lord and His promises, they took Him at His Word.

The author of Hebrews is not intending to pass moral judgment on the particular details connected with the people and episodes he mentions. Knotty moral dilemmas might be observed in the lives of not a few of these pilgrims (Rahab and Samson, for example). But the point of our author-preacher is that these were future-oriented people. Travelers all, they were intensely aware of the unseen. Their courage, their loyalty, their perseverance was motivated by the conviction that what God had said would come to pass.

Hebrews calls these heroes "witnesses" (12:1). This does not refer to a grandstand full of spiritual spectators witnessing our struggles and cheering us on, but rather "believers" who testified to the possibilities of the life of faith.

Finally, our preacher-author directs our attention again to Jesus, who is the ultimate witness to the life of faith. He is the trailblazer, the pathfinder of our faith. Fix your eyes on Jesus, and you will never lose the way.

### **REACT**

1. What problems today tempt people to give up their faith?
2. Does hearing about the exploits of other Christians discourage you or encourage you? Why?

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\* F. F. Bruce, *The Epistle to the Hebrews* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 278.

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*By Gilbert M. Valentine, teacher of pastoral studies, Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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# A Faith That Perseveres

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Heb. 10:36**

Some time ago, for a class assignment, I studied the letters Ellen White wrote during the last three years of her life. *What occupied her thinking*, I wondered, *as she was about to end her life of ministry?* Two themes stand out.

First of all, she was concerned that people should reach the full potential of godliness God had in store for them. She was burdened that the cause of the Lord should keep going at an ever-increasing rate till the soon-coming advent of Christ. And she managed to express this concern without sounding legalistic.

"I greatly desire that the work we do at this time shall impress itself deeply upon heart and mind and soul. Perplexities will increase; but let us, as believers

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### **She was concerned that people should reach the full potential of godliness.**

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in God, encourage one another. Let us not lower the standard, but keep it lifted high, looking to Him who is the Author and Finisher of our Faith. . . . Cling to the Mighty Helper, not letting pass one opportunity for speaking a word in season. There is heaven to win,—a life that measures with the life of God to obtain. Eternal life means everything to the receiver. We must strive earnestly to win souls to God."<sup>1</sup>

Second, although there was a lot of work to do before Christ's return, none of it should take away our joy and assurance of salvation. "Put away your distrust of our heavenly Father. . . . Do not talk of your own inefficiency and your defeats. When despair would seem to be sweeping over your soul, look to Jesus, saying, 'He lives to make intercession for me.' . . . You may believe that Jesus is true to you, even though you feel yourself to be the weakest and most unworthy of His children."<sup>2</sup> That's the kind of woman you will find Mrs. White to be in her last letters—always looking to Christ in assurance, lifting Him up.

Some years earlier she had said, "God designs that His people shall fix their eyes heavenward, looking for the glorious appearing of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. . . . By watching they become strong; they overcome sloth and selfishness and love of ease. Affliction's fire kindles upon them, and the waiting time seems long. They sometimes grieve, and faith falters; but they rally again, overcome their fears and doubts, and while their eyes are directed heavenward, say to their adversaries: 'I am watching, I am waiting the return of my Lord.'"<sup>3</sup> This is faith that perseveres.

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1. Letter 8, 1912.

2. Letter 2, 1914.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 194, 195.

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*By Reimar Vetne, a senior ministerial student, Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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## Faith in a Grain of Corn

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** Heb. 11:1, 6

“By faith” is used or implied 30 times in Hebrews 11 (NIV). Each one is an elaboration of verse 1: “Faith is being sure of what we hope for and certain of what we do not see.” But, in each instance of “by faith,” some prior knowledge or practice forms the basis surety. Abraham, for example, emigrated without knowing where he was going, but his faith was based on his previous relationship with God (verse 8). God had proved Himself reliable and trustworthy. So when He said Go, Abraham went, believing God would provide for him.

Faith is not a magical formula that applies to every situation. “By faith” leads to successful outcomes based on past experiences. The possibility of failure,

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### The geneticist finishes with 976.6 billion kernels.

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nevertheless, is real. Factors that contribute to failure are many, but faith is strong enough to overcome.

A geneticist, a hungry tramp, and a farmer each finds a kernel of corn. The farmer, who has enough corn to plant 100 hectares, will see little value in one kernel. The tramp might also disregard the kernel of corn as he makes his way to the next bin where he hopes to find a meal of bread. The geneticist, however, is intrigued by just one kernel in exploring the richness of its gene pool. In faith, the geneticist prepares soil and plants the kernel. A plant grows. Faith is confirmed. The new cob bears 250 kernels. Now all 250 kernels are planted, and there are 250 cobs more, each with 250 kernels. The geneticist continues the experiment for another three years and finishes with 976.6 billion kernels—each one having a little bit of that first kernel.

The geneticist discovers that the original kernel had invisible coding for different colors, size, shape, and smoothness. A knowledge of genetics, seed storage, and plant growth sustained his faith in the outcome of the experiment. The geneticist had no control over the fertility of the corn, its germination, growth, or fruiting. These are faith obstacles.

The Christian’s faith needs cultivating and nurturing, based on personal experiences and knowledge. In a sense, faith is putting theory to the test.

“Without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him” (verse 6). God is seeking to bless us through the application of our faith.

### REACT

What other analogies from science can you think of to describe faith?

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*By Albert A. C. Waite, principal lecturer in science at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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# Ready, Set, Go!

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Heb. 12:1, 2

Hebrews 11 has always intimidated me. That long list of overcomers who had faith that could have moved mountains is enough to scare anyone. How can you or I, or anyone, live up to that high standard? It seems impossible. This is because we fail to continue reading through to the end of the chapter. There, we would discover that this long list is given, not to discourage us but rather, for our encouragement! Here are three guidelines on how you, too, can be a part of God's hall of fame.

**1. Don't forget your fans.** I like to think of that cloud of witnesses as a cheering section. Even though they are not alive now, their experiences cheer us on. Jesus and the angels also want us to win. I can picture them yelling, "Come on!"

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## And He has run this race before, so He knows about all the holes in the road.

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You can do it! Don't stop now; you're almost there!" This must be the most illustrious cheering section in the universe.

**2. Never give up.** Have you ever heard the saying "Good things don't come easy"? Much as we don't want to believe it, it's true. If you want something really good, such as a college education or a new car, you usually have to work for it. Lucia, my roommate, is from Romania, and she works almost constantly to pay her tuition. Sometimes she feels like giving up, but she realizes the reward is worth it. How much more is that true for our goal. "I know that the sufferings we experience now are not even worthy to compare with the glory that will be revealed in us" (Rom. 8:18, author's paraphrase).

**3. Keep your eye on the Coach.** Jesus is the ultimate Coach! While we are running the race, He doesn't wait at the end of the track for us, but He runs alongside us. If we fall down, He picks us up. If we take the wrong way, He turns us around. And He never yells at us. Not only that, He is "the author and finisher of our faith" (Heb. 12:2, NKJV), so He will take care of the results. And He has run this race before, so He knows about all the holes in the road. All we have to do is believe that He can bring us to the end. Now that's good news!

## REACT

1. What can we do to be a cheering section for other people?
2. Why is it so difficult for us to accept Jesus' help in our lives?

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*By Trisha Missinne, a history-and-religion major at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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## Tickets for Free?

### OPINION

**Key Text: Gal. 3:6-11**

Imagine. In an Arabian bazaar, you lose all your money, checks, tickets, credit cards, the lot! The only solution you see is accepting some shady employment to earn money for a ticket home. Someone, however, offers you a seat in a plane to your destination—for free! Would you feel you could accept the offer only if you could remunerate him in some way? In real life we would probably accept such a gracious offer without feeling obligated to make compensation. In our spiritual experience, however, many find it almost impossible.

Hebrews 11 draws our attention to characters from the past who demonstrated faith as their *modus operandi*. For us today, “by faith” also needs to be our *leit-motif*. Its centrality in the gospel demands it.

We are indebted to Martin Luther for his articulation of this theme. We know

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### **Hebrews 11 draws attention to characters who demonstrated faith as their *modus operandi*.**

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we are declared just by faith alone in Christ. This insight helps us see that we are pronounced righteous on the basis of Christ’s perfection alone. This righteousness is passive in the sense that we are not declared to be in right relationship with God on the grounds of our doing. It exists only outside us. We are accepted in spite of being unacceptable. This acceptance on the basis of faith alone does not result from infused grace. At the same time we are both sinner *and* pronounced righteous. Justification is being declared righteous, not being made righteous. This righteousness by faith alone must not be confused with sanctification.

We are often confronted with the popular idea that Jesus is our model, which implies that we can overcome sin and some day live as sinlessly as Jesus did. Such a perfectionist approach, according to Paul and as elucidated by Luther, is incompatible with righteousness by faith. We will need to sharpen our concept of righteousness in light of the reformers’ understanding if we wish to remain the true Protestants we claim to be.

Toying with the idea of becoming sinless at the end of the age exposes us not only to uncertainty about our salvation in Christ, but it focuses our attention on our performance, not our Saviour’s. The Hebrews 11 perspective will reform us as it did the church. It enables us to experience the healing power of this “by faith” relationship with God. Why stay on in some shady employment in the desert when accepting a ticket offered by faith alone will get you home?

### **REACT**

How do you understand righteousness by faith alone?

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*By Marcus Witte, a graduate student from Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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# SOMETHING FROM NOTHING



**“In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth” (Gen. 1:1).**

# Before the Beginning

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Gen. 1:31**

The tiny points of starlight barely reach this dark corner of the galaxy, but the Creator, the Emperor of all worlds, is about to change the history of the universe forever. He carefully selects the spot for the new planet and begins. In one word, He accomplishes what Einstein would later only hint at describing: He makes something out of nothing. Matter exists where before there was emptiness. Light, the measuring stick of all future energy, is created first.

Immediately afterward, God sets apart an arbitrary time period and calls it a day. He smiles, for in doing this, He has formulated a simple test for His greatest creations to show their love for Him. In a matter of days, God creates water in a gaseous state, hard solids, and His most original work—life. He makes plants and

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### **In one word, He accomplishes what Einstein would later only hint at describing.**

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animals with such variety that only the world could hold it all. Some are so large, they block out the new sun. Others are so small, they cannot be seen.

In the midst of all this wonder, God sculpts a self-portrait. No other being on any previously created world can boast this fact. Humanity was created in the image of God. Satisfied with His work, He brings this crowning artwork to life to rule over this world. At the end, God sets apart a day for no apparent reason except to give humanity an opportunity to give witness of their love for their God. The Sabbath not only commemorates the fact that God created, but it reminds us that God is the only one who can create, giving Him the right to be God. Every time we celebrate the Sabbath, we pronounce our belief that “the Lord—he is God” (1 Kings 18:39, NIV).

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*By John Hammonds, a computer specialist technician from Indianapolis, Indiana.*

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# The Birth of Our World

## LOGOS

**Gen. 1:1-31; 2:1-4; Ps. 33:6-9**

The origin of the planet. The origin of the species. We revel in the display of power that was responsible for Creation. We delight, even fantasize, in the sequence of events that describe the birth of our world.

The Genesis account fills the mind with soft pastel images, the kind that might illustrate a child's Bible storybook. It is a pleasant seven-day journey that lasts the limits of imagination.

Yet the readers of this week's lesson may wonder why we are reexamining the familiar story of Creation. Is there any chance of making new discoveries? Will there be any refreshing relevance to our real-time world?

The following thoughts and questions are worth exploring during our week's study:

- God the Creator is also God the Re-creator.
- As He created physical life, does God create spiritual life?
- Why did God create?
- Does God continue to create? In what dimension?

Before we launch into any study on Creation or re-creation, we must deal with a question of faith that affects our entire system of beliefs. Unless this is done, we might have reason to question our origin, our hope, and our destiny.

Examine these verses: "The Lord God made the earth and the heavens" (Gen. 2:4, NIV); and "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made; and all the host of them by the breath of his mouth." "For he spake, and it was done; he commanded, and it stood fast" (Ps. 33:6, 9, KJV).

The central and most significant element common to each of these verses is clearly and simply proclaimed in Genesis 1:1, "In the beginning God . . ." Acceptance of the biblical account of Creation demands or at least presupposes a belief in the existence of the divine Creator.

When Paul states that "by faith we understand that the universe was formed at God's command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible" (Heb. 11:3, NIV), is he confirming Creation or the Creator? Could Paul be implying that the Creation confirms the Creator? "For since the creation of the world God's invisible qualities—his eternal power and divine nature—have been clearly seen" (Rom. 1:20).

Along with the apostle, we need to be assured that it was the power of the Godhead streaming through Christ Jesus that created all that is in the heavens and on the earth (John 1:1-3). The very existence of matter, in all or any of its known forms, can be attributed only to the divine science of a Creator-God.

These concepts may be, for many, so basic as to appear unessential in our consideration of this week's lesson. Yet as was the case of the early Christian church, we can become so caught up in our religious systems, in defending our faith, that the very components so carefully designed to give meaning to worshiping God can displace Him. We can easily forget that God is still intimately involved in our lives, in His church, in the affairs of His planet.

It is hoped that as we reexamine the Creation story, we will have a new and

greater awareness of the omniscience, omnipresence, and omnipotence of our God—that the finite was made by the Infinite (Ps. 90:2, 10). Our special connection with God, our link between mortal and immortal, is strengthened by the belief that Adam and Eve were created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26). This relationship is further explained by the truth implied in Jeremiah's testimony (1:5) that he and (by natural extension) all members of the human family originated as a plan in the creative mind of God.

From the vantage point of the Genesis story, we may be led to new vistas of Christ as Creator (John 1:3; Eph. 3:9), as our ransom from sin (Matt. 20:28), and as our Re-creator. This third view is made clear in Christ's response to Nicodemus. The Saviour presents the divine plan of regeneration and explains the miraculous process whereby we are to be restored (John 3:1-21).

We can also find in this marvelous account of our origin many parallels of practical value in our daily spiritual lives. One is found in Genesis 1:4. As God

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## **We will have a new and greater awareness that the finite was made by the Infinite.**

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separated the darkness from the light, so He desires to separate us from the darkness of sin into His marvelous light (1 Pet. 2:1).

Unlike the brief history of creating a perfect world, the work of recreating the divine likeness in His children is a heavenly work of patience. It is a task that He willingly begins at our invitation and longs to conclude, with our cooperation, at the second coming of Jesus (Heb. 12:2; Phil. 1:6).

Paul says that for him the process is continuous. He understood the necessity of dying daily to be reborn in Christ. Each day has its own ending, followed by a new beginning (1 Cor. 15:31). As it was for the apostle, so we can find power in the promise: "In the beginning God" (Gen. 1:1).

In the Creation story we discover who God is! We can be certain that nothing is so complex or difficult that He can't deal with it. We are reminded that God thought, God spoke, and God created and can re-create our personal world. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature: old things are passed away; behold, all things are become new" (2 Cor. 5:17, KJV).

The same God who can restore our souls will someday soon take this entire planet out of the darkness of sin and into light. We can let our minds soar with John the revelator as we see through eyes of faith the fulfillment of the promise that there will be "a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away" (Rev. 21:1, NIV). Our God is the Alpha and Omega, the Beginning and the End, the Author and Finisher—the *Creator*!

### **REACT**

1. What is the appropriate relationship, if any, between science and religion?
2. How should a rational Christian respond to claims of science that do not support a biblical worldview?
3. What is the relationship, if any, of God's omnipresence and the concept of pantheism?

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*By D. Neal Boger, teacher of religion and science, Indianapolis Junior Academy, Indianapolis, Indiana.*

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# The Great Master Artist

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Ps. 33:9**

God made Creation seem so easy. He said the words He wanted to say, and “it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:9, NIV). There were no colors to mix on a palette, no fabrics to match, and no planning committees from which to gain approval.

Living in Indiana, as a transplanted native Californian, I have developed a keen appreciation of the changing seasons. Spring, with its emerging green of new life, and autumn, with its explosions of orange, yellow, and red, remind me, during drives through the countryside, of God’s Creation masterpiece.

“The blue heavens were its dome; the earth, with its delicate flowers and carpet of living green, was its floor; and the leafy branches of the goodly trees were its canopy. Its walls were hung with the most magnificent adornings—the

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## **There were no colors to mix on a palette, no fabrics to match, and no planning committees.**

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handiwork of the great Master Artist.”<sup>1</sup>

I gain a small sense of what my God has made when, on a hayride, I tilt my head back to see the sky awash in starlight, or when I stop by the roadside to stare across a field carpeted with corn.

“The laws and operations of nature, which have engaged men’s study for six thousand years, were opened to their minds by the infinite Framer and Upholder of all. They held converse with leaf and flower and tree, gathering from each the secrets of its life. With every living creature, from the mighty leviathan that playeth among the waters, to the insect mote that floats in the sunbeam, Adam was familiar. He had given to each its name, and He was acquainted with the nature and habits of all. God’s glory in the heavens, the innumerable worlds in their orderly revolutions, ‘the balancings of the clouds,’ the mysteries of light and sound, of day and night—all were open to the study of our first parents. On every leaf of the forest or stone of the mountains, in every shining star, in earth and air and sky, God’s name was written. The order and harmony of creation spoke to them in infinite wisdom and power. They were ever discovering some attraction that filled their hearts with deeper love, and called forth fresh expressions of gratitude.”<sup>2</sup>

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 49.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 51.

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*By Michael R. Mendenhall, an industrial-equipment salesman in Indianapolis, Indiana.*

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# The Significant Truth

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Rev. 4:11**

In His infinite power, God was and is never indebted to preexisting matter. We know that everything came into existence by the utterance of His mouth. "Just how God accomplished the work of creation He has never revealed to men; human science cannot search out the secrets of the Most High. His creative power is as incomprehensible as His existence." However, "Through faith we understand that the worlds were framed by the word of God, so that things which are seen were not made of things which do appear" (Heb. 11:3).

In Genesis 1 we see the importance of His majestic power, which leads us to trust in His Word. Read John 1:1-3. All things were made by God; if it were not for Him and His wisdom to have things functioning together to accomplish unity

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## Humanity has always longed for fulfillment in something beyond its power.

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in our universe, how chaotic life or the universe would be! How well do we function and have unity among us?

Science cannot solve the many problems confronting humanity, for we need a source that is beyond human capabilities. We realize that something is lacking within all of us, and we must keep two things ever in mind:

**1. Spiritual growth.** Observing plant life, we see its slow-but-effective growth as it develops from day to day, a lesson that we can apply to our lives. The plant knows nothing, but it relies on its Creator for the unknown future. The Creator provides the rain, the sunlight, the carbon dioxide, and the food the plant needs. As the plant is nourished, it matures to bear fruit. The only way we can grow and develop is by constantly fertilizing our roots. We *must* search and study the Scriptures with prayer and dedication. Too often, we find ourselves too occupied with the materialistic things of this world. Is it really worth it? (Matt. 16:26).

**2. Trust for and in God.** When we are stressed, do we surrender to the problems, snares, and temptations too easily? Do we truly trust? In spite of humanity's desperate efforts to save our world, God is the Almighty, and only through Him do we see real beauty. We should rely on Him for spiritual growth. Humanity has always longed for fulfillment in something beyond its power. We have come up with recycling to preserve our environment; however, we should consider that God has existed throughout eternity and that recycling has been around since humanity's fall (see Gen. 2:5). Our trust and faith in God will sustain us to the end; only through Jesus Christ do we have true re-creation.

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\* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 113.

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By G. Cassandra Lewis, a computer technology student at Martin University, Indianapolis, Indiana.

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# Discussing Creation With Scientific Researchers

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: John 1:1-3**

I work in a research hospital where a large number of employees are involved with multiple research projects. Working with this stimulating group of people has always been enjoyable, and there is never a lack of conversation. Because many of the subjects used for research involve primates as a comparison to humans, it was only a matter of time before we thoroughly discussed the evolution-creation debate. Through these discussions, two points distinctly stand out:

**1. Both sides of the Creation-evolution debate involve an element of faith.**

Three of us ended up discussing the evolution-creation debate over lunch for a week straight, and at the end of the week all three of us ended the discussion with the same beliefs that we began with. I held the Bible and the texts John 1:1-3,

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### **To have an opinion on Creation or evolution, one must act upon some degree of faith.**

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Romans 1:20, and Revelation 4:11 as my citations; my friends held up various journal articles written by prestigious scientists throughout the country. As far as tangible proof or reproducible facts were concerned, none of us had any.

**2. The belief in Creation gives us a wonderful chance to share our faith and to talk about the Bible to people who may not normally be receptive.** The biblical basis of Creation is a starting point in many discussions. By discussing Creation, we open doors to other biblically based topics. As we journeyed through our week of lunchtime discussions, we often would veer off on a tangent topic, and many times these tangents would be related to biblical beliefs. Discussing Creation gave me an opportunity to discuss my basic belief in God, and our discussions also led me into discussing the Sabbath with my friends (which launched another week of discussions).

Overall, to have an opinion on Creation or evolution, one must act upon some degree of faith. This faith may come from either the Bible or worldly scientific scholars, depending on where your faith lies. The Bible combined with faith is our proof that creationism is valid. Evolutionists have their faith in mere humankind. In an evolutionist's point of view, we are but one small piece to a gigantic puzzle that is constantly evolving. To the evolutionist, our ancestors are a lower quality being than we are, and our offspring will continue to evolve, becoming much more than their mere forefathers. However, in looking at the issue from a Creation standpoint, we are part of a master plan that was outlined in the beginning. Our faith brings the belief that we were made in the image of God. Isn't it reassuring to believe that our Creator is the King of kings and Lord of lords?

## **REACT**

How does faith enter into the evolutionary explanation of origins?

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*By Betsy A. Sajdak, a physical therapist at Riley Hospital, Indianapolis, Indiana.*

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# Knowing Thyself and Coming Clean

## OPINION

**Key Text: Ps. 51:10**

Not too many years ago I sat on the floor in the dim light of an academy-dorm hallway listening to a friend's favorite Bible verse. My friend and I were commiserating with each other about the lack of opportunities in our small world. That's when Bonnie shared her well-marked text. It was so simple, but one I had never heard: "Delight yourself in the Lord and he will give you the desires of your heart" (Ps. 37:4, NIV). *Well, that's just great, you're thinking, but what has that got to do with Creation?* Slow down, reread that text, and think about your life and the scope of Creation.

That simple text has come to mean more to me over time than that evening when it first caught me off guard. You see, I had not often thought that my God not only knew my deepest desires but also wanted to see them fulfilled, as well.

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## **Our Creator knows us better than we know ourselves.**

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All I had to do was delight myself in Him! This concept was novel for an academy student; I believe it is still a novel concept in most people's lives today.

Who knows you better than anyone else? How often do you take the time to know yourself? Of course, our Creator knows us better than anyone else, better than we know ourselves.

Upon reflection, it is the desires of my heart that have often scared me. As a result, I am most thankful for a Creator who has provided for daily recreation in my life. It certainly is easy to delight in One who has so carefully considered all my needs. Yet, it is important that I think about my needs, as well. Does this sound appropriate? All that is wanting is the asking; and, if we don't know what we need, it is difficult to know what to ask for. What do you need in your life? "He has set . . . eternity in the hearts of men" (Eccles. 3:11). Know thyself.

## **REACT**

1. If our Creator knows us better than we know ourselves, why can't He give us everything we want?
2. What is the difference between needs and desires?

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*By Whitney Wilkowski, an educational psychology intern at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.*

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# A LOOK IN THE MIRROR



**“Now therefore, if ye will obey my voice indeed, and keep my covenant, then ye shall be a peculiar treasure unto me above all people: for all the earth is mine” (Exod. 19:5).**

## Reflections

### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:17

If you've ever attended an Adventist evangelistic series, you may have heard this illustration on the Ten Commandments. God's law is like a beautiful mirror. When we as humans are confronted there, we can only stare at our reflection and see what sin has done to us.

As the evangelist would say, if the mirror shows that your face is dirty, you don't cover the reflection or turn away from it in anger. Neither would you expect help from the reflection in cleaning your face! The mirror only shows where the problem is.

The commandments reveal God's purity. These principles are as real as any

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### **The mirror of God's law does not change our condition. It simply reveals it.**

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physical law—as real as gravity. And any attempt to live outside His law meets with sure and deadly consequences.

We have all experienced or witnessed such consequences:

- The stock-market wizards from Wall Street who broke the rules to do a little insider trading, and who also ended up in jail.
- The rebellious child, determined to follow the way of Cain and Esau and Samson, with the same sad ending.
- Or, sadly, our friends, our sisters and brothers, who "waste their substance" like the prodigal, only to be left with the harsh reality of AIDS before they can return home.

The mirror of God's law does not change our condition. It simply reveals it. The mirror comes from the Lawgiver. He makes all the difference. He washes us clean, from the inside out. He cuts away at old wounds and scar tissue that are part of the human condition. He washes away the grime of a 6,000-year battle with sin. He cleanses us with a touch as thorough and as tender as that of the good Samaritan. He makes us more like Him. And in the wonder of this washing, a lifetime process called sanctification, our relationship with God grows. We learn to trust Him more, through good experiences and bad. We can handle what comes from simply living on this planet—the suffering, the pain, the ravaged face of humanity staring back from that beautiful mirror. Yes, Earth falls short. We fall short. But we are not left alone. The Lawgiver stands ever beside us, and His righteousness covers us.

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*By Kyna Hinson, teacher of English and journalism at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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## Fine or Fined?

### LOGOS

**Exod. 20:1-11**

For many people, the Ten Commandments are nothing but a set of rules. If you obey them, you're fine; if you break them, you're fined. It is even the case with some Jewish philosophers. They present the law as both metaphysical principles and ethical duties. One basis for such an appraisal may be the thou-shalt-not structure of the Decalogue.

However, the primary focus of the Ten Commandments is not regulations, but relationship. That relationship exhibits a bidirectional axis: the vertical one of the I-Thou and the horizontal one of the thou-neighbor. A third one would be appropriate: the thou-thou axis of the relationship with self.

Like any other Near Eastern covenant, the Ten Commandments start with the identification of the Monarch who initiates it. The Lawgiver introduces Himself through the first person pronoun *I*. That reveals His desire to establish a personal relationship with the people. Then He reminds them of His past prowess as a "basis for gratitude and future obedience."<sup>1</sup> That prowess is contained in the very name "Yahweh." He reminds the people of the redemptive intervention that freed Israel from Egyptian servitude. Finally, God reveals Himself as "thy God," the God who belongs to Israel.

The I-Thou axis includes four principles: God's exclusiveness, God's uniqueness, God's sacredness, and God's ingenuousness. As the sole God, He requires total commitment. There is no room for divided loyalty. Because of God's uniqueness, His worship does not need any material counterpart. It is a spiritual exercise of faith in the Invisible One. God is so holy that even His name is sacred. The Jews understood it as a prohibition to utter the sacred tetragrammaton.<sup>2</sup> The Sabbath testifies of God's ingenuousness. Creation and redemption both have a redemptive dimension. Creation saves from nothingness; redemption saves from annihilation. These two motifs explain God's claims of the seventh day as His own.<sup>3</sup> Those who are in the right relationship with God will acknowledge Him as the All-Other through the remembrance of the Sabbath.

On the thou-neighbor axis, humanity has to foster the best relationship with others. That demands the respect of the elders, of life, of morality, of property, of reputation, of achievement.

Seen under that light, the Ten Commandments are more a matter of relationship than prohibition. The Jews express it through the literary structure they have arranged in the Decalogue. They divide the Ten Words in two pentads.<sup>4</sup> The first five, on the first table, are set in a symmetric fashion in front of the last five, on the second table.<sup>5</sup> That leads them to conclude that our attitude toward others affects God, and vice versa. That is why the Ten Commandments are a good mirror of self. They situate us vis-à-vis ourselves. They define us in our true essence. They reveal to us the meaning of our existence, one that honors God and serves humankind in love and mutual respect.

### REACT

1. Explain in your own words how the primary focus of the Ten Commandments is relationship.

2. How do the Ten Commandments affect a person's relationship with self?
3. How should the sacredness of God's name affect our use of language and self-expression?
4. In your own words, explain the meaning of the expression "Creation saves from nothingness."

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1. It was the usual pattern of the second millennium B.C.E. covenants. See R. K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970), p. 140.

2. Out of reverence and due to a misinterpretation of the third commandment, Jews do not articulate the four Hebrew consonants (YHWH in English).

3. Compare the two versions of the Decalogue (Exod. 20:8-11; Deut. 5:12-15).

4. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1985), vol. 1, p. 108. Josephus, Philo, the Eastern Church, and the Reformed Church share this view. E. G. White, *Early Writings*, pages 32, 33, saw in vision four commandments on the first table and six on the second one. That was also Augustine's and Luther's position.

5. Alfred Rubens, "Decalogue," *Encyclopaedia Judaica*, vol. 5, col. 1446.

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*By Agniel Samson, professor of biblical languages and New Testament studies,  
Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# Action! Take One!

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 3:16**

The actors are Satan and Earth's inhabitants. The stage is set. Before the inhabitants of the universe are to be answered the question: Is God's law imperfect?

"Before Christ's first advent, the sin of refusing to conform to God's law had become widespread. . . . Satan's power was growing. . . . A crisis had been reached. With an intense interest God's movements were watched by the heavenly angels. Would He come forth from His place to punish the inhabitants of the world for their iniquity? Would He send fire or flood to destroy them? All heaven waited the bidding of their Commander to pour out the vials of wrath upon a rebellious world. One word from Him, one sign, and the world would have been destroyed. The world's unfallen would have said, 'Amen. Thou art righteous, O God, because Thou hast exterminated rebellion.'"<sup>1</sup>

But God sent His only Son to save us. No word can describe the effect of this

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## No word can describe the effect of this act on the heavenly angels.

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act on the heavenly angels. With wonder and admiration, they could only exclaim, "Herein is love!" "Love is the fulfilling of the Law" (Rom. 13:10).

"Satan represents God's law of love as a law of selfishness. He declares that it is impossible for us to obey its precepts. The fall of our first parents, with all the woe that has resulted, he charges upon the Creator, leading men to look upon God as the author of sin, suffering, and death. Jesus was to unveil this deception. As one of us He was to give an example of obedience. For this He took . . . our nature and passed through our experiences. . . . As man, He met temptation, and overcame in the strength given Him from God. . . . As He went about doing good and healing all who were afflicted by Satan, He made plain to humanity the character of God's law and the nature of His service. His life testifies that it is possible for us also to obey the law of God. . . .

"As the Son of man, He gave us an example of obedience; as the Son of God He gives us power to obey."<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. What might Satan have pointed to as evidence that God's law is imperfect?
2. In what ways do we question God's law today?

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1. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 58.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 24.

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*By Angenetta Hill, an elementary-education major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# Love Is the Law

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Matt. 22:37-40**

We are told that love is necessary for the Christian, but does it have anything to do with the Law? Someone asked Jesus what was the greatest law. Christ answered, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it, thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:37-40).

Jesus is telling us that this commandment to love God and humankind is the basis of all that the prophets have said. It is also seen as the basis of Christianity. Christ tells us we can know a Christian by the love he or she shows (John 13:35). So Christ tells us that the basis of everything within Christianity is love. How can this be? Isn't the Christian life made up of "thou shalt nots"?

The accusation of negativity is sometimes placed upon those Christians who

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## We are told that love is necessary for the Christian, but does it have anything to do with the Law?

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teach that there is importance in following the law of God. These people are told they "major in minors," or they "take away the liberty that God has given us through Christ." Christ Himself gave us the love commandment: "A new commandment I give unto you, That ye love one another; as I have loved you, that ye also love one another. By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:34, 35). One might say that this law of love is positive, while the law of the Ten Commandments is negative; that they could not have anything to do with each other. Let us not forget that Christ tells us that being angry with your brother without cause is sin (Matt. 5:22). This can be seen as negative. This is nothing but the same law of love that Christ talked about. For those who love their neighbor will not be angry with him without cause. It is the same with the Ten Commandments. "Thou shalt not steal" sounds negative, but if you love your neighbor, you will not steal from him. They are from the same law, or as Jesus said, "On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets" (Matt. 22:40).

## REACT

1. How can the Sabbath be seen in the law of love?
2. Is there greater responsibility in the law of love than the Ten Commandments?
3. Can someone follow the Ten Commandments and not follow the law of love?

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*By Sherman Cox, Jr., a computer analyst in Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# Obey and Be Peculiar

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Exod. 19:5**

It is not always easy to obey, but in this week's text God is promising us something very different if we will obey His voice and keep His covenant. He promises that we will be peculiar. What is peculiar? Webster says, "standing apart from others, calling for special consideration or attention, distinct or particular."

God was trying to encourage Israel to be different, to stand apart, to be distinct. They were to be an example to other nations, showing that God is the true God to serve and that He gives blessings when we decide to keep His covenant. Here are some practical considerations for being peculiar:

**1. It is impossible to obey the voice of God.** We often want to obey our own voice, do our own thing, and only when things go wrong do we want to hear what God has to say. We fall on our knees, someplace we haven't been for ages, and cry to God to talk to us. Obedience cannot be attained by ourselves; it takes two—

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## God was trying to encourage Israel to be different, to stand apart, to be distinct.

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His strength and our will. The first step on the road to being peculiar is *prayer*.

**2. Peculiar people are usually noticed wherever they go.** We think of them as peculiar because of the way they dress, look, act, eat, and even worship. It is very difficult to be noticed when you are one of the crowd. In the crowd everyone looks alike.

**3. Trust is next.** We must believe that God is who He says He is, He can do what He says He can do, and He is a rewarder of those who obey His voice. We will not always understand the whys and wherefores of life. On this journey it will take trust to pull you through all that life has to offer—both good and bad.

**4. The children of Israel knew God.** The story of who, what, and how God had been in times past had been passed down from one generation to another. Israel had heard of the blessings and knew of the promises. They knew why they were chosen to be peculiar, and if they decided to do so, they knew how to stand.

**5. Have a message.** Have you ever attended a meeting in which someone stood up to make a point and forgot what he was going to say? When you stand, have a message to share with those who have come to hear it. Sometimes the message can be seen (what others see in us). Sometimes it can be told (what we tell others about God). Sometimes it can be shown (the things we do for others). God wanted Israel to tell, show, and allow others to see what great things He had done for them and would continue to do. Consequently, He allowed the story to be told by His children. There was only one catch—they had to keep the covenant and obey His voice.

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*By Ivy Starks, a senior communications major, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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## The Royal Law

### OPINION

**Key Text: James 2:8**

The royal law is thus designated because of its majesty and regal status. It rules over all other laws governing the behavior of humanity toward one another, and they are suspended from it. It is first enunciated in Leviticus 19:18.

One of the most difficult problems we have to face in our generation is that of our attitude toward persons of another race or color. The problem has always been with us, but we have never before been confronted with it as we are in this generation. In the past we could pretend that it did not exist, or if we admitted that it did, we could ignore it or run from it. Now we are forced to examine our own hearts, and this is often a painful experience. We tend to postpone it because we are afraid of what we will find. What makes it such a traumatic experience to encounter the problem realistically? We must reexamine the words and deeds of Jesus as applied to the stark racism of His days on earth. And we must do this

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### **A Christlike life is a lesson that anyone can read.**

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with a view to applying to our own lives the principles that He taught and practiced. There is little reason for the Living Word to be resurrected if we bury the written Word under the debris of centuries.

When we read about the man who fell among thieves on the road to Jericho, each of us must determine whether we identify with the priest, the Levite, or the Samaritan. The robbers symbolized the philosophy of violence expressed in the words, "Beat him up!" The Levite and the priest exemplified that of neglect and apathy: "Pass him up!" But the Samaritan demonstrated the ideal we should follow: "Lift him up." Jesus pointed to the Samaritan as an example for us.

We live in a world that needs to see the Word of God come alive. The translation most needed in our day is that of life and deeds. A Christlike life is a lesson that anyone can read. If we can conquer prejudice and littleness, we may be able to conquer the world for Christ. It is obvious that we cannot do so without allowing His Spirit to dwell in us. Surely there has never been another time when love for humankind has been more needed!

The royal law of love finds its source in the eternal King. If we will be His loyal servants, we must love as He has shown us—unselfishly, completely, impartially.

### **REACT**

1. Should Christians ignore all differences of race and culture?
2. Name some specific things the church can do about prejudice.
3. In your opinion, is it ever possible for one to free himself completely from class, cultural, and racial biases? If not, what should we do about it?

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*By S. Haywood Cox, chaplain and director of campus ministries and world missions, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# INAUGURAL ADDRESS



**“All we like sheep have gone astray; we have turned every one to his own way; and the Lord hath laid on him the iniquity of us all” (Isa. 53:6).**

# The Galilee Address

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Matt. 5:1, 2**

When Benjamin Franklin heard George Whitefield, the famous Methodist evangelist, during the Great Awakening in the eighteenth century in New England, he estimated that his voice was so powerful that he could be heard by a crowd of 30,000 on the Boston Green. They were personal friends, and Whitefield endeavored to bring Franklin to Christ as Lord and Saviour.

Long before George Whitefield preached to vast crowds in New England, Christ gave the Sermon on the Mount to the multitudes in Galilee. Galilee had 204 villages, each with no fewer than 15,000 persons, totaling approximately three million.\* So it is believable that on occasions thousands at one time heard Him preach. In 1987 on a trip to Israel, I visited the location where Jesus gave the Sermon on the Mount. It is situated north of the Lake of Galilee, two miles

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## **The Sermon on the Mount is the “inauguration message” of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee.**

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from Capernaum. This location is a natural acoustical bowl that would make it possible for Jesus’ voice to carry long distances to the vast listening crowds.

The Sermon on the Mount is Christ’s longest and most familiar recorded message in the Gospels. In Matthew’s Gospel, the Sermon on the Mount is the “inauguration message” of Jesus’ ministry in Galilee (4:12). His Galilean ministry could be summarized in this way: Christ gives 10 components in His Sermon on the Mount, followed by 10 miracles, with 10 reactions by various individuals (John the Baptist, King Herod), and groups of people (Pharisees, Sadducees). Matthew’s first division is our Lord’s teachings in chapters 5-7, which concentrate on what Christ said or taught in Galilee. His second division, chapters 8, 9, deals with Christ’s miracles, followed by reactions to what Christ said (teaching) and did (miracles), and culminating in His departure from Galilee (19:1).

Our lesson this week focuses on Matthew 5, which introduces the Sermon on the Mount. It examines the first two segments of the 10-part sermon. The introductory Beatitudes are descriptive of the believers who heard His message that day and of us believers who read His message today. Authentic believers are those who have received Him as Lord, possess eternal life, are citizens of His kingdom, and have built their lives upon Jesus Christ, the Rock (7:24).

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\* D. A. Carson, “Matthew,” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: The Zondervan Corporation, 1984), vol. 8, pp. 120, 121.

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*By Nancy Jerus, a registered nurse from Anaheim, California.*

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# An Impossible Assignment?

## LOGOS

### Matthew 5

The late British Archbishop Magee said it was impossible to conduct the affairs of the English nation by the Sermon on the Mount.<sup>1</sup> He was correct. The principles of the Sermon on the Mount can be obeyed only by citizens of the kingdom, who have received Christ as Saviour and have received a new righteousness (Matt. 5:20) based on grace and love (verses 43-48). In His sermon Christ rejects the secular application of God's law, as well as Pharisaic distortions of it.

Matthew 5 is organized into five parts: (1) description of a Christian's righteousness (verses 3-12); depiction of the Christian's influence in the world (verses 13-16); contrast of Christian righteousness with Pharisaic legalism (verses 17-20); further examination of the Christian's righteousness (verses 21-37); and concentration on a Christian's righteousness as revealed in love for those who are evil and are our enemies. It concludes with the challenge to be perfect (verses 38-48).

#### Christian Character in the Beatitudes (Matt. 5:3-12)

The Beatitudes are Christ's description of those who inherit God's kingdom. They specify what every Christian ought to be and remind us of Paul's fruits of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22, 23). Christ is not delineating eight types of Christian but is describing eight qualities of every believer who has experienced the new birth.

The blessings of the Beatitudes, like God's kingdom, are both future and present. Undoubtedly, receiving a reward in the kingdom of heaven is a future blessing. These kingdom principles suggest that a Christian who has been justified by believing the gospel (Christ's death and resurrection for us [1 Cor. 15:1-4]) learns from Christ how to live the new life and please God. Luther pointed out that Christ's sermon is not telling us how to become Christians, but rather "only about the works and fruit that no one can do unless he already is a Christian and in a state of grace."<sup>2</sup> The Sermon on the Mount presupposes the gospel, not the law. It is God's gift received in faith (Eph. 2:8, 9) that precedes Christ's demands.

The "poor in spirit" are those who have realized their sinfulness before God and the utter futility of trying to please God through mere human works. They have cast themselves upon God's mercy and rejoice in the good news of salvation through the Son. The "poor in spirit" introduces the whole spiritual foundation of the Beatitudes—those who trust in God's grace. The mourner, the meek, the righteous, the merciful, the pure in heart, the peacemaker, and the persecuted describe people who have been changed by falling on God's mercy. Jesus contrasts their inner righteousness with the false external righteousness of the Pharisees (Matt. 5:20). The Beatitudes are rounded off as they were begun, with the promise of the kingdom.

#### The Influence of the Christian in the World (verses 13-16)

Jesus now turns to the disciples' dynamic influence. Tasker points out in his commentary on Matthew that Christians are "to be a moral disinfectant in a world where moral standards are low, constantly changing, or nonexistent."<sup>3</sup> They are "salt of the earth" and "a light to the world." The good news of the gospel is to be reflected to the world so non-Christians will be attracted to Christ and the new

life He offers. As Christians manifest the qualities of the Beatitudes and the fruits of the spirit, the world will be drawn to individual believers and to the church.

### **Authentic Christian Righteousness Contrasted With Pharisaism (verses 17-37)**

Through the metaphors of salt and light, Christ intimates that believers and their inherent kingdom qualities are different from the world's external righteousness. He contrasts true Christian obedience with the legalistic externalism of the Pharisees. He rejects the Pharisaic distortion of God's law that uses human works to become right with God. This distortion is a defiant rejection of God's grace and mercy in Jesus Christ.

Jesus makes it clear that one must go beyond the external righteousness of the Pharisees. Christian righteousness is of the heart. It strongly indicates that one is indwelt by the Holy Spirit, has experienced the new birth, and has believed God's gospel.

Jesus gives several illustrations of this in-depth righteousness of the heart produced by the Spirit of God. The first two relate to the sixth and seventh commandments. He confirms that murder and immorality cannot simply be reduced to the acts themselves, but that anger and lust indicate guilt of these sins as well.

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## **Archbishop Magee said it was impossible to conduct the affairs of the English nation by the Sermon on the Mount.**

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He also concentrates on fidelity in marriage and honesty in speech (verses 1-37). His two final illustrations stress the pivotal point of His message—to demonstrate God's love to those who are evil and to our enemies (verses 38-43).

### **The Key to the Puzzle of Perfection (verses 38-48)**

The extraordinary love Christ describes is the key to His perfection command (verse 48). This has been introduced as a discordant phrase in the Sermon on the Mount which suggests that believers can reach absolute perfection in this life or that unless we become absolutely perfect, like the Father, we shall not be saved. The perpetual desire of the believer to hunger and thirst after righteousness indicates that he cannot reach absolute sinlessness or perfection until Christ returns. The context suggests that this perfection is related to God's perfect love for those who do not deserve it.

### **REACT**

What are the major differences between Pharisaic righteousness and the authentic righteousness of Christian believers?

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1. G. Campbell Morgan, *Studies in the Four Gospels* (Old Tappan, N.J.: Fleming H. Revell, 1931), p. 39.
  2. Martin Luther, *Luther's Works* (St. Louis: Concordia Publishing House, 1956), vol. 21, p. 291.
  3. R. V. G. Tasker, *The Gospel According to Matthew* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1973), p. 63.
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*By Joe Jerus, a self-supporting chaplain of campus ministry at California State University at Fullerton.*

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## There Is No Way, or Is There?

### TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 5:48**

The last verse of Matthew 5 does not seem to leave too much room for personal opinion. How is it that Jesus, knowing the weaknesses of our nature, could expect us to live up to such expectations? Ellen White puts this famous verse in context for us: “‘Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect’ (Matt. 5:48). The word ‘therefore’ implies a conclusion, an inference from what has gone before. Jesus has been describing to His hearers the unfailing mercy and love of God, and He bids them therefore to be perfect. Because your heavenly Father ‘is kind unto the unthankful and to the evil’ (Luke 6:35), because He has stooped to lift you up, therefore, said Jesus, you may become like Him in character, and stand without fault in the presence of men and angels.”<sup>1</sup>

She explains that the goal is nothing short of perfection, yet not by our own

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### “Their righteousness could never enter the kingdom of heaven.”

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unaided efforts. “The Jews had been wearily toiling to reach perfection by their own efforts,” she adds, “and they had failed. Christ had already told them that their righteousness could never enter the kingdom of heaven. Now He points out to them the character of the righteousness that all who enter heaven will possess.”<sup>2</sup>

Later in the same passage she continues, “God is love. Like rays of light from the sun, love and light and joy flow out from Him to all His creatures. . . . He tells us to be perfect as He is, in the same manner. We are to be centers of light and blessing to our little circle, even as He is to the universe. . . . Jesus said, Be perfect as *your Father* is perfect. If you are the children of God you are partakers of His nature, and you cannot but be like Him. Every child lives by the life of his father.”<sup>3</sup>

“The ideal of Christian character is Christlikeness. As the Son of man was perfect in His life, so His followers are to be perfect in their life . . . He shared the lot of man; yet He was the blameless Son of God. He was God in the flesh. His character is to be ours.”<sup>4</sup>

### REACT

1. Explain the implications of the statement, “Every child lives by the life of his father.”
2. If Jesus was perfect, how is it possible for us to relate to Him?

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1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 76.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 77.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 77, 78.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 311.

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By Vladimir A. Corea, associate pastor of the Saddleback Valley Adventist Church, Irvine, California.

# Perfection and Rejection

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Matt. 5:48**

The young couple's wedding day had finally arrived. The beautiful bride waited in anxious anticipation as the minister asked her fiancé, "Will you take this woman . . ."

The bridegroom paused. "No way! Have you ever seen such a failed creature? I cannot marry someone so imperfect! Her eyes stick out, her mouth is huge, she can't sing, her ears are too pointy, her big toes curl up. No, I'm sorry, I am not marrying this woman; she lacks perfection."

I hope none of us has had the same experience as the rejected bride, but we can all relate in some way. How grateful we are that God's standards are not like the world's. The world judges us by what we are, not who we are. We are supposed to be good looking, talented, wealthy, and hold a powerful position; otherwise, we are not valuable individuals. God judges us differently. God does not

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## **The bridegroom paused. "No way! Have you ever seen such a failed creature?"**

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want us looking at ourselves and our accomplishments, but we are to focus on Him and what He has done and can do for us through Jesus, His Son.

What did Jesus mean by "You must be perfect"? He was the only person who was ever absolutely perfect. This allowed Him to become the final, unblemished atonement for the sins of His people. He suffered and died for our transgressions so that by accepting His sacrifice, we may become perfect before the Father in order to receive salvation. Our sinful condition restricted us from being recognized as perfect before God. It was impossible for our works to save us. The only solution was the perfection of Jesus Christ, who died in our place (Rom. 4:24, 25).

When Jesus commanded us to be perfect, He was referring to the perfect love of the Father, which was revealed in Jesus Christ and in His death on the cross. God has shown us His great love; therefore, we need to share that powerful love with others, especially nonbelievers. They will be drawn to the light that is in us, because of our relationship with Christ. We have the privilege of showing the Father's mercy to all people, no matter who or what they are. We need to view people through the accepting eyes of God and not the world's artificial standards. We must find perfection in Christ, who by His grace can make us righteous before our Creator.

Thankfully, Christ is nothing like the bridegroom who rejected his bride because of her initial imperfections. We can be joyful because Jesus loves us despite our imperfections. "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (5:8, NIV). Jesus is the perfect bridegroom. He makes us perfect through His union with us. We must be accepting of others to show them God's perfect acceptance.

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*By Julie Jerus, a sophomore college student at Columbia College, Sonora, California.*

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## Doormat Christianity?

### HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Matt. 5:43-48

C. S. Lewis accurately observed that the Christian life is both easy and hard. It's easy in that God has provided salvation in His Son apart from any human works and has given us the Holy Spirit to enable us to live a new life (2 Cor. 5:17). In spite of the fact that the kingdom of God has dawned through the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, it will not be fully realized until the return of Christ. This means that even though we have experienced resurrection through Christ, we still live in an evil world. We face three relentless enemies—our own flesh, the world system, and the devil—which often make the Christian life difficult.

One of the most difficult ethical commands of Christ for me to develop in my life is to “love your enemies” (Matt. 5:44, NIV). Christ may have had overt persecution for the gospel primarily in mind when He originally gave this command.

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### **Jesus is not suggesting a passive form of “doormat Christianity.”**

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However, we are called to love in spite of hurts or injuries from any source. Jesus is not suggesting a passive form of “doormat Christianity,” but He is saying we should not be a slave to anger, bitterness, retaliation, or revenge over those who have sinned against us. It is better to suffer loss than to have an unforgiving spirit or to hate your enemy. Yet God realizes we are not yet perfect. The kind of love and forgiveness He wants us to cultivate in our lives sometimes takes time.

Corrie ten Boom suffered in a German concentration camp for hiding Jews in her home in Holland during World War II. After the war Corrie was speaking in a church in Munich, Germany, on God's forgiveness. In the church she noticed a familiar face. It was one of the most cruel guards in Ravensbruck concentration camp, who had victimized her and her sister, who died in the camp. He approached her with the good news that he had become a Christian and asked her forgiveness. She asked the Lord for forgiveness for this man, and in that critical moment she experienced in her heart God's forgiveness for all this man had done to her. She remarked that in her own strength she did not have the power to forgive, but realized from the Word that she had experienced the reality of words “because the love of God is shed abroad in our hearts by the Holy Ghost which is given to us” (Rom. 5:5). Loving and forgiving our enemies is God's will for us, since He has forgiven us of all our sins, through the death of His Son!

### **REACT**

What is the difference between being a doormat and a responsible Christian who experiences forgiveness for his enemies?

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*By Joe Jerus, a self-supporting chaplain of campus ministry at California State University at Fullerton.*

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# Boundless Love

## OPINION

**Key Text: Matt. 5:43-48**

“But I say to you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, so that you may be sons of your Father who is in heaven; for he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust” (Matt. 5:44, 45, RSV).

Our Lord contrasts love that flows naturally from the human heart and God’s love. Human love is often self-serving; we care for and share ourselves with those who have given us something or are likely to do so in the future. Jesus points out that the immoral and lost exhibit this love. God’s love, however, is perfect and complete. Christ exemplified this love by giving His life for His enemies and praying for their forgiveness while He died. Jesus challenges us to show that we are God’s children by the extent of our love.

Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NIV). Jesus was a friend to sinners. A lack of close

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## Everyone who is not a Christian is lonely.

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friends (or a lack of close friends who help in spiritual growth) seems to be related to criminal behavior. We *need* to associate not only with Christians but especially with non-Christians.

As social beings, we have a strong impulse to label people according to position and status. A man may be a father, husband, architect, church officer, and club member, but some may see him only as a club member. This is always unfair *except* for one master status: a member of the family of God. If we would see each one as a member of God’s family, we would treat him or her better. Because of God’s infinite love for us and all humanity, we are to allow the finite limits of our love to expand beyond those who provide some positive reward for us. Everyone who is not a Christian is lonely. Only Adam and Eve were perfectly happy with each other (before they fell). Everyone wants someone to love him or her unconditionally. God’s initiating act of love in Jesus Christ awakens this love in us.

## REACT

1. How can we continue our spiritual growth as we reach out to non-Christians?
2. What statuses do you hold in society today? How would placing the greatest importance on your status as a child of God change your attitudes or behavior?

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By Nancy Murphy, a program analyst from Orange County, California.

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# LAYING DOWN THE LAW



**“His divine power has given us everything we need for life and godliness through our knowledge of him who called us by his own glory and goodness” (2 Pet. 1:3, NIV).**

# Fasten Your Seat Belts!

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rom. 3:20**

“Quick! Fasten your seat belt!” I yelled to my cousin as my eyes caught the heart-stopping display of a police car with its lights flashing, two cars behind me. I checked my speed. No, I was under speed after just turning a corner. He couldn’t be after me, could he?

The driver behind me pulled over and, horror of horrors, the officer passed him. I dutifully pulled over, expecting—hoping and praying—for him to pass me too. He didn’t.

I rolled down my window. The policeman strolled up to my car, looked down,

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## “Quick! Fasten your seat belt!” I yelled to my cousin.

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and growled, “License and registration.” My hands broke into a cold sweat as I fumbled with the glove-compartment latch and handed him the documents. I swallowed hard.

“You realize that was a red light you went through, don’t you?” He shone his flashlight around in the car as I went through all the stages of shock.

“But, sir, it was yellow!” I squeaked, my vocal chords betraying my nervousness.

After a few nerve-wracking moments, during which he scribbled furiously on his little pad, he ripped the paper from the booklet and smiled. “I’ll give you a warning this time. But,” his face got stern again, “you had better watch the color of those lights next time.”

Whew!

Since my grandpa taught me how to drive, I’ve learned and understood the reasons for traffic laws. “They are to protect us,” I can hear him saying. “They help us to be better drivers.”

The parallels between God’s laws and traffic laws, though simple, are enlightening. He has given them to us for a reason: to guide us and teach us how to be better “drivers.”

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*By Kim Sulzle, a junior secondary-education major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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## Making Minimums Into Maximums

### LOGOS

Heb. 8:10, 11

Once a year, on a Sunday and a Monday evening, my family, with a bucket of Kentucky Fried Chicken, would sit in front of our television and watch Cecil B. DeMille's *The Ten Commandments*. I remember watching God's fiery finger etching out the commandments on stone as Charlton Heston cringed in the background. Even when I was young, I knew there was something special about the Ten Commandments.

Since that time, I've become a Seventh-day Adventist and noticed that the Ten Commandments are almost central to who we are as a denomination. Yet, at times, I've been confused about what role God's law—specifically the Ten Commandments—should have in my life. I've never had much of a problem with them. I don't want to have any other gods before Him. I've never had the desire to make stone frogs and bow down to them. I don't want to take the Lord's name in vain. I love the Sabbath; it's my only day off. I love my father and mother and would never dishonor them. Murder has never been a bad habit of mine. I'm quite happily married, so adultery is out. I don't steal. I don't lie about my neighbor. And coveting has never been my style.

So have I reached perfection? Am I ready for translation? No, of course not. Mickey Meyer is a pastor in the Washington Conference. I heard him preach a sermon on the Ten Commandments once. He said, "Keeping the Ten Commandments is the least you can do for God and your neighbor." Think about it. Not killing your neighbor is the least you could do for him. Remembering God once a week is the least you can do to maintain a relationship with Him. The Ten Commandments are the bare minimum that it takes to maintain an alliance with our Creator and our fellow human beings.

In 2 Corinthians 3:7-11, NIV, we find that Paul calls the Ten Commandments a "ministry that brought death." The words *ministry* and *death* don't seem to belong together, do they? How is it that these heavenly words engraved in letters on stone brought death to those who tried to obtain salvation by following their precepts? What is wrong with the Ten Commandments? Why can't they save me?

Read Nehemiah 8. Israel had just come out of Babylon, back to Jerusalem. The Israelites listen to the reading of the law (many of them for the first time) that they have ignored for hundreds of years. When they hear how far they have fallen from the ideal, they weep bitterly. To safeguard their nation from ever falling away from the law again, they devote the next 400 years to creating laws around God's law that would take away even the possibility of breaking a commandment. Unfortunately, in the process, Israel forgot one simple principle: letters formed in granite don't save you—God does.

I think that's why Paul seems to come down so hard on the law. In Romans, Galatians, and 2 Corinthians, some would say that it sounds as if he is selling the law short. He mockingly calls it the "embodiment of knowledge and truth" for the Jews (Rom. 2:20, NIV) and later says that "the law was added so that the trespass might increase" (5:20). He says that "the very commandment that was intended to bring life actually brought death" (7:10). Paul realized how inept the Ten Com-

mandments are as a source of salvation. They seem to fall short in their ability to save anyone from sin.

So where do the Ten Commandments fit into the life of a Seventh-day Adventist? What role, if any, do they play in my salvation? Revelation 14:12 says that people who survive the end of time will be *obeying God's commandments* and remaining faithful to Jesus. It seems as though the commandments do have something to do with our salvation, but what?

A head elder once conversed with a Christian of another denomination about the Ten Commandments. The elder was told that "keeping the Ten Commandments cannot save you." The elder agreed with the man, then added, "But if you don't keep the commandments, it sure can *lose* you!" Think about it. What kind of person would you be if you did exactly the opposite of what the commandments ask? Could you do this and still maintain a saving relationship with Christ? Your rules for living would be to put God last in your life, make images and worship them, take God's name in vain, forget the Sabbath, dishonor your father and mother, murder, commit adultery, steal, tell lies about your neighbor, and covet.

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## **I remember watching God's fiery finger etching out the commandments on stone as Charlton Heston cringed in the background.**

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The Bible lists some of the habits and characteristics of those who will not be in the kingdom. It seems fairly evident that commandment breakers will not be in heaven, and commandment keepers will.

What did Jesus have to say about the law? Read Matthew 5:17-20. After Jesus says this, He spends the rest of His Sermon on the Mount changing our perception of the law from something we do to something we become. He attempts to take the law out of our hands and feet, putting it into our hearts and minds. Murder becomes not what you do with your hands, but how you feel in your heart. Adultery is not just what you do in a cheap motel; it's what you think in your mind. During the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus turned what had become the minimum (the Ten Commandments) into the maximum. He turned doing into being.

### **REACT**

1. Reconcile Ephesians 2:8, 9 with James 2:24.
2. How are the Ten Commandments the minimum you can do for God? How can they become the maximum?
3. In the context of Hebrews 8:10, 11, what does it mean to break one of the commandments?
4. Why have Seventh-day Adventists put so much emphasis on the Ten Commandments?
5. In the context of Hebrews 8:10, 11, what makes the people described in Revelation 14 so special?

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*By Mark Witas, chaplain for Canadian Union College and Parkview Adventist Academy, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# To Work or Not to Work: That Is the Question.

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 John 5:3**

While sitting in the Kiev airport in the Ukraine one summer, I found myself engaged in conversation with a gentleman who described himself as a “Christian of the New Testament.” He felt that Adventists are generally pretty good people, but that they try to attain salvation by keeping the Ten Commandments. My response was to quote John 14:15: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (RSV). But exactly what role do the commandments play in terms of our salvation? Are they only the evidence of a life lived in Christ?

Compare these three statements by Ellen White:

“It is plainly stated that the condition of gaining eternal life is obedience to the commandments of God.”<sup>1</sup>

“While we are admonished to obedience, we are not to think that we can merit

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**I found myself engaged in conversation with a gentleman who described himself as a “Christian of the New Testament.”**

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salvation by our good works. Salvation is the free gift of God, and it is to be received by faith. . . . Christ enjoins upon us the keeping of the commandments because He knows that in keeping them there is great reward, the revealing of a character after the divine similitude.”<sup>2</sup>

“Do you love to keep the commandments of God, because the commandments of God are God’s precepts, the transcript of His character, and can no more be altered than can the character of God?”<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

1. Compare Matthew 22:36-38 with Exodus 20:3-11. With whom are the first four commandments concerned?

2. Compare Matthew 22:39, 40 with Exodus 20:12-17. With whom are the last six commandments concerned? Is love for God and for humans the same as keeping the commandments in truth and in spirit?

3. How can the above statements be harmonized?

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1. *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Oct. 26, 1897, p. 4.

2. *The Signs of the Times*, May 16, 1895, p. 8.

3. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 130.

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*By Grant Misseghers, a senior theology student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# The Philosophy of God's Law

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: James 1:25**

What defines God's law? Many in the church assume that through our 27 Fundamental Beliefs we possess absolute truth—the summation of God's law. But are they specific truths for every individual, culture, and situation? The Ten Commandments are a framework from which an individual may *begin* to know truth. They aren't a list of rules, but a synopsis of the law. They are a standard. Our 27 Fundamental Beliefs seem to be the easiest way for us to define them. However, the law is much more than this. When we don't strive to find out how much more, we limit our view of God's character.

By discovering God, we discover His law. God's law is ultimately pure morality. We must strive to live this morality—knowing God and having Him reside in us, to prevent us from sinning. In doing so, we find ourselves free from the

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**Many in the church assume that through our 27 Fundamental Beliefs we possess absolute truth—the summation of God's law.**

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bondage of sin and the seeming bondage of God's law. In this aristocracy of the free, an absolute minority, we become fulfillers of the law.

This concept of morality is an intricate part of God's character. Many times we find ourselves attempting to restrict the individual's right to choose and establish this "concept of morality." Yet God, at the risk of all creation, gave humanity the right to choose, resulting in the death of His Son.

On earth, Jesus motivated us to communicate through parables. He did this so that instead of blindly following a set of rules, we would establish a principle that could be applied to any given situation. We must steer away from the religion of the Pharisees, for it makes our minds dormant and lazy. Often we take godly hints, such as "You *should* not wear jewelry," and make them into "godly" laws, such as "You *shall* not wear jewelry," confusing the *should not*'s with the *shall not*'s. This destroys the faculty of choice, which is the underlying theme of God's law. It destroys our capacity to look beyond—and that is where God is. When we stifle the necessity to look beyond, we become stagnant, destroying spiritual evolution.

So how do we establish this concept of morality for ourselves? Theologians and religions have attempted to answer this question throughout earth's history.

## REACT

1. By discovering God, we discover God's law. Conversely, by discovering God's law, do we discover God?

2. Is choice the underlying theme of God's law? Explain your answer.

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*By Kevin Coppock, a sophomore premed student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# Expectations

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: James 1:22**

One cold January morning in Canada, I sat in the back of a grade 10 classroom observing an experienced teacher welcome 30 students for a new semester. I knew this was a respected and well-liked teacher. I was struck with the length and detail with which he presented the rules for the students in his classroom. He had some high expectations for these young people! I was amazed that this particular teacher would even need to talk about discipline. Why wouldn't students hold him in high enough esteem just to behave automatically in a responsible, mature manner, giving him the respect he deserves?

The Ten Commandments remind me of this loving, caring, sensitive teacher giving his rules to facilitate a happy and successful year. As sinful human beings, we need to have certain rules spelled out. It should seem obvious to most that

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## **I was amazed that this particular teacher would even need to talk about discipline.**

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murder, adultery, or stealing would result in emotional pain and devastation for each person involved. How well God knows each one of us. He knows that our generation has been numbed by denial because of traumas and tragedies in life. Right and wrong have become a hazy gray. We have been medicated by legal, and illegal, drugs, and we seek comfort by a variety of means. He knows that sin has perverted our ways and, in His everlasting love, He has created commandments that focus our attention and love on Him so He can give us His agape love to share with others.

His love is not like our love. His love is perfect, so perfect that He knew that we could never keep His commandments because sin has made us incapable of being naturally good. “[Christ] was delivered for our offences, and was raised again for our justification” (Rom. 4:25). He revealed His love at the cross, and we need to appreciate the significance of the cross before we can grow. (He knows us *and* still loves us—what a friend!)

How can we keep the commandments?

1. We must study the cross of Christ, discovering how much He loves us.
2. We must allow God to do in our lives what He is so wonderful at doing. It's up to us how much we let Him in.
3. We live daily in Him, praising Him for His power and His strength, grateful that He is all we need to be victorious over sin. Keeping God's commandments is easier when I am assured of His love for me.

## **REACT**

What is the relationship of discipline to love?

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*By Debbie Bogdon, director of guidance and counseling at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# Roller Coasters

## OPINION

**Key Text: Ps. 119:165**

My professor broke my “classroom trance” and said something that was worth all my tuition dollars: “We are not to teach students what to think, rather how to think.” Click. A light went on inside my head. This class was no longer of benefit to me if I could not eventually apply what I had learned to my life. God’s law was not intended to teach us what to think as much as how to think.

As an effective teacher waits for students to grasp one concept before moving on to the next, God waits for humanity to understand one Christian principle before He gives another. Application is proof of understanding. Sometimes it is frightening to discover more about God, because more is expected of us.

Never going back in life can be illustrated by riding a roller coaster. Once we begin the ride, it is impossible to stop the roller coaster until the ride is over.

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### **Though I may face many roller-coaster rides, God will never put me on a ride I cannot handle.**

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Sometimes we choose our roller-coaster rides, and sometimes we are thrown onto them. We must decide whether or not we will use God’s commandments to get us through each ride or apply our own strength and wisdom, which will make the ride more rough and unpredictable. It is exciting to realize that though I may be faced with many roller-coaster rides, God will never put me on a ride I cannot handle.

God’s commandments become bothersome tasks when we choose not to apply them throughout the many roller coasters of life. When we do not utilize what we feel is God’s will, the rides that inevitably come our way will conquer us. It is great that God presents us with laws to live by, carrying us through each ride so we won’t be afraid to get on the next.

God realizes that just because someone can memorize the commandments doesn’t mean he can necessarily apply them to his life. So God prepares each one of our hearts through the work of the Holy Spirit, helping us to acknowledge the usefulness His commandments have in our lives. Just as teachers show patience toward students trying to grasp a concept, God grants us patience and love when He teaches His children as He feels they are ready to learn. So remember, when the roller coasters come, hang on to God’s commandments, and get ready for the ride of your life.

## **REACT**

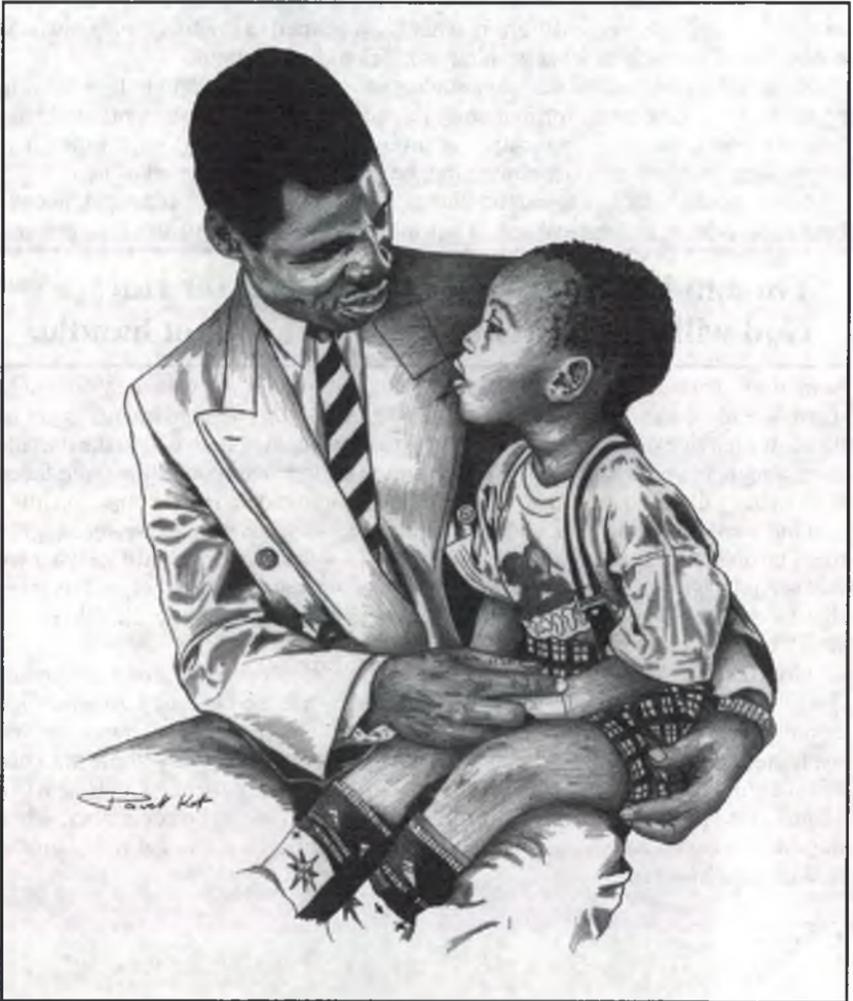
1. What is the difference between learning what to think and learning how to think?
2. How does this difference apply to the Christian experience?

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*By Sherry Varty, junior secondary-education major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# “TAKE CARE OF THEM FOR ME!”



**“That they all may be one; as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be one in us: that the world may believe that thou hast sent me” (John 17:21).**

# Himher

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Eph. 4:3-6**

In a few months my wife and I will be blessed with a child, who at the present time goes under the name of "Himher." I guess that, unless you've been there, you have no idea of the excitement that fatherhood presents to me and the sense of belonging and oneness that exists and will develop with that child. I want the very best for Himher, for whom I, as a novice earthly parent-to-be, would put my life on the line.

This experience of parenthood brings to my mind more than ever before the close relationship that existed between God and His Son, Jesus Christ. While on earth, Christ relied heavily on that oneness with His Father and knew better than anyone else the importance of that relationship and the comfort, support, and reassurance that it provided. As Christ's time on earth drew to a close, I believe

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### **Unless you've been there, you have no idea of the excitement that fatherhood presents to me.**

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He was impressed with the need for His disciples and other followers to have that same closeness with the Father that He experienced. He knew well the trials and temptations they would encounter and that by developing a relationship with God they too would receive that fatherly love with all its benefits. Christ also believed that the result of oneness with the Father would be unity and spiritual support among fellow believers, which would create a synergistic effect in their influence on those around them.

From our human perspective, we strive on a daily basis to comprehend and attain to the oneness that Christ had with His Father. Although present-day applications of Christ's prayer are fairly simple, they are easier said than done. We are never too young or too old to start that relationship and let it ignite us along with those with whom we come in contact.

With Himher's entrance into the world, I will have the joy of developing an earthly oneness with my child, as well as the responsibility of helping Himher to understand the greater need of a relationship with the Father of humanity.

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*By Robert N. Mason, layout designer at Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho.*

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# A Matter of Character

## LOGOS

**John 16:28-33; 17:1-26; Ps. 133:1-3**

Jesus knew. He'd been too long with those 12 men not to know their patterns of behavior, and indeed, with divine insight, their very patterns of thought. "We know that you know all things, and need none to question you," they assured Him (John 16:30, RSV).

Jesus was too deep into the heartbreak of the events He knew were soon to occur to gloss over their simple reply. He tells them gently that they will leave Him. "Yet I am not alone, for the Father is with me" (verse 32). He needed reassurance, and at that moment His security was in His Father.

John 17 shows us the heartfelt longing of Christ in those turbulent moments before Gethsemane, the trial, and His crucifixion. It's far and away Christ's longest recorded prayer. Even though we are told so often that Christ was in the habit of going away and praying all night, there are so few recorded prayers. And this one is a very special and insightful one.

### Glory (John 17:1)

Jesus lifts His eyes to heaven and begins a prayer that is characterized, not by doom and gloom, but by celebration of His oneness with the Father. A recurring theme throughout the whole prayer, and particularly in the early part, is the glory of God. "Glorify thy Son that the Son may glorify thee" (17:1), Jesus prays. And again He says, "I glorified thee on earth" (verse 4). And, "Father, glorify thou me in thy own presence with the glory which I had with thee" (verse 5).

And surprisingly down in verse 10 He says of His disciples, "I am glorified in them."

Even more surprising, in view of His gentle rebuke of their soon-to-come desertion, Jesus says of the disciples, "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them" (verse 22). Then, He concludes the prayer with a request that His Father allow His disciples to be with Him "where I am, to behold my glory which thou hast given me in thy love" (verse 24).

What is this glory? Was Jesus referring to the Shekinah glory that blazed above the mercy seat in Old Testament times? Was He referring to the majesty that surrounded the appearances of God to prophets of old? Could it even be the blaze of light from resurrected Christ that struck down the Roman guard?

The answer is found back in the Old Testament in Exodus 33, 34. Moses, who had survived the very presence of God and received for the first time the words of God engraved on stone by His own hand, had a special request to ask of Him. "Moses said, 'I pray thee, show me thy glory'" (33:18). And God agreed to show Moses His glory (verses 21-23).

And how was that glory revealed? "The Lord passed before him, and proclaimed, 'The Lord, the Lord, a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness, keeping steadfast love for thousands, forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin, but who will by no means clear the guilty'" (34:6, 7).

There is no question that by His glory God intended Moses to understand His very character.

That idea is so obvious in this prayer of Jesus. Not only does He speak of His Father's glory but the name of God, as well. And, of course, they are synonymous. "I have manifested thy name," Jesus says (verse 6). "I kept them in thy name," Jesus prays in verse 12. And then, summing up at the end of the prayer, He says, "I made known to them thy name" (verse 26).

### **Unity the Natural Result (John 17:22)**

Toward the end of the prayer, Jesus sums it all up in the most trenchant statement: "The glory which thou hast given me I have given to them, that they may be one even as we are one" (verse 22).

This is the summation of the very ministry of Christ on earth. This was His aim in bearing so long with those often rebellious and always recalcitrant disciples. This is His continuing goal in encouraging us believers in the twentieth century. He wants us all to participate in the very character and experience of the Godhead.

Jesus didn't pray that we should be relieved of all earthly troubles. In fact, He prays the reverse (verse 15). He prays that His disciples might have the joy of the

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## **He'd been too long with those 12 men not to know their patterns of behavior.**

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infilling character and Spirit of God. He prays that they might be kept in His love, sanctified through the word of God (verse 17).

### **The Character Test**

Jesus looked beyond the immediate denial of the disciples. He knew they had indeed begun to participate in the very character of God. After their fear had evaporated and they had taken the time to gather together and study His word and to pray for the Holy Spirit, the power of God would indeed change their lives. Because of that, He could pray with assurance to His Father that "these know that thou hast sent me" (verse 25).

This prayer proves that our Saviour will never desert us. He knows our weaknesses, but He is determined to share His heavenly glory with us. And as our intercessor in heaven above, He is continuing to plead before the Father. It's not enough that He stand between us and the Father. It's more important, as this prayer so clearly points out, that He is the conduit from the Father to us to enable the development of a godly character. We can trust Jesus. We can trust the Father. And as we ourselves reach toward the attributes of the Godhead, we are showing Christ and His Father that we have indeed been made worthy of the trust that They have given to us.

### **REACT**

1. In practical terms, what does it mean to participate in the character of God?
2. What does this prayer reveal about Christ Himself?
3. What is there in this prayer that might have encouraged the disciples and might encourage me today?

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*By Lincoln E. Steed, editor of Listen magazine, Review & Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.*

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# Sincerely Yours

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 17:20**

The words have been demeaned by common use. I've used them myself on various form letters and applications. But "sincerely yours" implies so much if taken literally.

The extended prayer recorded in John 17 is anything but a form prayer. Jesus pours out His heart in a yearning for closeness—both to His Father and to His disciples. In the truest sense, this is a sincerely-yours prayer. Since Jesus Himself extended it to cover all believers down to our day, it is the ultimate chain letter, sharing an inexhaustible empathy and love.

"The religion of Christ is sincerity itself. Zeal for God's glory is the motive implanted by the Holy Spirit; and only the effectual working of the Spirit can

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### **"Sincerely yours" implies so much if taken literally.**

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implant this motive. Only the power of God can banish self-seeking and hypocrisy. This change is the sign of His working. When the faith we accept destroys selfishness and pretense, when it leads us to seek God's glory and not our own, we may know that it is of the right order. 'Father, glorify Thy name' (John 12:28), was the keynote of Christ's life, and if we follow Him, this will be the keynote of our life."<sup>1</sup>

So shortly before Gethsemane, the prayer of Jesus is all emotion. It is moving to read the repeated requests for unity and the assurances that, yes, we can partake of the very character of God.

Jesus prayed this emotional prayer for me. I know it! I feel it! He looked down through time and saw me. He prayed His Father that I might experience the thrill of unity with the Godhead.

Yes, this prayer-letter is to each of us with a "sincerely yours" from Jesus. We read it as a letter. But we cannot, dare not, dismiss it as a form. "'Father,' He says, 'I will that they also, whom thou hast given me, be with me where I am.' And then the Father declares, 'Let all the angels of God worship him.' The heavenly hosts prostrate themselves before Him, and raise their song of triumph and joy. Glory encircles the King of heaven, and was beheld by all the heavenly intelligences. No words can describe the scene which took place as the Son of God was publicly reinstated in the place of honor and glory which He voluntarily left when He became a man."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus wants us to be with Him. Sincerely.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 409.

2. Ellen G. White comments on John 17, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1146.

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*By Lincoln E. Steed, editor of Listen magazine, Review & Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.*

## Spiritual Glue

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: John 17:21**

It was going to be another one of those church-board meetings. It was already 9:30, and we hadn't even gotten through the departmental reports yet. The regular agenda stretched endlessly before us, and it seemed that every board member and her sister had to have his or her say. Me? I was nursing a headache from too many hours behind a desk and thinking about the "Monday Night Football" game I was missing. *Why can't we all just try to get along?* I thought.

My local church, like most Adventist churches in this age, is going through a traumatic period. Pick a topic, and you're bound to find someone on either side of

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### **I was nursing a headache from too many hours behind a desk and thinking about the "Monday Night Football" game I was missing.**

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the fence. And most likely they will argue the topic to death just for the "principle of the thing." *Unity* seems to be one of those buzz words that sound great but are just about as hard to grasp as *perfection*. The only consolation we have is that the problem of attaining unity is not unique to contemporary Christianity.

Chapter 17 of John is the only place in Scripture that takes an entire chapter to present one of Jesus' prayers. The Lord's Prayer in Matthew 6 is better known, but this intercessory prayer is significant, as well. Christ prayed here for the unity of the disciples. "Throughout the high-priestly prayer, Christ brings into view the *oneness* of the disciples as the mark of their matured discipleship: the sign that they are one in the name of the Father of Christ. The living, known name of God has this unifying power. As it is the bond of union between the Father and Son, it is, in like manner, to be the bond of union among the disciples."<sup>\*</sup>

Today, the Christian church has incredible potential for good. And we are left with the same mandate that confronted those disciples in Jerusalem 20 centuries ago—that of taking the good news to the entire world. The disciples prayed, as they had seen Jesus do, and gained the Holy Spirit, that "spiritual glue" they needed to hold themselves together in unity. Our task today is to do the same.

### **REACT**

1. How can the church foster "strength in diversity" in its governance?
2. When are personal opinions inappropriate?

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<sup>\*</sup> John Peter Lange, "The Gospel According to John," in *A Commentary on the Holy Scriptures* (New York: Scribner, Armstrong, & Co., 1873), p. 519.

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*By Glen Robinson, associate book editor at Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho.*

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# Striving for Unity

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: John 17:21**

“I am not attending a church where women wear jewelry! You know what the Bible says about adornment!”

The reply came quickly, “We should accept our fellow Christians regardless of what they wear!”

The church board was trying to decide whether to accept a membership transfer into their fellowship from another Adventist church. The young couple in question seemed to be dedicated Christians, but some church members were having trouble with the fact that the wife wore certain items of jewelry. Controversy escalated as people took sides against one another. No one was without an opinion.

Christian unity. Is it attainable in our churches, our workplaces, our lives?

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## “I am not attending a church where women wear jewelry!”

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Unity draws the world’s attention to us as Christians and makes it wonder what makes us tick. In Jesus’ last prayer for His disciples, He asked that the believers might be unified so that the world would be drawn to the Father.

God has made each of us unique; our diversity is a wonderful thing. Yet because we are all different, conflicts are bound to arise. But when we do differ, instead of attacking each other, we need to disagree without being disagreeable. Here’s how:

**1. Develop unity with God first.** Christian unity starts with us—and God; if we are unified with God, then our relationships with others will be filled with God’s love for them. The result of that love is an appreciation and tolerance of the differences between ourselves and others.

**2. Pray for those with whom we disagree.** Instead of gossiping or engaging in verbal attacks, why not pray for those who see things differently from the way we do? And these prayers should not simply be requests that those who differ with us will see the light and come to agree with us, but rather that we may come to live with them in love and unity. When we pray for others, we will be far less likely to criticize them or to emphasize our differences with them—and far more likely to love them.

## REACT

1. In light of John 17:21, what kind of unity do you think we should have with non-Adventist Christians?

2. How can we achieve unity—even in our own church—when we don’t believe the same way?

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*By Shauna McFarland, a student employee at Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho.*

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# Just Sitting, Looking Around

## OPINION

**Key Text: John 17**

About 20 young adults sat in our Sabbath School group one Sabbath morning, chewing on whether our particular congregation is cold or lukewarm or acceptable as it is. Someone challenged the complainers to be specific. Rocky, a man in his thirties who is not a Seventh-day Adventist, gave an answer I'll never forget. "Many of those people," he said respectfully, pointing to the church across the courtyard, "don't seem to know that they are the body of Christ."

If you've read John 17 carefully, you'll understand that the perfect solidarity Jesus has with the Father is the same solidarity Jesus' followers have with the Father *and with one another*. It is solidarity based on (1) God the Father, the ultimate authority figure; (2) Jesus, the intercessor, who has been punished for our crimes; and (3) the Spirit of love, who neutralizes every last one of our selfish excuses and indulgences. We need frequent reminders from the Bible as to how we

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### Rocky gave an answer I'll never forget.

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can put the relationship into practice.

We need many reminders, it seems, because we lose our awareness of these three binding elements so quickly. The devil tempts us to think that our own feelings, our own finances, our own circumstances deserve highest priority. He tempts us to think that being at church, singing the songs, kneeling at prayer time, are all it takes to unite us. He tempts us to think that our side of an argument should prevail; that our position on the ideological spectrum should hold sway; that the church owes us better treatment, better programs, more money for our age group. He'll tempt you with anything you have a burden for if it will hurt the body of Christ instead of build it up.

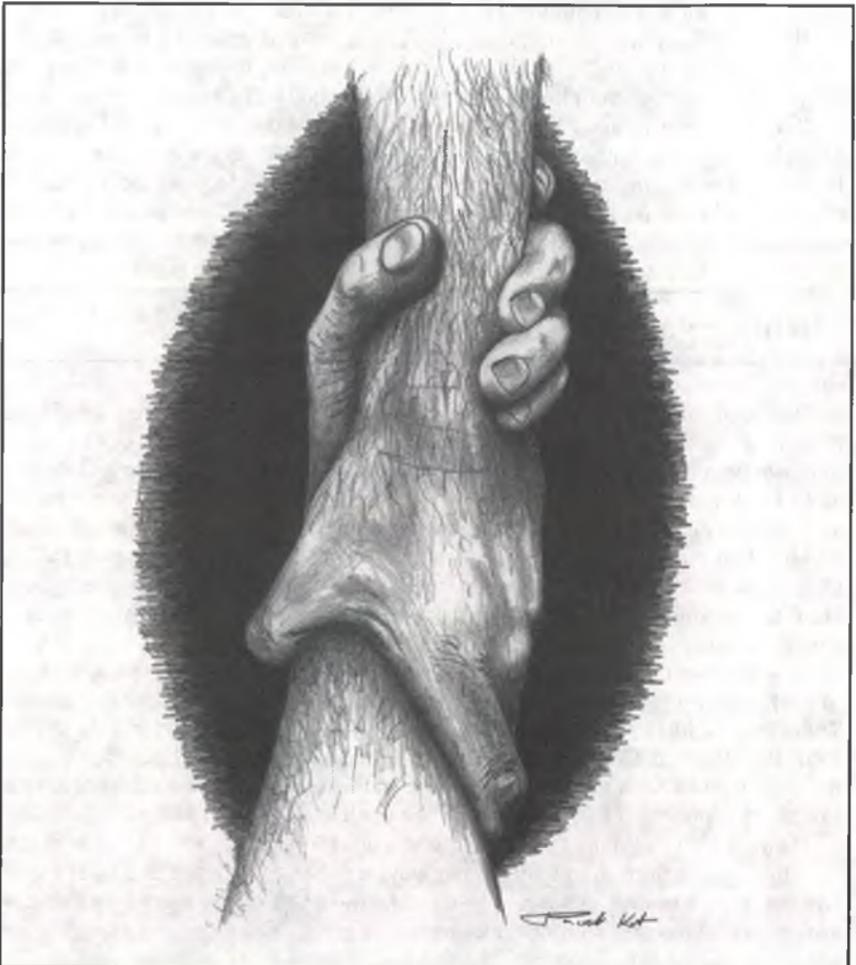
You may see in your church activity what seems tangential to Jesus' stated goal of perfect unity. There may be argument or ego stroking or personality clashes. There may be lots of members sitting on the sidelines. The remedy is truth straight from the Word of God. Ellen White said once, with her usual practicality, that the *only* way to fight error is to state the truth plainly.\* She would have agreed, I think, that one must be motivated by the truth and the truth alone.

Besides 1 Corinthians 13, John 17 is the one passage I would like to hear read in church much more frequently. That way, those in my church and your church who have ears to hear can never lose their awareness of the simple fact that we are one with God and with one another.

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\* Manuscript 6, 1902.

# WHAT'S FOOD GOT TO DO WITH IT?



**“Is not this the fast that I have chosen? to loose the bands of wickedness, to undo the heavy burdens, and to let the oppressed go free, and that ye break every yoke?” (Isa. 58:6).**

# Ya Gotta Serve Somebody

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isaiah 58

In the summer of 1993, 11 persons worshiped in a tent on campus and vowed to partake of only water until the administration of the University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), agreed to form a Chicano studies department. A small tent city grew around the fasters. Chicanos vowed their culture would be recognized at a university within the U.S. city having the largest Chicano population. Two thousand persons marched 13 miles from East Los Angeles to UCLA in the rain.

The reverence within the tent city was palpable. Ancient *Mexica* prayers and songs were heard. Aztec dancers performed to praise and implore Father God and Mother Earth. The smell of sage lingered from ritual cleansings of the tent city and its inhabitants. Descendants of the First Nations fasted for recognition on land stolen from their ancestors while community leaders and politicians negotiated with descendants of those who stole the land.

Did the fasters know Isaiah had predicted a Messiah would come for such an

## What if Jesus showed up today demanding the return of land stolen from the Lakota?

occasion (Isa. 61:1-3)? Did their supporters know Jesus said He was the Messiah and that He would initiate the predicted mission (Luke 4:18-21)? Do we as Seventh-day Adventists believe it's our job to sustain the Messiah's mission? Do we believe Jesus' statement that those who serve persons in need get into heaven; and those who don't, won't (Matt. 25:31-46)?

If we believe, why do we identify with the oppressors? If SDAs stand with the businesses, governments, and economic systems causing the social disorders the Messiah came to destroy, how can we call ourselves by His name? What if Jesus showed up today demanding the return of land stolen from the Lakota in the U.S.A., the Inuit in Canada, the Khuri in Australia? This is what "to proclaim the . . . year of the Lord" means—the Year of Jubilee, when all prisoners are released, all debts are canceled, and land is returned to its proper owner (Luke 4:19, RSV).

Why does Jesus identify with the oppressed and never the oppressor? The poor and not the rich (Matt. 19:23, 24; Luke 6:24-26)? To follow Christ is to be at odds with the ruling class and society in general. To be a Christian is to identify with those with whom Jesus identified, the victims of society. Worshipful fasting must take place in the context of preparation to serve those whom the Messiah served. Why would those who have everything fast? Why would Laodicea fast?

Those who need a Saviour fast. Those who want to cleanse themselves before embarking on a mission fast. The Creator will fulfill the promises of Isaiah 58 only for those who practice a true worship. True worship can take place only when the practitioner identifies with the same mission with which the Messiah identified.

*By Matef Harmachis, associate director of academic publications, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.*

# The Mysteries of Fasting

## LOGOS

### Matt. 6:16-18

Fast (verb): To abstain from any favorite pastime.

For religious or health purposes, human beings deny themselves certain pleasures for different lengths of time. Generally, such a fast is for personal or self-satisfaction.

A closer evaluation reveals that such practice can be pharisaic or egocentric (Luke 18:12). The Pharisee in the story related by Jesus in Luke 18:9-14 is condemned because his outward demonstration of fasting drew attention to himself. Even though he acted out the proper rituals of worship, such as fasting, tithing, and Sabbath keeping, he did not have the proper motive to worship (Isa. 58:1-9; 1 Cor. 13:3). What he needed was an inner fast. Such outward show was categorized by Jesus as hypocrisy (Matt. 6:16).

Why is there a need to fast anyway? Jesus commended it and defined it: "But when you fast, anoint your head and wash your face, that your fasting may not be

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**It is the inner fast that counts with God.**

**This inner fast is a preparation of the mind  
for service to humanity.**

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seen by men but by your Father who is in secret" (Matt. 6:17, 18, RSV). In *The Mysteries of Fasting*, Islamic scholar Al-Ghazzali makes the assertion that fasting belongs to God because it is concealed from human sight, while all other acts of worship can be done publicly.

It is the inner fast that counts with God. This inner fast is a preparation of the mind for service to humanity. Daily, our thoughts are occupied with concerns of family, school, recreation, entertainment, job or lack thereof, food, transportation, and the like. There is a need, at times, to empty one's mind of such cares and concentrate on things spiritual. In such times of inner fast, we can gain a better understanding of our purpose in the world.

Jesus, our example, entered the wilderness to fast after His baptism (Matt. 4:2). Many times during His hectic ministry He escaped to fast and pray. His followers, even His enemies, admitted the tremendous power with which He served humanity during His short stay on earth.

Seventh-day Adventists look for the soon return of Jesus. When He comes again, He will accept only those who demonstrated by their lifestyle that they experienced an inner fast. "Then the King will say to those at his right hand, 'Come, O blessed of my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world; for I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me'" (Matt. 25:34-36).

Jesus' statement is a reminder of what He Himself had spoken through Isaiah, clearly defining a true fast (Isa. 58:6, 7). The true value of a fast is the benefit derived by suffering humankind from our Christian service. True worship can be externally demonstrated only when we first have had an inner fast with our Lord.

## **REACT**

1. In your own words, how would you define “inner fast”?
2. If you have ever fasted, be prepared to share your experience with other Sabbath School class members.

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*By Linbrook Barker, a physician who works for the state penal system, Riverside, California.*

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# Deluded Enthusiasts or Ambitious Hypocrites?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 Corinthians 13**

In Isaiah 58 those who fasted were trying to achieve a closer walk with their God. Isaiah contrasts the type of fast that pleases God with the sham worship practiced by the Israelites. He lists the benefits and rewards of service as worship. But reward was all the Israelites had on their minds. So what is it that makes the service sufficient? What motivates us to act on behalf of God? What is it that attracts us to worship Him by serving humanity?

Many of us believe we learn to love others because we have learned to love God first. John suggests it to be the reverse. We learn how to love our Creator by first learning how to love those who are around us every day. "If any one says, 'I love God,' and hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother

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### **We learn how to love our Creator by first learning how to love those who are around us every day.**

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whom he has seen, cannot love God whom he has not seen" (1 John 4:20, RSV).

If this is true, then the love we develop with our families, friends, and neighbors is the love we will show our heavenly family. Maybe this is why we are commissioned to serve the victims of society. By learning to love "the least of these, my brothers and sisters," we become adept at loving the One who sent us.

All the talk of love in the Bible seems to radiate from the focal point of Jesus' sacrificial death on the cross. But His life of sacrifice was part of the salvation package—being freed from others' sins against us is just as important as being liberated from our own sins. All of His acts of sacrifice cannot be separated from His motive for action. In 1 Corinthians 13 Paul explains the motive for the inexplicable sacrifices Jesus made for us.

"No matter how high the profession, he whose heart is not filled with love for God and his fellow men, is not a true disciple of Christ. Though he should possess great faith and have power even to work miracles, yet without love his faith would be worthless. He might display great liberality; but should he, from some other motive than genuine love, bestow all his goods to feed the poor, the act would not commend him to the favor of God. In his zeal he might even meet a martyr's death, yet if not actuated by love, he would be regarded by God as a deluded enthusiast or an ambitious hypocrite."

## **REACT**

1. Why is love an essential element to the acts of those following and professing the Word of God?
2. Why does God not accept works done without love?

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\* *The Acts of the Apostles*, pp. 318, 319.

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*By Tafari Higgs, a freshman at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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## *Helios Biblios* (Fiery Words or Holy Bible)

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Isa. 58:4**

Isaiah points out two types of fasts in chapter 58. The first fast, in Isaiah 58:4, is one designed for the purpose of increasing the strength of Israel to afflict others instead of their own souls in preparation to act like God's chosen people. Many people fast, believing that if they afflict their souls they will hear God's presence.

Unfortunately, this type of fast is recognized by its lack of a proper motive. The Israelites practiced this without realizing that self had gotten in the way of communion with God. They desired a closer relationship with God for the wrong reasons. Just like the Israelites, we use fasting as a way to self-improvement at the expense of the very persons we have been commissioned to serve.

The second type of fast, which appears in verses 6 and 7, has roots in selfless-

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### **“What man has more than enough and gives it to the world?”**

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ness. These ideas expressed by Isaiah were not new. From the sixth century B.C. in China, the *Tao Te Ching* says: “The Tao (The Way; God) of heaven is to take from those who have too much and give to those who do not have enough. Man's way is different. He takes from those who do not have enough to give to those who already have too much. What man has more than enough and gives it to the world? Only the Man of Tao.”

Long before Joseph's brothers sold him into slavery, the Egyptians believed that to enter paradise they would have to go before Isiris and give an account of their lives. In the *Book of the Dead*, they outlined how to live so that when they died they could say, “I have appeased God by doing His will. I have given bread to the hungry, water to the thirsty, clothes to the naked, and a boat to the shipwrecked.”

The Lord God promises a multitude of blessings as a result of taking part in a selfless fast (Isa. 58:8-12). The blessings include:

- Your health will be restored speedily.
- Righteousness will go before you.
- The glory of the Lord will be your reward.
- Your prayers will be answered.
- You will have comfort during mourning.
- Your light shall rise in obscurity, and darkness will be as noonday.
- You will receive continuous guidance.
- Your needs will be satisfied in drought.

### **REACT**

Explain the meaning of each of the eight blessings listed above.

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*By Regina McKenzie, a mathematics teacher at Loma Linda Junior High School in Loma Linda, California.*

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# Filling Out Your Add/Drop Form

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: 1 Cor. 10:31**

Just as fasting is more than physical hunger, fasting deals with more than just tangible food. Since fasting is a cleansing of one's mind to prepare it for worship and service to God, there should be a removal of any distractions, idols, and pre-occupations that take our eyes off God. In the end, a misguided fast is just as useless as a self-righteous one. But how do you make a fast meaningful?

**1. Make it personal.** Identify a specific distraction that comes between you and God. If you spend irresponsible amounts of time and money buying and checking out the latest fashions, then perhaps clothing is your weakness. You should fast from elaborate and expensive clothing. If you are an avid sports fan and you spend

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**If you don't know the difference between a steeple chase and a pennant race, then a fast from ESPN wouldn't make much sense.**

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your time following your favorite sports stars more than your real hero, Jesus Christ, then sports are your weakness. Give sporting events a break for a time.

Fast from a weakness. If expensive clothing is your weakness and you don't know the difference between a steeple chase and a pennant race, then a fast from ESPN wouldn't make much sense. Similarly, if you cling to every juke and jam by Barkley or Shaquille, yet care little about trendy threads, a fast from Gucci, Pucci, or Nina Rucci would be futile.

Pick a fast that will clear your mind and body to prepare you better to worship God. Identify your shortcomings, and make the deed fit the need. Remember, some distractions may appear to be positive, e.g., too much studying or overtime.

**2. Do it in service for others.** Just as self-righteous and pompous fasting is hypocritical (Isa. 58:3, 4; Luke 18:12), laborious and unenthusiastic fasting is counterproductive. When you fast, don't sit at home next to the clock, counting hours, waiting for your next fix. When abstaining from pleasurable personal pastimes, you will save money, time, and energy. Invest what you save from trimming your excesses in your fellow man and woman. Give your extra clothes/money to some poor persons. Spend your sports time tutoring and role modeling for troubled youth. Use your renewed energy to give unselfishly of yourself.

Soon you will find exhilaration in putting others' needs ahead of your commercial-induced wants. Your temporary fast may quickly become a permanent one. The joys of service will replace the fear of the void you thought you would feel.

**3. Remember the God factor.** Everything you do should be to His glory (1 Cor. 10:31). Find pleasure in allying yourself with God. When the fast is trying and your will is thin, look to Christ for power. Have faith in God's promise to reward your fast (Isa. 58:10-14).

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*By Miriosh Higgs, a senior at John W. North High School, Riverside, California.*

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## Talkin' 'Bout Revolution

### OPINION

**Key Text: Rev. 1:12-18**

Change is the order of the day. When reviewing Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25:31-46 and then juxtaposing them with Luke 4:16-30 and Isaiah 61:1-4, the picture of a liberating, activist Messiah powered by a radical Holy Spirit comes into focus. Gustavo Gutierrez, in *A Theology of Liberation*, defined liberation as having three necessary parts. If you are missing any one part, you are not free.

First, you must be relieved from all forms of oppression. It doesn't matter whether you are oppressed because of your religion, race, gender, handicap, or economic status. It doesn't matter whether smog oppresses you. You must be free of that oppression to have liberation.

Second, you must be in charge of your history as an individual and as a col-

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### **“The church can neither retreat from the world nor embrace it.”**

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lective. If you are in charge of your history, that proves you are in command of your present and you will control your future. That is why Carter G. Woodson, founder of Black History Month, said you cannot judge the potential of a people until you have analyzed their contributions to humanity.

Third, you must have an intimate relationship with the Creator of the universe. It's erroneous to teach that Jesus came only to save us from our sins and leave us on a wicked planet depending on a theory of pie in the sky. Jesus called Himself the Messiah, the One who would proclaim the Year of Jubilee. That means sight to the blind, now; it means freedom to the captive, right now. If you call yourself by His name, you must be an activist too (Mark 16:17, 18; Luke 24:49).

James H. Cone, in *A Black Theology of Liberation*, says: “Because the church knows that the world is where people are dehumanized, it can neither retreat from the world nor embrace it. Retreating is tantamount to a denial of its calling to share in divine liberation. It is a complete misunderstanding of the Christ-event which demands radical, worldly involvement on behalf of oppressed . . . [people].

“The embracing of the world is also a denial of the gospel. . . . And since not everyone recognizes Christ for who he is, the task of the church is to be out there in the world, not as an endorser of its oppression but as the visible representative of his Lordship.”

If Jesus came only to free us spiritually, why did He spend three years teaching us how to live a life of service? Why would His disciples emulate Him so closely that even Peter's shadow passing over the sick brought healing? Why would Ellen White revive the health message to lead us to live balanced lifestyles? But today, we act as if liberation took place only when Jesus died on the cross.

Long live the activists.

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*By Matef Harmachis, associate director of academic publications, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.*

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# READY FOR THE FINALS?



**“Therefore be ye also ready: for in such an hour as ye think not the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 24:44).**

# Never Again!

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 24:33

“There’s no time to kill between the cradle and the grave,” echoes from a far corner as a waitress slides the greasy plate of hash browns under my nose. I douse the plate with ketchup and begin forking food into my mouth while I turn pages in my textbook. Pouring a little more coffee in my cup of sugar, I stir the mixture slowly as my study partner fires questions at me. Bleary-eyed truck drivers and tired waitresses stare at us while we utter profound phrases about William Faulkner, Kate Chopin, and other prominent writers in Southern literature. I glance at my watch—12:45 a.m.—plenty of time. I gulp down another cup of coffee, the Waffle House specialty, and start the next chapter. Final exam week is here again.

My exam week always follows a predictable pattern—late nights, early mornings, one or two hours of sleep a night for a week, and the monotonous wardrobe

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**Always there’s that moment at 4:30 when  
I look at myself in the mirror and promise,  
“I will *never* do this again.”**

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of jeans and sweat shirts. Normally a healthful eater, I find myself gobbling candy bars and soda at 3:30 in the morning. And, of course, there’s coffee—a procrastinator’s lifesaver. I walk to class shaking with a caffeine buzz and return to my room two hours later with an upset stomach. And always there’s that moment at 4:30 when I look at myself in the mirror and promise, “I will *never* do this again. *Never*. Next time I’ll prepare the week before.” Right! Score: Final Exam Week 7, Heather 0.

Sabbath morning I wake up late. I fumble around and find my devotional book under a pile of school papers. I alternate reading a sentence and twirling another hot roller into my hair. Pulling on a dress, I search through my books and around my bed, until I finally find my Bible under my Sabbath coat in the corner. I run out the door, down the sidewalk, and into the church. The sermon is about signs of the end of time, and those signs seem startlingly familiar and relevant. Matthew 24:33 says, “Even so, when you see all these things, you know that it is near, right at the door” (NIV). My mind wanders for a moment, and I picture a huge scoreboard lighted up at the end of time. Score: End of Time 1, Heather 0.

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*By Heather Brannan, senior history-and-English major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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## Son Watchers, Not Sign Watchers

### LOGOS

**Matt. 23:37–25:46**

During Jesus' earthly ministry, He showed that He was a master of public speaking. He understood what type of speech would result in the effect He desired. His penchant for the parable was based on this understanding. An effective method of teaching simple lessons, the parable was quite popular in Christ's day. Thus, when His followers heard a parable, such as the good Samaritan (Luke 10:25-37), they knew the meaning immediately.

However, the parable was also an effective method to use when one wanted temporarily to hide some truth. When Jesus told the parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33), He used a metaphor that could be interpreted in several ways. The meaning He wanted to hide from the Pharisees and Sadducees in His audience was the metaphorical use of leaven for the doctrines of these two groups. Christ saw no need to make His enemies angrier.

Yet the Master Orator also saw times when a blunt tirade was appropriate. Often, these speeches were reserved for the Jewish leadership because of their hypocrisy. And Matthew 23 relates one of those times when Jesus openly exposed their falsehood. Any member of Jesus' audience would have had no doubt as to His meaning: Christ wanted the 12 disciples, the curious seekers, the Pharisees, and the Sadducees to know that these last two groups were nothing more than hypocrites.

Moments later, however, Jesus is again talking in riddles. After lamenting the future fate of Jerusalem, He is met with incredulity. His disciples want to know how such magnificent buildings could be destroyed. When Jesus says, "There shall not be left here one stone upon another" (24:2), they want to know when. Their question is hinged on two other questions: "What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?" (verse 3, NIV). The combination allows Jesus to move into an answer that certainly left the disciples somewhat confused.

This moment is not the first time Jesus' close friends were perplexed. The disciples often missed the meaning of the parables. But Jesus "privately to his own disciples . . . explained everything" (Mark 4:34, RSV) in regard to the spiritual stories. When He wanted to teach a spiritual lesson about the kingdom of heaven, Jesus would speak without underlying meanings to these men. These parables, after all, contained the basic elements of a life on this earth in preparation for a life in heaven. The disciples needed to understand this information.

But there were times when Jesus treated His disciples as He did the general populace and kept the meaning of His words hidden. Thus, even though the apostles continued to interpret Jesus' words and actions to be those of the deliverer from Roman rule, the Master did not attempt to correct their thinking until nearly the end of His earthly ministry. He understood their spiritual immaturity would not allow for the express truth before that time. And even then they still misunderstood Him.

In Matthew 24 Jesus speaks in double-entendre. He mingles the descriptions of both the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming. He could have chosen to make the details of each even distinct, but, "The knowledge of future events would, at that time, have been too much for them."<sup>1</sup>

There is, however, another crucial reason for Jesus' ambiguity. He did not want His disciples, as well as future followers, to become concerned about the date of the second coming. Thus, as subsequent events put Christ's words in perspective, the apostles understood where Jesus expected emphasis to be placed: on being Son watchers and not sign watchers.

For this reason, Jesus includes the parable of the 10 young maidens (Matt. 25:1-13) in this conversation. All the women were waiting for the bridegroom; only five were not disappointed. They had invested in some oil in preparation for the event. Should the wedding be delayed, as it was, they would be ready.

The five foolish maidens represent those who do not yield to the Holy Spirit. Rather, they are attracted to the gospel, but selfishness keeps the truth from taking deep root in their lives.<sup>2</sup> Can there be anything more attractive than that which heaven promises? There are many who believe not and thus become enamored with the event that will usher in a life of eternal bliss. The apparent delay of Christ's coming, however, as well as other problems of the church, will cause them to be unprepared. They have not invested in a relationship with Christ. (Interestingly,

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## **The parable was an effective method to use when one wanted temporarily to hide some truth.**

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Jesus' blunt tirades against the Jewish leadership resulted from an absence of this relationship.)

One modern-day event elucidates the above concept. The Great Disappointment of 1844 caused many to denounce religion entirely. Yet the Seventh-day Adventist Church was born from the study of those who sought an answer to the error. Today, this church emphasizes Son watching over sign watching.

When Jesus' disciples questioned Him about the destruction of Jerusalem and His second coming, He chose to speak ambiguously. He wanted His hearers to forget about dates. The books of the New Testament show that He knew what He was doing. Their authors' emphasis on relationship, though their belief in the nearness of Christ's coming, is quite apparent. Jesus also wanted future generations, as they read His words, to understand this same concept. The Seventh-day Adventist does.

### **REACT**

1. What are the practical differences between "Son watching" and "sign watching"?
2. How has the imminence of Jesus' second coming affected your behavior today?
3. In everyday terms, what effect should it have?

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1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 496.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 636.

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*By Dennis Negrón, assistant dean of men of Talge Hall, Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# Surprise!

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 25:13**

*I'm not expecting Mom home until around 5:00 p.m., so why not?* she said to herself, settling down comfortably by the Christmas tree. Home from college for the holidays and bored, taking an early peek at her gifts seemed childish, but irresistible. The tree was furry and fragrant. Its prickly green needles tickled as she sifted through the piles of presents.

Soon she had a colorful pile set aside, each package with her name attached. *I feel like a little kid*, she thought guiltily. Gingerly, she began opening them—and then carefully replacing the tape and smoothing the ribbons. Reaching for the

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## Gingerly, she began opening them—and then carefully replacing the tape.

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longest box, she heard a shuffle. Glancing up, her heart froze. There stood Mom, her face flushed with disappointment. Caught.

When Christ comes, will we be rummaging through the delights of this world—carefully replacing the tape in an effort to hide our shame? Is this the state of readiness we ought to be in? “Watch therefore, for ye know neither the day nor the hour wherein the Son of man cometh” (Matt. 25:13).

In Scripture the Saviour Himself has given signs of His coming. It will be our own fault if we are caught in unreadiness at His return. “But the day and the hour of His coming Christ has not revealed. He stated plainly to His disciples that He Himself could not make known the day or the hour of His second appearing. Had He been at liberty to reveal this, why need He have exhorted them to maintain an attitude of constant expectancy?”\*

This attitude of constant expectancy should be our daily experience. Of course, we must continue planning and setting goals for our life here on earth. These plans, however, should in no way interrupt our diligent study of Scripture or stand in the way of our being prepared for Christ's soon return.

Are you ready for Jesus to come? Don't allow the brightly wrapped packages of this life to keep you from being prepared to meet Him when He comes. There will be no end to heaven's surprises. They're waiting for you.

## REACT

1. What things are happening today that indicate Christ's soon return?
2. What can you do to make sure you are not caught by surprise at His coming?

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\* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 632.

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By Melia K. Boyson, a senior broadcast journalism major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.

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# Investing Commodities

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Matt. 25:18**

The world's best museums benefit greatly from a practice of human nature and a function of geology. Namely, things get buried. An entire branch of science (archaeology) exists simply because many yesterdays are left under the surface of our planet. The earth's crust is a haven for unwritten yet clearly recorded history.

From the vaults of treasure in ancient pyramids to entire cities preserved underground to digs that uncover massive personal fortunes of precious jewels and incredible wealth, our modern world catches glimpses of the past by looking beneath us.

Much of the burying that takes place is simply geological. But much is intentional. And this is the kind we find in Matthew 25:18. In ancient times it was

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### **I say No to all these definitions of *ready*.**

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commonplace to bury something valuable to protect it. Unlike today, when we use bank vaults or investment securities to protect our wealth, people of the past hid what they considered precious with a shovel and wheelbarrow. And this is what the servant in Jesus' story is doing. He feared that he might lose or have stolen what the Master had given him to care for. And so he buried the treasure where history would store it.

If we take the analogy that, like the servants waiting for the return of their master, we too are living in the "waiting period," then what is it that we either bury or invest? Our master must have given us something to care for while we wait for His return.

Perhaps Adventism's most asked question is "Are you ready for Jesus to return?"

Well, I ask, "What is *ready*?" Is *ready* professing the 27 Fundamental Beliefs? Is *ready* holding to the Ten Commandments? Is *ready* reaching the proper level of performance preparation?

I say No to all these definitions of *ready*. In the context of Matthew 23–25 (the last days), the issue of readiness is whether we invest (we are ready) or bury (we are not) the commodity given by the Master. The commodity God has given us (especially this church) is the good news of salvation. What we do with the saving commodity is the measuring stick of being ready. Am I investing the gospel in the lives of the world? Is the mission of sharing the saving and returning Jesus the passion of my life? Am I investing the spiritual gifts the Master has given me in the lives of the lost, or have I chosen to bury the treasure because it's too risky?

Are you investing your commodity? Are you burying it? Are you ready?

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*By Alex Bryan, associate pastor for worship and college ministries, Collegedale (Tennessee) Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

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# The Parable of the Ten Students

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 25:1-13**

Sandi Patti, Michael English, 4 Him—it was going to be a great concert. And it was free! But it was also going to be crowded. To avoid a rush, the producers of the concert decided not to announce the starting time. Sometime Sunday. That's all anyone knew.

Early Sunday morning, people carpeted the concert hall's front steps, waiting for the doors to open. Ten students from a nearby Christian college had been there since 5:00 a.m. Only a few feet from the door, they jabbered happily about the concert. By 1:00 p.m. the jabbering had given way to growling stomachs. Five of the ten students pulled out their sack lunches and devoured them. The other five, thinking the concert would have started long before now, had brought nothing to

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### Early Sunday morning, people carpeted the front steps, waiting for the doors to open.

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eat. They asked the five with food for a bite or two, but they had finished their lunches. They were sorry, but what could they do?

"We'll be OK," said the hungry five. "The concert should start soon." But four hours later, they were not OK. Two had headaches; three felt weak and dizzy. "We're going to get some food," they said. "We can't wait like this any longer."

There were no McDonald's or Pizza Huts in the concert hall's ritzy cultural section. The restaurants were expensive and crowded. Finally, they found an inexpensive coffee shop. They had been gone two hours. They rushed back to the hall, but the steps were deserted.

"No!" they cried. "We've been waiting since five." The hall was full, and the concert had started.

God the Father, God the Son, God the Holy Spirit, and the angels—it's going to be a great concert. But the starting time hasn't been announced. Sometime soon. That's all anyone knows. Christ has paid our admission fee, but if our strength fails us during the time of trouble because we are spiritually starved, or if we are looking for fulfillment elsewhere than in Jesus Christ, we won't be going in when the doors open. To be fulfilled by Christ:

1. **Seek Him.** Talk with Him on your knees, as you walk, as you drive.
2. **Behold Him.** Study Christ's character as He reveals it in His Word and in His nature.
3. **Love Him.** To know God is to love Him by keeping His law and actively loving our fellow humans.

Seek Him, behold Him, love Him—know Him—it's the only way to be ready now or three years from now. The doors may open at any time. And we don't want to be sitting in a coffee shop when they do.

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*By Jessica Vining, senior English major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# Are You Getting Warmer?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Matt. 24:36**

“Jesus is coming again.” That’s the message we keep hearing. “Prepare to meet your Maker.” That message soon follows, and in turn is followed by, “Good Christians should not be intimidated by the fact that we don’t know exactly when.”

But many of us still feel a twinge of fear when we think about these things. After all, this isn’t your surprise birthday party, at which the worst thing that could happen is you look a little foolish in the Polaroids. This is the big time: salvation versus eternal damnation.

I think all little kids love to play “hot-and-cold.” They’ll hide something and make us hunt for it. “Cold, cold, cold!” they sing out, and our progress is marked by “Warm, warmer, hot, hotter!” And when we are right on top of it, they shout, “Oh, you’re gonna get buuuuurrrned!”

We are cautioned against abusing signs of the second coming. Many of us are

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**This isn’t your surprise birthday party, at which the worst thing that could happen is you look a little foolish in the Polaroids.**

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tempted to play “hot-and-cold” with the signs Jesus gave us. When the signs are screaming “Hot, Hotter, Hottest! You’re gonna burn!” we plan on quickly dropping to our knees and hopping in with the flock.

Why should we have to worry about a surprise second coming? Everyone who has had to search and search for something while some six-year-old shouts, “You’re getting warmer!” can understand the frustration that accompanies not knowing something that could easily be told to us.

But we are nonetheless forewarned that Jesus’ coming will be sudden, and we must be resigned to the fact that the exact moment will remain a surprise. So the only way you can find comfort is to be ready to enjoy the moment for which all Christendom has been waiting for 2,000 years. And forget about what you will look like in the Polaroids.

## REACT

1. On what scriptural evidence do you base your own personal conviction that Jesus’ second coming is imminent?

2. How would you answer someone who claims that it is capricious and cruel of God not to tell us the exact time of Christ’s return?

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*By Steve Gensolin, a senior English-and-history major at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# DELIVERANCE



**“Here is the patience of the saints: here are they that keep the commandments of God, and the faith of Jesus” (Rev. 14:12).**

# Luther's Dilemma

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rev. 18:4**

Throughout the Bible, there are instances in which God had to call after His people who had fallen prey to the fornications of the surrounding nations. Around the sixteenth century a man was called out of Babylon to stand true to the Word of God. Martin Luther had always been a devout Roman Catholic and never dreamed of being anything other than that, until one day he journeyed to Rome and his eyes were opened to the profanity taking place in his church.

Fortunately, Luther loved the Word of God and made it his standard by which to live and to test truth. And this is also what he preached: no other doctrines than those based on the authority of Scripture.

When the pope declared that it was now possible to pay your way out of purgatory by purchasing indulgences, it was the last straw for Luther. He had discovered for himself that God's grace is free—it cannot be purchased; people cannot be saved by their own effort. So, at the Festival of All Saints, Luther posted

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### **Often Luther's mind was filled with doubts about whether he was doing the right thing.**

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his 95 theses on the church door in Wittenburg.

Often his mind was filled with doubts about whether he was doing the right thing. But Luther would answer such questions by recalling from Scripture that Moses was alone when he had to lead God's people out of Egypt; Elijah had to stand alone against King Ahab; Isaiah was alone in Jerusalem.

In the face of trials and persecution, Luther would say with confidence, "I am like Jeremiah, a man of strife and contention; but the more their threats increase, the more my joy is multiplied. . . . They have already destroyed my honor and my reputation. One single thing remains; it is my wretched body: let them take it; they will thus shorten my life by a few hours. But as for my soul, they cannot take that. He who desires to proclaim the word of Christ to the world, must expect death at every moment."\*

We are living at the end of time, and we are being called to heed the three angels' messages, to make a decision between truth and error. Those who remain true to the Lord and obey His commandments will receive the seal of God and will become instruments of the Holy Spirit in finishing the work.

Our faith will be tested under severe trials as the Holy Spirit finally withdraws and Satan takes control over the world in the time of persecution. Will you remain true to the Lord and faithful to the true Sabbath until He returns?

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\* *The Great Controversy*, p. 135.

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*By Yolande Vorster, a theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Cape, South Africa.*

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# Make Up Your Mind!

## LOGOS

Rev. 14:1-20; 15:2-4

This week's Scripture is a dramatic presentation of last-day events. Visions of victory and worship alternate with scenes of warning and judgment. Angels are announcing solemn messages, inducing the final acts of the drama of salvation. The wooing voice of "there is still time!" already forecasts the approaching climax of "it is completed." Nobody can avoid a decision, and only two groups will emerge.

### A Perfect Victory (Rev. 14:1-5)

Here, John still has in mind the visions of Revelation 12 and 13; namely, the dark powers and their activities. They are setting up counterfeit images, and their deceptive power seems to threaten our salvation. But now the prophet receives an encouraging vision: a huge group of redeemed who have gained the victory! Despite fiery end-time temptations, these singing saints are "those who did not defile themselves . . . they kept themselves pure. . . . They are blameless" (verses 4, 5, NIV). Christ's grace has produced "a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle" (Eph. 5:27). The ideal of Christ's perfection has found its fulfillment.

On 144,000 foreheads the name of the Lamb and the Father is written: the seal of Christlikeness. The bearers are sons and daughters of God. God's name signifies that they are creatures in His image, having the likeness of God's character. And they are God's holy possession that He purchased. God takes care of what has always been His: "Surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age" (Matt. 28:20).

The joy is too great and the relief too mighty. Thousands of thankful voices culminate in a powerful song. So special has been the way God revealed His faithfulness during overpowering tribulation, so glorious appeared God's liberation, that this song is absolutely unique. Only the 144,000 can sing it. It is *their personal way* of thanking God.

### Three Angels Proclaiming (Rev. 14:6-13)

The previous scene has reaffirmed God's faithfulness and presence to the very end. But it was like an anticipation. Now, we find ourselves back in a sinful world and hear heaven's last messages to the earth. Three angels proclaim promises, as well as warnings. God's triumph over Satan is determined, and His final judgment is at hand. The three messages adjure a personal decision: obedience or destruction. In the end, there can be only two parties among humankind.

That the first angel's gospel is eternal shows us its authority. Four terms—*nation, tribe, language, and people*—emphasize its universal relevance. This gospel concerns and affects every person on earth! The call is one of worship: "Fear God and give him glory. . . . Worship him" (Rev. 14:7). It is intensified by awareness of imminent judgment and the sovereign creatorship of God.

Then we hear quite different words: a great fall has taken place. Babylon, which had ruled all nations and made them indulge in idolatry, is destroyed. The first message's call to worship *God* is enhanced through the downfall of God's enemy—Babylon. And the third message is already envisioned: fall with Babylon, or win with God.

The first angel introduced God, the second Babylon. The third angel now presents two groups: followers of Babylon and followers of God. Either you worship the beast and his image, or you are faithful to God. Two times we read of those who worship the beast or receive his mark (verses 9, 11), and in between we find God's manifest wrath. The faithful, on the other hand, are assured that even death cannot take away the blessed aftermath of their labor.

### **Three Angels Harvesting (Rev. 14:14-20)**

Again we meet three angels, but this time they not only speak, they also act. The image of "one 'like a son of man'" (verse 14) seated on a cloud surely recalled in John's mind Jesus' ascension and the words: "[He] will come back in the same way!" (Acts 1:11). The harvest of the earth is thus connected to Christ's second advent, the close of human history.

Two things are significant: first, harvest is a recurring theme in Jesus' parables. Humanity will be judged according to their fruits. In the parable of the weeds (Matt. 13:24ff), the good seed grows along with the weeds until harvest. Apparently, this time has now come for the earth.

Second, each angel comes out of the temple. Since harvest implies separation

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## **On 144,000 foreheads the name of the Lamb and the Father is written.**

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of the fruitful crop and the weeds, mention of temple and altar might indicate termination of Christ's mediating ministry (cf. 15:8).

The whole harvest is made possible by Christ's death "outside the city" (Rev. 14:20). He has "trodden the winepress alone" (Isa. 63:3), surely connoting judgment and Christ's death.

### **Praising God's Righteousness (Rev. 15:2-4)**

This vision reminds us of the 144,000. Although it is possible that the two groups are identical, their depiction seems to have diverging aims. The first scene focused on the 144,000 and their blamelessness. The second scene focuses on *God*, the "just and true" King whose deeds are "great and marvelous," who "alone . . . [is] holy" (verses 3, 4) and whose righteous acts have been revealed.

The reason for this becomes evident as we read 15:1. There, plagues are about to be poured out. Doubts may arise about God when we see Him punishing the wicked so severely. The song is meant to reassure us of God's justice even as judgment strikes. At the same time, we sense the jubilant tone that praises God's victory over dark forces—an experience those saints share with Moses and the Lamb. Again, this scene of worship is a glimpse into the future so that the present might be better understood.

### **REACT**

1. Why do you think the three angels' messages are regarded as one of the pillars of Adventist identity?

2. How is it possible to combine in our lives hate for sin with love for sinners?

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*By Johannes Kolletzki, a theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Cape, South Africa.*

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# More Than Deliverance!

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Exod. 29:46**

“In order to be prepared for the judgment, it is necessary that men should keep the law of God. That law will be the standard of character in the judgment. The apostle Paul declares: ‘As many as have sinned in the law shall be judged by the law, . . . in the day when God shall judge the secrets of men by Jesus Christ.’ And he says that ‘the doers of the law shall be justified.’ Romans 2:12-16. Faith is essential in order to keep the law of God; for ‘without faith it is impossible to please Him.’ And ‘whatsoever is not of faith is sin.’ Hebrews 11:6; Romans 14:23.”<sup>1</sup>

“God has called His church in this day, as He called ancient Israel, to stand as a light in the earth. By the mighty cleaver of truth, the messages of the first, second, and third angels, He has separated them from the churches and from the

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## The law is the only possible means by which God will distinguish the just from the unjust.

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world to bring them into a sacred nearness to Himself. He has made them the depositaries of His law and has committed to them the great truths of prophecy for this time.”<sup>2</sup>

“Christ’s true disciples follow Him through sore conflicts, enduring self-denial and experiencing bitter disappointment; but this teaches them the guilt and woe of sin, and they are led to look upon it with abhorrence. Partakers of Christ’s sufferings, they are destined to be partakers of His glory. In holy vision the prophet saw the ultimate triumph of God’s remnant church.”<sup>3</sup>

The law is the only possible means by which God will distinguish the just from the unjust. This is, however, not to frighten us, since, as stated above, our faith will enable us to please Him. Our faith, in turn, is the gift of God. Thus we realize once again that salvation lies entirely in the hands of God. But there is more to it. Salvation means more than being freed from our sins; it is the ultimate fulfillment of God’s initial purpose with this world, a purpose quite distinct from that of all other worlds: God wants to “tabernacle” with us!

## REACT

1. What is the role of the law in regard to the three angels’ messages?
2. How do you react emotionally to the concept of self-denial as it is described in the *Testimonies* quotation above?

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1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 436.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 455.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 590.

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*By Dennis Meier, theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Cape, South Africa.*

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# Why Exactly 144,000?

## EVIDENCE

### Key Text: Rev. 14:1

We can split 144,000 into several factors:  $12 \times 12 \times 1,000$ ; or  $12 \times 12,000$ . These figures, being so clean cut, suggest a symbolic meaning.

**Twelve.** This is the number of the tribes of Israel and Israel's sons. Twelve is the smallest factor in what was promised to become as numerous as the sand of the sea. As the number of yearly months, 12 also symbolizes completeness. Many of Israel's offices were structured on a monthly basis. Jesus chose 12 apostles to form the core of the Christian church. The New Jerusalem has written the names of the 12 tribes and of the 12 apostles, linking Old and New Testament.

**One hundred forty-four.** The temple used 24 divisions of singers and musicians, who totaled 288 ( $144 \times 2$ ) persons. Interestingly enough, the 144,000 are

## Twelve is the smallest factor in what was promised to become as numerous as sand.

depicted as singers and musicians too. Similarly, the number of the 12 army divisions serving the king each month were 24,000 each, totaling 288,000 a year (1 Chron. 27:1).

**One thousand.** The number 1,000 symbolizes "very many," or even "any given number." God remembers His covenant "for a thousand generations" (1 Chron. 16:15, NIV). Psalm 84:10 confesses that one day in the Lord's courts is better than a thousand elsewhere. Often, 10,000 is employed in the same way, e.g., Paul would rather speak five intelligible words than 10,000 in a tongue (1 Cor. 14:19).

**Twelve thousand.** The occurrence of 12,000 in the Bible is rather incidental. Twelve thousand is not a typical military contingent. One might want to suggest that 12,000 from each tribe (Revelation 7) shows that each tribe in a loving way includes all the others. Each tribe represents all 12 tribes ( $12 \times 1,000$ ) because there is empathy and caring.

To multiply numbers marks a striking enhancement, e.g., Jesus tells us to forgive 70 times 7 times (Matt. 18:22). So 144 as  $12 \times 12$  indicates intensification of the symbolic meaning of 12: the *whole, complete* Israel. This symbolism suggests the 144,000 as the saved of all ages, the "spiritual Israel."

One hundred forty-four may allude to sanctuary functions: like the Levites, the 144,000 are singers and musicians before Yahweh. It may also hint at their service as "holy warriors" for God. *One thousand* actually means "countless" and connotes civil and military order. Twelve thousand from each tribe might suggest unity in diversity, a mutual caring. On the bottom line, the figure 144,000 suggests radical completeness, vastness, ordered structure as loyal servants, and finally harmonious unity. For a reliable identification of the 144,000, though, not only the hints contained in this number but the entire context needs thorough consideration.

*By Johannes Kolletzki, a theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Cape, South Africa.*

## Three Angels or Nothing

### HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Rev. 14:7

Do these messages really mean anything to you and me, right where you are now, reading this? Something that has always intrigued me, ever since I have been an Adventist, is the common logo seen on most of our church bulletins—the three supermen flying from left to right! Well, in case you don't know, these represent the three angels' messages, which you and I have also heard about a million times in sermons. Why are they so important?

When I play volleyball with my friends, we have a game plan. While I study, I have graduation as my goal, and my game plan is to attend classes, do assignments, and pass my exams. In almost everything we do in life, we have a strategy and a goal. When it comes to being a Seventh-day Adventist, it is exactly the same.

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### **I dreamed of owning a 50-foot yacht somewhere in the South Pacific.**

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We have as a goal the coming of God to make His home here with us in “a new heaven and a new earth” (Rev. 21:1, NIV), and the game plan is the three angels' messages. But what do they mean to you and me—right now?

Well, I can only tell you what they mean to me. You will have to decide for yourself what their meaning is. From them I get direction and purpose in life. Before I became an Adventist, I really struggled with the meaning of life. I dreamed of owning a 50-foot yacht somewhere in the South Pacific. We all think that the surf, sun, and sand will give life meaning, but I soon realized that to purchase such a yacht would cost millions of dollars, and to earn that amount of money was a lifelong work. How would I ever reach my goal? This all changed when God met me through His faithful people and I was shown that my goals were a waste of time and that if I spent my life trying to reach these goals, I would cry, like Solomon, “So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Eccl. 2:17). But what gave me meaning and direction was that there is a God who is in control.

He was so in control, in fact, that He revealed to me that I can be part of His plan and can work toward helping Him reach His goal of living here with you and me. The three angels' messages tell me that God is so great that He could foretell, exactly, what would take place in the future and, by this, warn us and give us direction in our individual lives.

### **REACT**

1. How can the three angels' messages affect and change your life's direction?
2. In what way can they give your life meaning?

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*By Andrew Waters, II, theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Cape, South Africa.*

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# Judge Me, O Lord!

## OPINION

**Key Text: Rev. 14:7**

The words *judge* and *judgment* have always evoked negative connotations in my mind. I recall texts like Romans 2:16; Hebrews 13:4; and Jude 14, 15.

But as I began reading more about the judgment, I found that, although it was a solemn and soul-searching time, God's people do not need to fear it. We see this clearly in Psalm 26:1, 2, where David says: "Judge me, O Lord; for I have walked in mine integrity: . . . examine me . . . and prove me." If judgment were all that negative, why would David ask God to judge him? In this context judgment is positive because David is blameless. The word for *judgment* in this context means "vindicate" or "defend." David is asking God to defend him against his enemies.

In the book of Revelation, God's saints, like David, suffer accusation and persecution. They cry: "How long, Sovereign Lord, . . . until you judge the inhabitants of the earth?" (Rev. 6:10, NIV). These saints are able to ask such a question because judgment is something positive to them. By God's judging the inhabitants

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### **These saints are able to ask such a question because judgment is something positive to them.**

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of the earth, He indirectly proves the innocence of His saints.

In Daniel 7:10 books are opened, suggesting that a judgment is to follow. The little horn, representative of anti-Divine powers, is waging war against God's saints and defeating them (verse 21). The Ancient of Days comes and pronounces "judgment in favor of the saints" (verse 22). Thus the vindication of God's saints implies judgment on the wicked forces. Prior to this, His saints were falsely accused, and the evil powers had the upper hand. Now God's saints are shown to be right and the evil powers wrong.

The good news about the judgment is that even though Satan accuses us (see Zechariah 3), God shows the purity of those who claim His blood. We may not yet have reached God's perfect requirements, but Christ's robe of righteousness gives us the full assurance that we can boldly stand before the judgment bar. Christ as our Advocate is our only hope in the judgment. With Christ on our side we, like David, can say, "Judge me, O Lord!"

## REACT

1. Have we preached a judgment message so focused on ridding ourselves of sin that we have neglected Christ as the key figure in our salvation?

2. What does the Sabbath commandment have to do with the three angels' messages and the seal of God?

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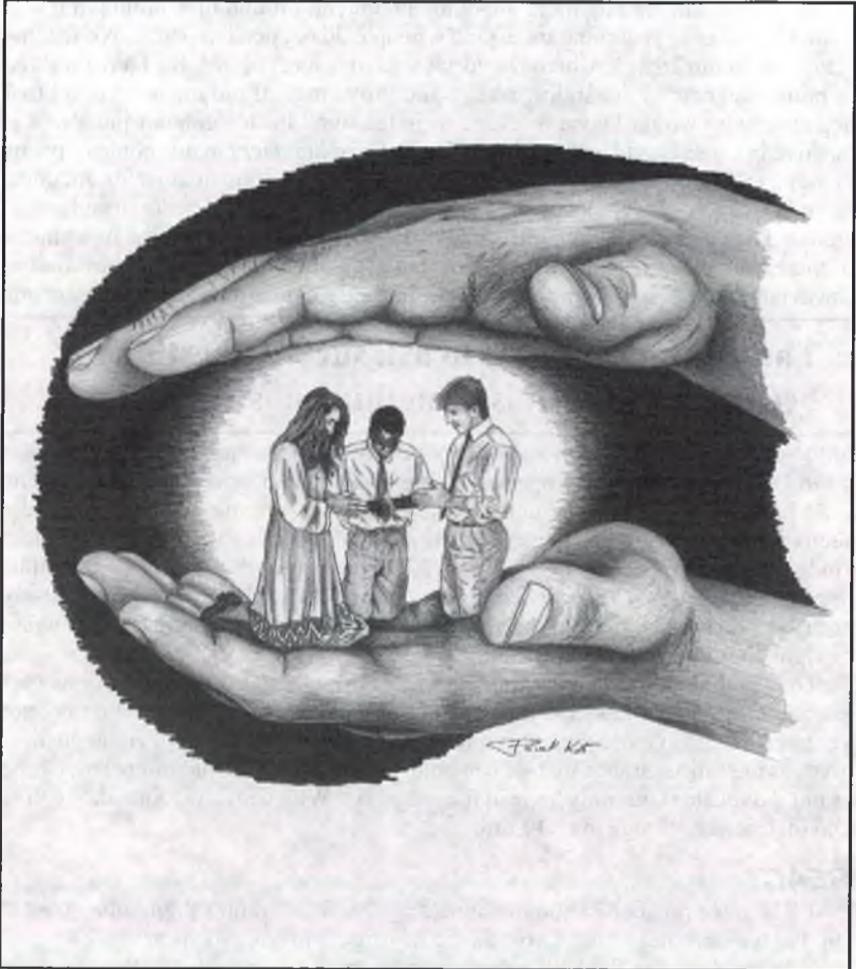
\* James Strong, *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*, 1986, p. 159.

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*By Shandrell M. Penniken, a theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Cape, South Africa.*

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# DANGER'S INTRIGUE



**“He that dwelleth in the secret place of the most High shall abide under the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the Lord, He is my refuge and my fortress: my God; in him will I trust” (Ps. 91:1, 2).**

# Scar Stories

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Nah. 1:7**

Does danger intrigue us too much? Halfway out of a plane at 10,000 feet, we're not likely to think of this question. Our hearts clutch our throats, the wind snatches our breath away, and we almost panic in pulling the cord to release our parachutes.

Maybe you don't sky-dive or race cars or climb mountains. But you surely have your own danger threshold. Are you driving too fast around that icy mountain curve? Is this cave safe to explore? Should you dash across the street now or wait until you know it will be safer?

Pegging the thrill meter might be fun in sports terms, but the times of danger spoken about in Psalms 46 and 91 are intensely sobering in terms of spiritual destiny. The time of trouble to come for all Christians is much more serious than taking a tumble on skis, accidentally cutting your arm with broken glass, or even

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## **We all have tales to tell about this or that cut or scrape.**

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a car crash. A spiritual time of trouble is of far greater import than bodily harm—with eternal consequences. But if we trust in God, we will find Him to be a fortress of strength and refuge.

Gather any group of people together, and sooner or later you'll hear scar stories. We all have tales to tell about this or that cut or scrape: the stitches from an operation or childhood accident, the reminders of pain and trouble. For some of us, these stories are simply light conversation. For others, they are too intense and personal for us to share our pain with others. But behind all such stories lie moments of danger. We share these accounts because the danger often intrigues us. And we tell them because the scar is a sign of triumph, a sign that we survived.

Through Scripture and the words of Ellen White, we know that God offers great comfort and solace in times of storm and stress. I recall the promise in Nahum 1:7: "The Lord is good, a refuge in times of trouble. He cares for those who trust in him" (NIV). The time of trouble will soon befall all Christians. None of us invites this danger, but after Christ's second coming, will we have spiritual scars from the time of trouble to show that we survived? This week we'll explore God's promise to care for us as we prepare for the biggest scar story of all.

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*By Michael D. Welch, who edits computer books in Foster City, California.*

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# Certain Victory

## LOGOS

Ps. 91:1-16; 46:1-11

Psalm 91 is among the most simple and beautiful of the psalms, and it carries an important message: that God is trustworthy, even when dangers threaten. In studying the psalms, modern readers often forget that they were originally composed not as theology, but as liturgical poetry. The first part of this psalm, the promise of verses 1-13, was undoubtedly recited or sung by congregants gathered for worship. Verses 14-16 switch voice, the priest speaking to the people on behalf of God. It would be used for worship when people felt in most danger: when a disease epidemic was sweeping the community or when an enemy threatened. The psalm remains a promise to all who need reassurance of God's faithfulness.

### Commentary

The figures used to describe danger and protection from it would have been more familiar to ancient listeners than they are to us today.

Verses 1, 2. The word for shelter (KJV: "secret place") was often used to describe the temple, and as such may allude to a particular temple theology of the Jews, the belief that God made His home in their temple and thus made it invulnerable to attack. Although the prophets scolded them for this belief (Jer. 7:4; Mic. 3:11), it was pervasive until the temple was razed by Babylonian invaders in 587 B.C., when decades of belief in its magical security were at last demonstrated false.

Verse 3. The image of a bird-catcher's snare is metaphorical. Snares were not used to trap people. Boys often captured birds in a small, netlike device that sprang suddenly when a bird took the bait—a good metaphor for temptations that initially seem attractive, but then entangle us in sin.

"Deadly pestilence" (along with "pestilence that stalks in the darkness," and "the plague that destroys at midday" [Ps. 91:3, 6, NIV]) was a frightening but familiar part of the life of ancient peoples. In the absence of a scientific understanding of microbes or contagion, or effective means to treat disease, thousands died when disease epidemics swept communities. It is no wonder many ancient peoples oversimplified disease as always being the entry of a demon into the body.

Verse 4. Feathers and wings were figures familiar to agricultural people, who'd seen mother fowl protect their babies by sheltering them under their own bodies, even at the expense of the mother's life.

Shield and rampart (an earthen fortification) were a metaphor for complete protection, one mobile and maneuverable in face-to-face defense, the other a solid and immovable hiding place. The emphasis is on the completeness of God's care.

Verse 5. "The terror of the night" may have meant a strange and unknowable danger (such as demons) to the listeners. "The arrow that flies by day" sounds like warfare, but the arrow is a symbol of stealthy aggression, and by parallel with the preceding passage, might mean the attack of any kind of enemy (including disease or demons) who is neither known nor anticipated.

Verse 8. God doesn't always need to punish the wicked actively. Often, the psalmist observes, their reward is a natural consequence of wicked acts.

Verse 12. The foot is a symbol of both vulnerability and strength. To stumble and break the bones of one's foot was crippling in a culture that depended largely

on bipedal locomotion, but such accidental injuries occurred frequently. To trample an enemy under foot was to have complete victory over him.

Verse 13. Lions were once common in Palestine but later were hunted to extinction. “Adder” (KJV) refers to the cobra, which while not seen in Palestine, was well-known from Egyptian art. Dragon refers to a large snake, not a mythical, fire-breathing beast.

### **Interpretation**

It is a misunderstanding of the text to suppose that a complete theology is contained in this psalm. The psalmist expresses simple trust and faith but does not attempt to encompass the full complexity of evil. To believe these promises in a simplistic way may lead to disappointment and skepticism, for surely believers, like others, suffer disease, attacks by enemies, accidents, temptations, and fear of unknown dangers.

This understanding is clarified by looking at important teachings on this subject by Paul and Jesus, who make what appear at first glance to be similar sweeping promises. However, while insisting that “all things work together for good to them that love God” (Rom. 8:28, KJV), Paul makes it clear that this doesn’t preclude the believer’s suffering “nakedness, or peril, or sword” (verse 35). Jesus says that

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## **Boys often captured birds in a small device that sprang suddenly when a bird took the bait.**

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“not a hair of your head will perish” (Luke 21:18, NIV), even while He promises that believers would be persecuted and even put to death (verses 16-18).

What these verses do mean is that no danger befalls the believer except by God’s will and that victory is certain for the believer on the other side of death. The most certain promise for the believer in Psalm 91 is not that “I will rescue him” (verse 14) from every danger in his mortal life but that “I will be with him in trouble” (verse 15), no matter what danger threatens, and even after martyrdom honor him in life everlasting (compare with Rev. 6:9; 20:4).

It is common to apply this psalm to the time of trouble preceding Christ’s second coming. However, this application is not noted in the text, nor does the text seem to offer an apocalyptic theology. Although the promises of Psalm 91 will undoubtedly encourage us in the time of trouble as they do now, many of them may better be understood as reaching fulfillment directly after the second coming, in a sinless universe, when believers will have eternal life and all enemies of righteousness are destroyed.

### **REACT**

1. Were time to last another 3,000 years, do you think the words of modern hymns would survive and be as relevant as the psalms are to us? Explain your answer.

2. What help have you found that God gives in times of danger and suffering?

3. Why doesn’t God always rescue us from danger?

4. Do you agree with the author that it’s possible for us to be too simplistic about applying Bible promises to our own lives? Give an example.

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*By Loren Seibold, pastor of the Palo Alto (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

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# Hope in Challenging Times

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Jer. 30:5-7

Ellen White offers many messages of hope to buoy us up during the time of trouble that will challenge believers before Christ's second coming:

"When the third angel's message closes, mercy no longer pleads for the guilty inhabitants of the earth."<sup>1</sup> "When . . . [Jesus] leaves the sanctuary, darkness covers the inhabitants of the earth. In that fearful time the righteous must live in the sight of a holy God without an intercessor."<sup>2</sup>

"As the crowning act in the great drama of deception, Satan himself will personate Christ. The church has long professed to look to the Saviour's advent as the consummation of her hopes. Now the great deceiver will make it appear that Christ has come. . . . In his assumed character of Christ, he claims to have changed the

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**"Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels . . . about those who have kept the word of Christ's patience."**

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Sabbath to Sunday, and commands all to hallow the day which he has blessed. . . . This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion."<sup>3</sup>

"But the people of God will not be misled. The teachings of this false christ are not in accordance with the Scriptures. . . . Satan is not permitted to counterfeit the manner of Christ's advent. . . . This coming there is no possibility of counterfeiting. It will be universally known—witnessed by the whole world."<sup>4</sup>

"Could men see with heavenly vision, they would behold companies of angels that excel in strength stationed about those who have kept the word of Christ's patience. With sympathizing tenderness, angels have witnessed their distress and have heard their prayers. They are waiting the word of their Commander to snatch them from their peril."<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

1. How can an "almost overmastering delusion" be so simple as Sabbath vs. Sunday? Is it really this simple? What further twists might Satan add? How did he deceive one-third of the angels?

2. What can you do now to prepare for the time of trouble?

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1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 613.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 614.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 624.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 625.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 630.

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*By David E. West, a software engineer at Central Point Software, Foster City, California.*

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# God's Protection Plan

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Ps. 46:1; 91:10**

My husband and I have recently experienced the joy of the birth of our first child. This event has triggered a desire to get our finances in order, check into life insurance, prepare a will, and select guardians. In other words, we want to strengthen our earthly fortress to protect our child the best way possible.

We talk with insurance agents and review policies in order to determine the best possible protection. This week's psalms remind me of this process. These psalms offer a "protection plan" of a different kind. As with an insurance policy, maybe a similar analysis is beneficial:

**1. How complete is the coverage?** Read Psalms 46 and 91, comparing the promises with your expectations. The verses contain apparently conflicting prom-

## What evidence do I have that the company will deliver on its promise?

ises. For example, Psalm 46:1 tells us that "God is our refuge and strength, . . . in trouble," while Psalm 91:10 asserts that "there shall no evil befall thee." One verse seems to imply help living with disasters, while the other offers protection against a disaster ever happening.

**2. What are the terms of delivery?** We have all seen examples of bad and good things happening to good people. I enjoy reading stories of Christians being delivered from accidents, but I can't help wondering why they were delivered, while somebody I knew was not. What are the terms that determine which type of coverage is offered?

**3. What evidence do I have that the company will deliver on its promise?** Given that we can expect refuge and strength in times of trouble, and sometimes expect total protection from the trouble's ever happening, what provides us with evidence as a basis for trusting the promises? What evidence can we offer other people? If we find ourselves in a desperate situation, a grasp of this issue is required to provide a solid foundation for our faith. Otherwise, we may find ourselves faltering at the exact time we need to be abiding "under the shadow of the Almighty."

## REACT

1. Given the promises, is a physical experiment possible or appropriate to gather evidence of God's protection? For example, the long-term studies of Adventist health documents the benefits of healthful living. Is it possible to conduct a related study documenting God's protection?

2. If faith is "being sure of . . . what we do not see" (Heb. 11:1, NIV), is it appropriate to expect God's promises to be verifiable?

3. What are the shortcomings of comparing God's promises to insurance policies?

*By Arminta Jensen, a civil engineer for Greiner, Inc., Milpitas, California.*

# Whirlwinds and Wind Chimes

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Ps. 46:10**

Sometimes we need reminders to “be still.” Our daily lives often face stress and distraction. Psalms 46 and 91 reassure us of God’s care and offer practical ideas for coping with adversity.

**1. Establish a private place where you can talk to God.** It may be a quiet, secret location or perhaps a place set away in your heart. Dialogue with God is the key concept. See Psalm 91:1.

**2. Read what God says in Scripture.** It’s helpful to memorize texts and chapters to think on during the day and to apply in situations we encounter. See Psalm 91:4.

**3. Listen to God’s voice.** At times we may not be in tune with what God is

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## I can’t really remember tuning in to the meaning of those chimes in any significant way until one evening more than 10 years later.

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saying to us, partially because of our neglect of prayer and Bible reading, or because we crowd Him out in our hurry. Perhaps we need to step out of the whirlwind and listen to the wind chimes. It reminds me of a memorable experience I once had. A friend had given me a special set of tinkling wind chimes as I prepared to leave home for boarding academy. Attached to the gift was a note with these words: “Whenever you hear the sound of these wind chimes, remember the verse, ‘Be still, and know that I am God!’ See Psalm 46:10.”

I cherished those wind chimes as a remembrance of friendship and took them with me whenever I moved. But I can’t really remember tuning in to the meaning of those chimes in any significant way until one evening more than 10 years later. I was complaining to God as I knelt at my bedside. My life had been a whirlwind of stress, and I was worried, tired, and lonely. Through hot tears I mumbled to God, when all of a sudden, I stopped—and listened. There was a soft tinkling of wind chimes outside my window. Just then, I remembered the verse that had accompanied the gift years ago. A smile of relief replaced my tears and worry. God was talking to me if I would just listen. We have the assurance that God is there and will be there for us—always!

## REACT

1. When life is stressful and your mind is full of various agendas, how can you know what God is saying to you?
2. Have you ever felt God speaking to you when you were in a hurry?
3. What are some ways God speaks to you? Can He use nature, dreams, books, or other people as effectively as Scripture itself?

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*By Jenny Welch, a nurse, teacher, and homemaker living in Foster City, California.*

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# Do We Tempt God?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Matt. 4:5-7**

“He shall give his angels charge concerning thee: . . . lest thou dash thy foot against a stone” (Matt. 4:6). The devil quoted this verse to Jesus, attempting to persuade Him to jump from a pinnacle of the temple. Jesus responded with another verse, “Ye shall not tempt the Lord your God” (Deut. 6:16). We often claim this promise, as well as those in Psalm 91, but how often do we tempt God?

During recess one day in the fourth grade, a few of my friends and I explored—without permission—a creek that ran by the school. When we climbed up the opposite bank, we used a root growing from the bank to aid us in the climb. One, then two boys, made it up the bank. A third climbed up without using the root.

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## **If we participate in sky diving, skiing, rock climbing, bungee jumping, and other high-risk sports, are we tempting God?**

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Finally, it was my turn. I was several feet up when the root broke, and I fell backward. Like many creeks, this one was full of rocks. Had I landed on a rock, I would have been seriously injured. Instead, I landed in a pool of water.

At the time, all I could think about was the scolding I would suffer for getting my clothes wet and dirty. It wasn't until a few years later that I realized God did indeed send His angels to keep me from dashing my body against a stone.

I was too young and naive to think about the risk I was taking. But what about sky diving, skiing, rock climbing, bungee jumping, and other high-risk sports? If we participate in one of these activities, are we tempting God? After all, God did not ask us to climb Mt. Everest. What about people who pray for the Lord's protection as they travel, and then knowingly exceed the speed limit?

Risk makes life interesting; the results can be very rewarding. When evaluating a risk, we must consider our experience and skills along with the specific circumstances. For instance, I enjoy skiing, but I know better than to follow my friend down Dead Man's Alley! Perhaps Solomon gave us the best advice on taking risks: “My son, preserve sound judgment and discernment. . . . Then you will go on your way in safety, and your foot will not stumble” (Prov. 3:21, 23, NIV).

## **REACT**

1. What defines an acceptable risk for Christians?
2. What role, if any, should high-risk sports play in a Christian's life?
3. Is it acceptable for a Christian to be employed in high-risk professions such as test piloting, police work, and so on? Why or why not?

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*By Jerry Weldon, a software engineer at Central Point Software, Foster City, California.*

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## Next Quarter's Lessons

### Joshua

If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 1995, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

#### **Lesson 1: Joshua, God's Man**

*Scripture:* Exod. 17:8-14; Num. 13:1, 21; 14:1-38; 27:12-23

*Theme:* The life of Joshua before the conquest of Canaan reveals the experience and depth of character that prepared this great leader of Israel.

#### **Lesson 2: The Two Joshuas**

*Scripture:* Num. 13:16; Josh. 1:2-5; 3:7; Deut. 18:15-19; 34:10-12; Hebrews 3 and 4.

*Theme:* Joshua is a type of the New Testament Joshua, Jesus Christ, who provides victory and rest to spiritual Israel.

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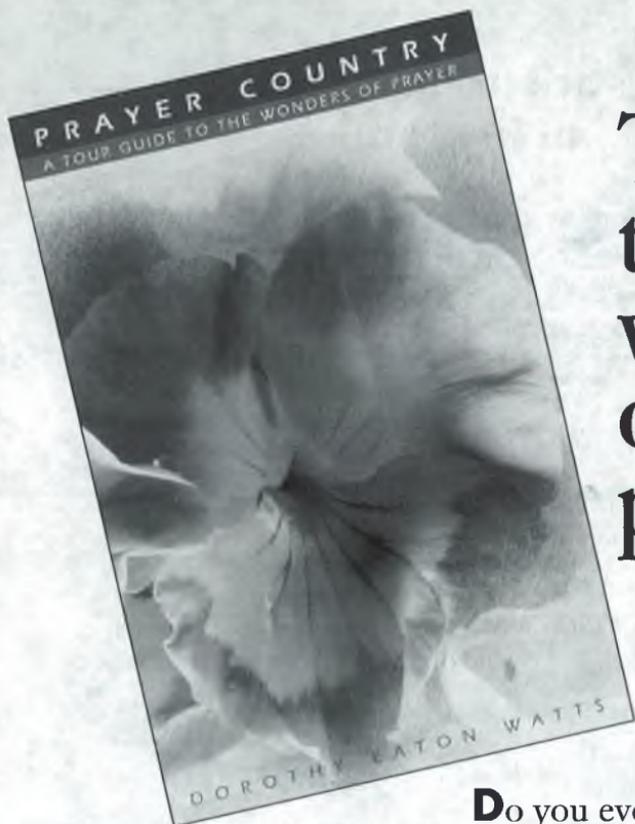
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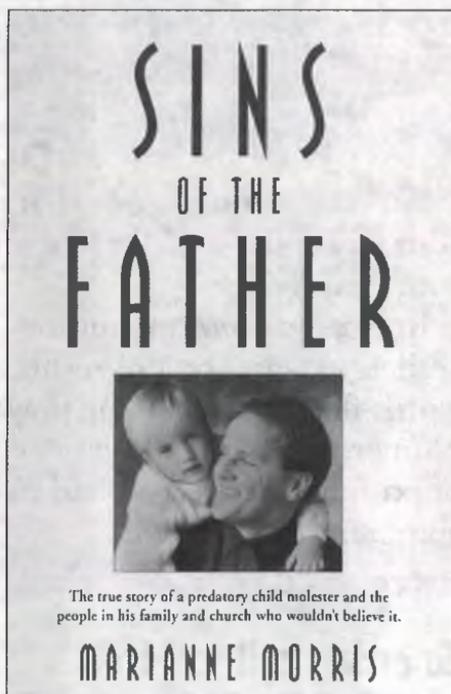
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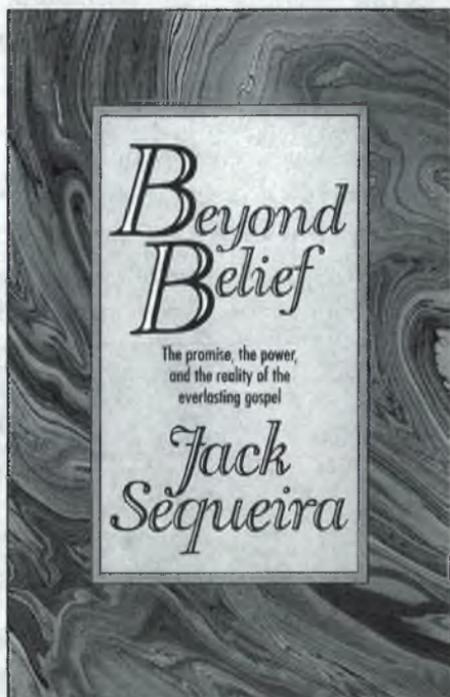
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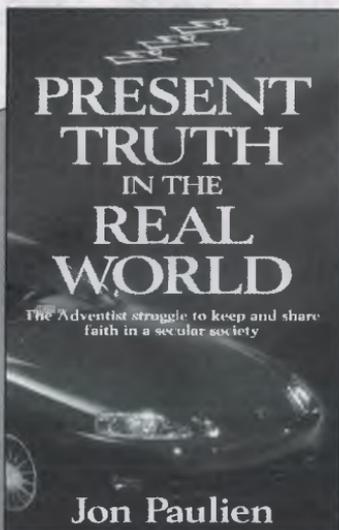
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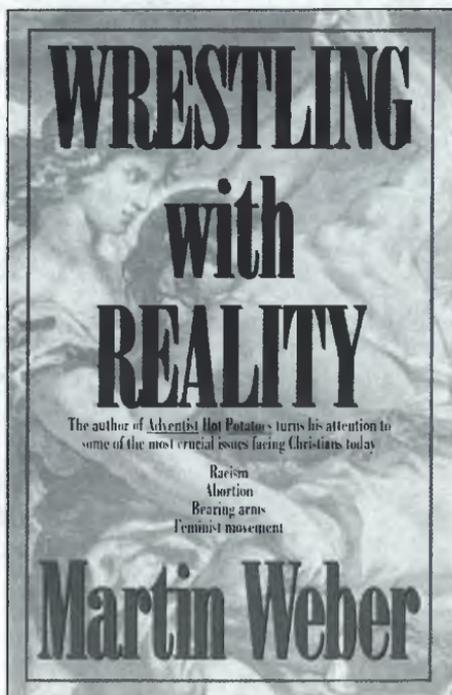
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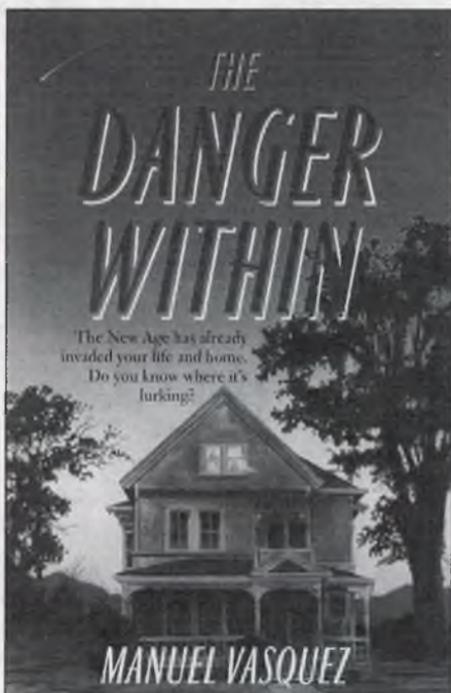
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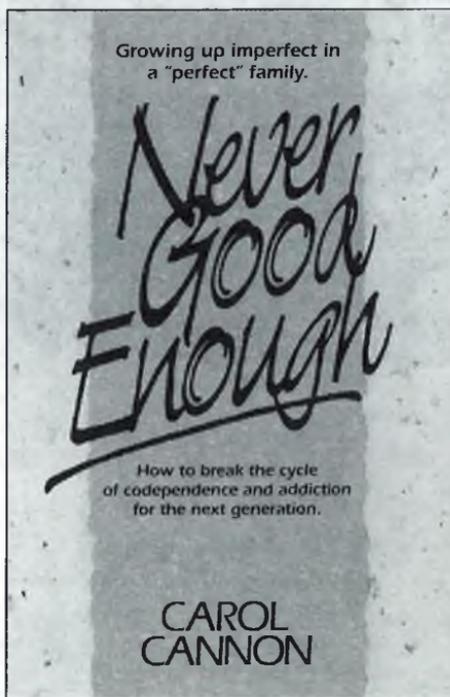
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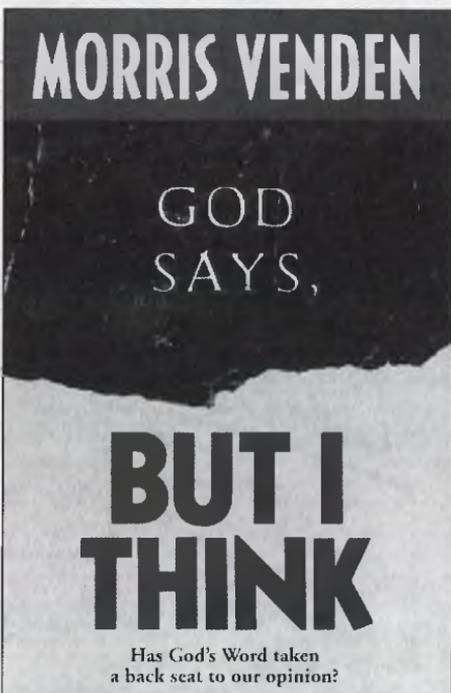
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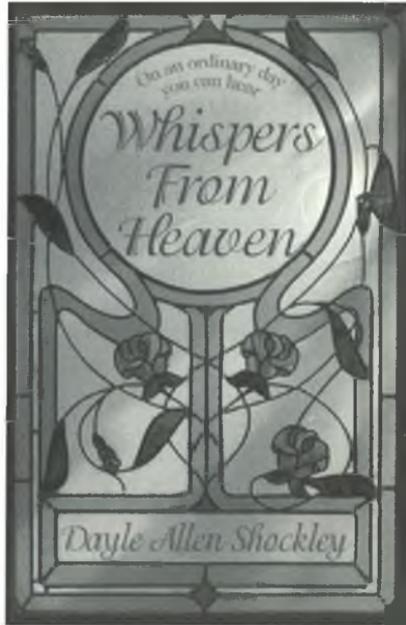
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