

APRIL-JUNE 1997

EQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

1, 2, and 3 John
**Walking
in the
Light**



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Currently, Amy is a history major and the co-social vice-president for the student association. Last year, she worked as the campus director of CABI (Collegiate Adventists for Better Living). And she says her experience in Yap will stick with her forever.

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1, 2, and 3 JOHN: WALKING IN THE LIGHT

APRIL - JUNE 1997

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Sabbath
School

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Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writing groups that have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson quarterly, more than 300 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 individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000. It is published in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Finnish languages.

Ever think about writing a Sabbath School Quarterly?

Why not! Each year 300 young adults from around the world participate in the *Collegiate Quarterly* writing program. CQ gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our CQ formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson—and get paid for it—write us today:

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CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Illustrator



Twenty-five-year-old Wesley Tolhurst, this quarter's illustrative photographer, grew up in Sydney, Australia, before attending Avondale College. He then moved to Southwestern Adventist College in Keene, Texas, where he completed his B.A. in theology. After graduating in 1995, he accepted a call to the ministry in southern New Zealand. He currently ministers to two churches there and is youth pastor for the city of Christchurch. In his spare time, Wesley enjoys surfing, fishing, and reading. He has been winner and twice runner-up in the Kodak Australian Young Photographer of the Year awards program.

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 300 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 59,000.

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" (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 the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read the remainder of the 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.*

SWEET OR SOUR?



“We write to you about the Word of life, which has existed from the very beginning. We have heard it, and we have seen it with our eyes; yes, we have seen it, and our hands have touched it” (1 John 1:1, TEV).

Whom Will You Believe?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 1:1-4

A farmer was planting some orange seeds while a group of people looked on. Suddenly an agricultural expert stepped forward and said to the farmer, "Those orange seeds are going to produce sour oranges."

"That's impossible," said the farmer. "I just ate the orange from which these seeds came, and it was very sweet."

The others wondered whom to believe. It was the expert's word against the farmer's, and only time would tell who was correct.

A long time ago, Lucifer placed God's character and His love for His creatures in question. When Adam and Eve fell under Satan's deceptions, disobeying the law of love, the human race was condemned to eternal death. But God promised to rescue us from this hopeless situation (Gen. 3:15).

The fulfillment of God's promise was guaranteed in His Word of life, Jesus Christ, who came to this world as a living testimony of God's love toward lost humanity. Through His life and His work of love, Jesus showed the true charac-

"I just ate the orange from which these seeds came."

ter of God and His incomprehensible love by living a perfect life and dying in our place so that we might be saved for eternal life.

Just as the farmer was confident that he would have sweet oranges, because he had tasted the life source of the oranges, so John in his Epistles expresses his confidence in God's love for humanity as it was so clearly demonstrated through the sacrifice of His Son, Jesus Christ. John spent three years with Jesus, he tasted the sweetness of the life source, and he knows that there is life in this Word, Jesus Christ. Now he wants to share its sweetness and joy with others.

It is up to us, then. Will we trust those who have tasted the sweetness of the fruit or those who haven't?

By Clara Delkis Duran, a junior modern-language major at the Universidad Adventista Dominicana, Sonador, Bonao, Dominican Republic.

Literacy in the Word of Life

LOGOS

1 John 1:1-4

Walking through one of the parks in the center of most cities here in the Dominican Republic, one will inevitably find a hub of activity. Buses, taxis, and motorcycles are looking for passengers; people are selling flowers, lottery tickets, food, sweets, and other items. But the participants who particularly catch my attention in all the activity are the smallest ones, the children. The fight for the survival of their families becomes the focal point of their lives from an early age. They sell candy, shine shoes, and beg for a *peso* or two while other children their age are sitting in classrooms, learning their ABC's. As a result, the world of words will be closed for most of them unless someone takes an interest in their future and teaches them this essential part of survival.

Words. Imagine the millions of people who can never completely function in society, because they can't read a sign, write a check, or fill out a simple application. Words are power, and this power is directly related to one's quality of life.

John opens his First Epistle by referring to the "Word of Life." He proves his "literacy" as he reminds us that he has an intimate knowledge of the "Word of Life," Jesus Christ. At the point in time that he is writing this epistle, he is nearing the end of his life and will soon be exiled to Patmos. In his early years, he walked with Jesus, learning from Him and building a strong foundation for a secure future. He personally witnessed Jesus' baptism, His ministry, His miracles, His transfiguration, His death, and His ascension following His resurrection.

He heard the command from Jesus' lips to "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19), and obeying this command he spent his life teaching and testifying. He witnessed and participated in the formation of the early Christian church and suffered persecution for his loyalty and commitment to the Word of life, for his commitment to the "literacy" of those around him. As a result, he can testify at the beginning of his First Epistle that he has heard, seen, and touched the Word of life and has personally witnessed His power to transform lives with the assurance of freedom from sin and of the promise of eternal life.

Now John is making an appeal. Perhaps as he writes, he has that aching feeling that I have as a teacher when I see so many children living in ignorance and destined to a life of closed doors and missed opportunities. I know the power available through the written word, because I have experienced it in my life.

Here the beloved disciple is attempting to reach out to his "little children" (1 John 2:1) who, by failing to stand up for Christ, are living in ignorance and falling victims to the sway of popularity and the work of the devil. He longs to convince them to be counted among those who are literate in the Word of life and have power to confront challenges in daily life along with the complete assurance of a secure future. He has witnessed and depended on this source of power, Jesus Christ, and he has seen the results in his life.

Literacy is the work of a lifetime. If my little shoeshine friends enter a classroom for one day to learn to read and write, they will leave confused and discouraged. They must study faithfully, beginning with the simplest tasks and continuing to more challenging books and writing projects. And all this must be done

under the guidance of one who is literate and experienced in the world of words.

Becoming literate in the Word of life was the work of a lifetime for John, and it is no less for us. But John's message for us, his little children, is, "It's worth every sacrifice you'll ever make! I know! I've walked with Jesus and I know the joy and peace to be found when one faithfully pursues literacy in the Word of life! Don't miss out on this opportunity!"

"And these things write we unto you, that your joy may be full" (1 John 1:4). Here is the secret to true joy—fullness of joy. This is a joy that gives light and understanding to the ignorant and a song of hope in times of peace and persecution. John longs to share this secret and see all God's people literate and filled with joy! We can sense the combination of enthusiasm, yearning, and concern in his words throughout his Epistles. In his Third Epistle, he writes, "I have no greater joy than to hear that my children walk in truth" (verse 4). He has a sincere burden for God's people to know the Word of life.

Finally, as we grow and walk in the light of literacy in the Word of life, we must obey Jesus' command to "go ye therefore, and teach all nations" (Matt. 28:19).

The world of words will be closed for most of them unless someone takes an interest in their future.

The words are for us today just as surely as they were spoken to John nearly two thousand years ago. As we are filled with the joy of beholding Christ, we also share John's burden for those living in ignorance and illiteracy. And as we work for Christ and witness the light of truth and understanding in the eyes of His little children, we, with John, will have no greater joy!

REACT

1. How can I reach out to those who live in ignorance of the Word of life or to those who are discouraged with the church and would prefer to live in ignorance?
2. How can I prepare myself to witness most effectively for Christ?

By Donna Warman, coordinator of the English program at the Universidad Adventista Dominicana, Sonador, Bonao, Dominican Republic.

Faithful Witness

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 1:1-4

“After the ascension of Christ, John stands forth as a faithful, earnest laborer for the Master. With the other disciples he enjoyed the outpouring of the Spirit on the day of Pentecost, and with a fresh zeal and power he continued to speak to the people the words of life, seeking to lead their thoughts to the Unseen. He was a powerful preacher, fervent, and deeply in earnest. In beautiful language and with a musical voice he told of the words and works of Christ, speaking in a way that impressed the hearts of those who heard him. The simplicity of his words, the sublime power of the truths he uttered, and the fervor that characterized his teachings, gave him access to all classes.

“The apostle’s life was in harmony with his teachings. The love for Christ which glowed in his heart led him to put forth earnest, untiring labor for his fellow-men, especially for his brethren in the Christian church.”¹

“As a witness for Christ, John entered into no controversy, no wearisome contention. He declared what he knew, what he had seen and heard. He had been intimately associated with Christ, had listened to His teachings, had witnessed His mighty miracles. Few could see the beauties of Christ’s character as John saw

John entered into no controversy, no wearisome contention.

them. For him the darkness had passed away; on him the true light was shining. His testimony in regard to the Saviour’s life and death was clear and forcible. Out of the abundance of a heart overflowing with love for the Saviour he spoke; and no power could stay his words.”²

“As witnesses for Christ, we are to tell what we know, what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt. If we have been following Jesus step by step, we shall have something right to the point to tell concerning the way in which He has led us. We can tell how we have tested His promise, and found the promise true. We can bear witness to what we have known of the grace of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing.”³

REACT

1. What has Jesus done to change your life specifically?
2. Have you shared this experience with others? If not, why not?

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 546.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 555.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 340.

By Harvey N. Miller, vice-president for academic affairs, Universidad Adventista Dominicana, Sonador, Bonaio, Dominican Republic.

A Closer Look

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 1:1-4

The first verses of the first chapter of First John are full of vital teachings. If we look more closely at these verses, we will find interesting details.

The apostle used some verb tenses that have specific connotations for human learning: (a) “which we have heard” (NIV); (b) “which we have seen”; (c) “which we have looked at”; “which . . . our hands have touched”; (e) “we . . . testify to”; (f) “we proclaim”; (g) “we write.”

Seven different actions. Seven verbs in different tenses. Why? Have you thought about this?

“Which we have heard.” To listen, how we have lost this virtue! If we would practice listening more often in our lives, we would be completely different.

“Which we have seen.” To see is a marvelous gift—to observe details, colors, geometric forms, reflections of light, perspective, and to share as well as the faces of loved ones and friends.

“Which we have looked at.” To see is not sufficient. The mind must be molded according to the observed object because looking is a conscious and voluntary activity. Looking takes time, concentration, and energy. Our lives are changed by

Our lives are changed by what we observe.

what we observe, what we look at.

“Our hands have touched.” For the people who doubt as Thomas did, for those who deny their senses because “to hear,” “to see,” and “to look at” are not sufficient for skeptical spirits, for them also, God has provided evidence of His power.

“We testify.” John’s mind, full of marvelous memories, wants now to awaken every thought, every memory. He is emptying himself and sharing with others. Oh, that we would follow John’s example!

“We proclaim.” We testify not only with our behavior but also with our words. They have an unimaginable influence on the people around us.

“We write.” This is a difficult art. Writing allows us to record our thoughts for future generations and to allow others to participate in our experiences.

This is the power of the Word of life. When we are put in contact with the Source of power through the Holy Spirit, we won’t live selfishly. In contrast, we will live for others, reaching out to help those who are walking in ignorance and darkness. This is how we will experience joy and knowledge in the Word of life, Jesus Christ.

By Jose R. Luna, who works for the ministry of education for the government of the Dominican Republic, Sonador, Bonao.

Complete Joy

HOW-TO

Key Texts: 1 John 1:4; John 17:3

We all want to lead lives of joy, but is it possible for the children of God to find complete joy in this world filled with problems?

We “shew unto you that eternal life” (1 John 2:1). In his Gospel John defines eternal life: “That they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent” (John 17:3). It is clear then that the assurance of eternal life is found in a relationship with the resurrected Jesus Christ, the Word of life. And it is this assurance that makes our joy full, complete.

Before all else, communion is the basis for truly knowing another person and for knowing God. This being true, we must:

1. Enjoy the sweetness of communion with the Father. The psalmist says, “There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee,” (73:25) and “It is good for me to draw near to God” (verse 28).

Even if we are in the midst of a corrupted environment, we are not obligated to participate in corruption. It is possible to breathe the fresh, clean air of heaven through sincere prayer, which blocks all impure thoughts and puts us in communion with heaven. This is essential to our relationship with Christ. As we daily dedicate our lives to Him in prayer and study, we learn to trust Him more and we

We are not obligated to participate in corruption.

are transformed into His likeness because we have communed with Him.

2. Experience the joy of healthful communion with others. “Behold, how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!” (Ps. 133:1; see also Prov. 3:27-25).

What happiness and encouragement we can find in spending quality time with fellow believers. As we share joys and sorrows, standing together as a unified body, we find such strength. This is God’s desire, and Jesus demonstrated its fulfillment as He walked on this earth. He didn’t accept false teachings or wickedness, but He lived in purity and encouraged those around Him to do likewise. He brought spiritual, physical, and emotional comfort to those around Him and longed for the same from His loved ones. If this human communion was vital for Christ, it is definitely vital to our spiritual growth.

When we have real communion with the Father and with our fellow believers, then we will have complete joy in the assurance of divine and human fellowship and aid in every circumstance of our lives along with the promise of life eternal.

REACT

How can we improve our communion with God and with other believers? With nonbelievers?

By Eunice Yessenia Vasquez, sophomore modern-language major, Universidad Adventista Dominicana, Sonador, Bonaio, Dominican Republic.

Genuine Love

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 1:1-4

Read the chapter in *Steps to Christ* entitled “God’s Love for Man.”

The New Testament uses the term *agape* love for the love God feels for fallen humanity. Never has this love been so clearly demonstrated than it was in God’s sacrifice of His only begotten Son to redeem the human race. Through the sacrifice of the Word of life, Jesus Christ, God provided the biggest proof of love, and He revealed His character as the God of love for all generations.

John shows us the need of genuine love. We must emulate Christ in all things, and part of this is to show love to all around us. Our love must be a result of our walk with Christ for it to be a genuine love and for it to weather the tests of the variety of human relationships in which we are called to participate. And Jesus Christ is our example. Studying His Word and His life daily will instill in us the same love.

It is very important that as Christians we practice the virtue of love when we interact with our fellow brothers and sisters in Christ in order to be in harmony with the principles of the kingdom of heaven for which we must be preparing

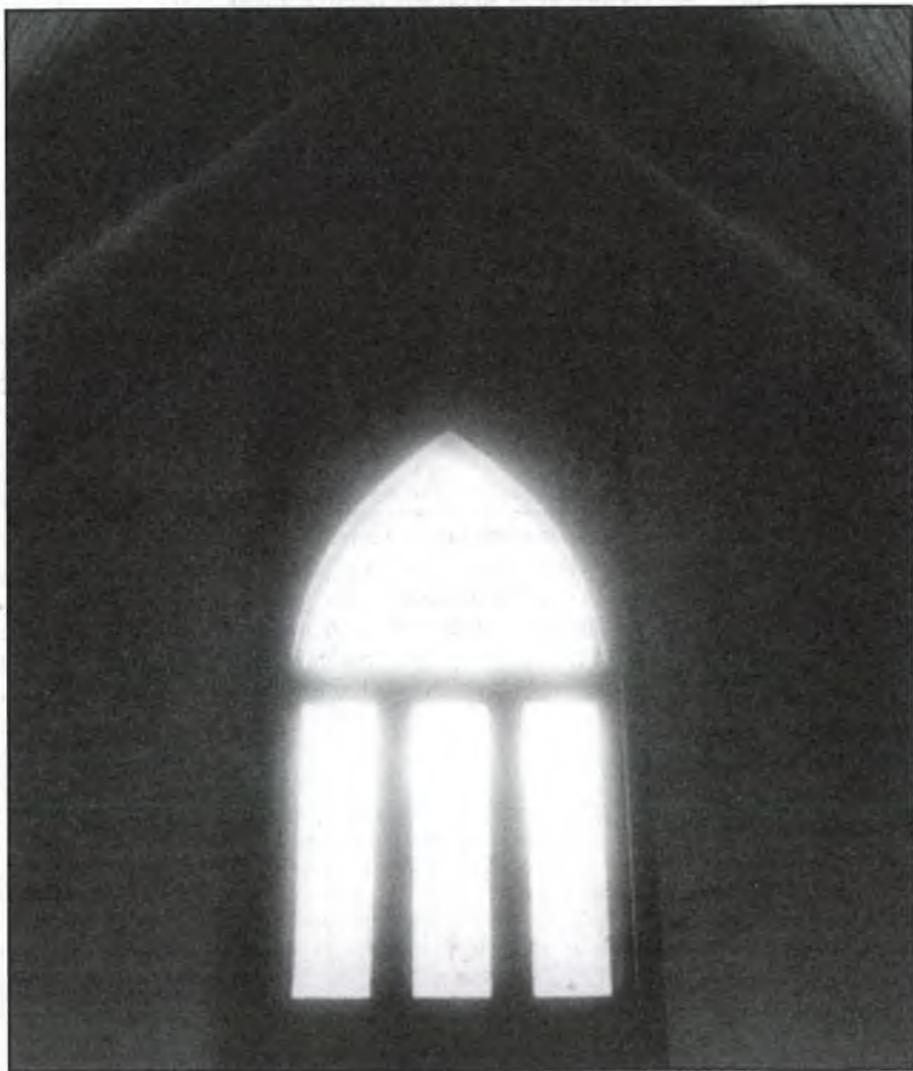
We must always keep in mind our responsibility to love others.

daily. And we must always keep in mind our responsibility to love others as Christ’s ambassadors here on earth. He has commissioned us to “Love one another; as I have loved you” (John 13:34), and this must be our goal.

Write a list of all the things God has done for you and those things others have done for you in the name of Christ. What can you learn from this? How can you change your life and your attitudes to show divine love?

By Lilian Esther Gomez, sophomore modern-language major, Universidad Adventista Dominicana, Sonador, Bonao, Dominican Republic.

WATCHING IT BURN



“This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5, NKJV).

Light Against the Darkness

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 1:5

At Oakwood College, my professor, C. E. Moseley, told us of a church that caught fire. After the fire was extinguished, the pastor asked a man standing nearby, "Do you live around here?"

"Right next door," the man answered.

"I've never seen you around here," the pastor said.

"I've never seen the church on fire," the man replied.

Elder Moseley suggested to us that we should keep our church doors open nightly, especially Sunday nights. "Pray, work, teach, and preach the word," he said. "Set the church on fire, and people will come to watch it burn." Prayerfully I tried this under the anointing of the Holy Spirit. During my first year, 51 souls joined the church.

Moving to a smaller town and assisting in a church, I requested 20 minutes each Sabbath to teach how to give personal Bible study for lay evangelism. That small membership gave 238 Bible studies and baptized 26 souls that year. To God be the glory!

A 30-year-old man shared his conversion story. He had started doing drugs at age 13, married young, had two children, and continued to do drugs. One day, while he was stoned, he wrecked his car, killing his wife and breaking his son's

He developed kidney failure and was placed on dialysis three times a week.

leg. God spared his life, but he continued to do drugs. He developed kidney failure and was placed on dialysis three times a week. Yet he still continued to do drugs.

One day he was rushed to the emergency room. When his doctor performed open heart surgery, he found a small piece of cotton (from shooting drugs into the veins) clogging the vein to the heart. His doctor told him that God loves him and had preserved his life once again.

Upon leaving the hospital, he moved next door to a church. God's love was beaming through the church. He and his girlfriend registered for a Bible, were married, and were baptized together into God's Sabbath keeping church. Thank God the light was shining that Sunday night!

As we study this week, let us examine the evidence and testimony of God, the source of light and life. The only hope that we have in this world is Jesus.

Let our prayer this week be: Dear Lord, as I learn and see more of You and Your love for me in the face of Your darling Son Jesus on the cross, help me to keep the light of Your character lifted higher above self, by opening up Your Holy Word among friends and family in this dark world, that they may find the pathway to Calvary in the closing hours of earth's history.

By Lloyd J. Hudson, an evangelist and freelance writer from Port Marian, Pennsylvania.

John's Emphatic Statement of the Case

LOGOS

1 John 1:5-10

God is light (verse 5).

John goes to the heart of the issue in this declaration: "God is light and in Him is no darkness at all" (verse 5, NKJV). "Gnostic theory held that good and evil were necessary counterparts of each other, and that both sprang from the same divine source—God." John does not argue the point, but counters this fallacy with a statement of truth. Note how he uses the double negative: "In Him is no darkness at all." This is not an accident on John's part, but his way of stating the case emphatically.

God's followers do not walk in darkness (verse 6).

Here John deals with the lives of those who say that they belong to God, but are demonstrating that they do not really walk with God, who is only in the light. Because God is not darkness and does not associate with darkness, His people must have no fellowship with darkness. (See John 1:4-9; 8:12; 9:5; 12:46.) John develops his basic premise with a series of "if statements" that alternate between right and wrong ways of responding to God's light. It is logical that if we walk in the light we walk with God and with others who are following Him.

As we fellowship with God and humanity by walking in the light, we also experience the vital and necessary cleansing from sin by the blood of Christ. John does not lightly introduce the necessary cleansing from sin. This cleansing is

Some believed that this placed them in a condition of sinlessness.

always a part of our saving relationship with God. Fellowship with fellow Christians does not remove the need of cleansing from sin.

Resistance to His truth about us demonstrates that we are in darkness (1 John 1:8).

Some might claim sinlessness because of their claim that they are fellowshiping with Christ and His people. In John's day, some believed that this placed them in a condition of sinlessness, that is, they were no longer sinning.

John says, "Not so!" Again, John states all of this in the hypothetical sphere. He does not directly accuse his listeners, but the point is clear.

Do we use our religion, class, status, race, to feel superior to others? How may we avoid this situation?

Acceptance of His truth about us leads us to confess our sins (verse 9).

Acknowledging that what God has said concerning us is true—that we are sinners and need His forgiveness—is a positive step in the right direction. He will forgive the sin confessed because He is faithful and righteous to forgive us and to cleanse us thoroughly from sin. (See *Steps to Christ*, p. 92; and *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 131).

What is my part in this thorough cleansing?

Denial of sin's reality proves a lack of connection to God (verse 10).

Here John is dealing with an even worse situation: people who claim to have no sin in them at all. Do we need to be reminded that we are sinners, that we live in a sinful environment, that we need daily to submerge ourselves in the crimson flow that will wash us white as snow? Do we need to be reminded that we look forward to a soon-coming, sinless Christ, who will take us out of this world—this same Jesus who washed us in His own blood? To deny His truth concerning our sinful state is to show that His Word has not taken residence in our hearts.

**SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 7, p. 630.*

By Joseph E. Harris, Sr., district pastor, Allegheny West Conference, Columbus, Ohio.

Living in the Light

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 1:5-7

First John 1:5 states that God is light and that there is no darkness in Him. "God is light; and in the words, 'I am the light of the world,' Christ declared His oneness with God, and His relationship to the whole human family."¹ Jesus identifies Himself with God as the light sent into the world. "As the radiant lamps of the temple lighted up all about them, so Christ, the source of spiritual light, illumines the darkness of the world."²

It is by the life of Christ that we can see the condition of this world. Without His example we would continue to live in darkness. "No other light ever has shone or ever will shine upon fallen man save that which emanates from Christ. Jesus, the Saviour, is the only light that can illuminate the darkness of a world lying in sin. Of Christ it is written, 'In him was life; and the life was the light of men.' John 1:4. It was by receiving of His life that His disciples could become light bearers. The life of Christ in the soul, His love revealed in the character, would make them the light of the world."³ Christ's mission was not only to show us the condition in which we live, but also to give us the opportunity to live in the light through Him.

Jesus, the Saviour, is the only light that can illuminate the darkness.

When we accept the light that Christ has given us and take on His character, we, too, become a light to the world. "Jesus is light, and in Him is no darkness at all. His children are the children of light. They are renewed in His image, and called out of darkness into His marvelous light. He is the light of the world, and so also are they that follow Him. They shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life."⁴ Our life is to reflect Jesus so that the world may know the Saviour.

We cannot live in the light while maintaining habits and traits carried over from our life in darkness. "But light and darkness cannot harmonize. Between truth and error there is an irrepressible conflict. To uphold and defend the one is to attack and overthrow the other."⁵ We must live in the light that Christ has given us and renounce the ways of darkness. We must fully conform our life to that which truly reflects the character of Christ. Only then are we living in the light and bearing light to the world.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 464.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 463.

3. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 39, 40.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 405, 406.

5. *The Great Controversy*, p. 126.

By Clayton Alves, II, applications engineer for Westinghouse Electric Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Light Against the Darkness

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 1:5

The message that “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5) comes directly from Jesus Christ and is here only reported by the apostle. So, to have fellowship with Him, to be in communion with Him in a defined space and time, demands that we also be in the light. Fellowship with God means walking in the Light.

Darkness is the opposite of light. If God is light and stands for justice, truth, and righteousness, then darkness must stand for injustice, falsehood, unrighteousness. So, if we say we have fellowship with Him and walk in darkness, we lie (an attribute of darkness) and do not walk in truth (an attribute of light).

Only those who are in the light can have “light-fellowship.” “Darkness-fellowship” is possible only to those who are in darkness.

As we understand it, life is impossible without light. Deprive a perfectly healthy plant of its fellowship with light, and it will die—the natural result of “darkness-fellowship.” Light is essential for plants to grow and produce. Without plants and other life forms that photosynthesize, higher forms of life would be in danger of extinction.

Fellowship with God means walking in the Light.

The Word says we, by nature, prefer darkness to light. According to the apostle Paul, our natural inclination is to fellowship with darkness instead of light (Rom. 8:7).

Thank God for 1 John 1, which conveys Christ’s message of hope to us, inviting us to fellowship with the Light. Light-fellowship is our greatest need, and God provides it.

As a boy growing up in the tropics where bananas are grown, I learned a little lesson about light and the color of bananas. To ensure no one else got bananas I had claimed for myself, even while they were too green to be eaten, I would cut down the bunch just before it began to change color from green to yellow. I then placed it on a bed of dry leaves, covered with more leaves and then earth. Bananas seem to ripen more quickly this way, but lack the rich yellow characteristic of sun-ripened bananas. You cannot have lovely yellow bananas when you hide them in a hole in the ground away from light. What does this say about how we ripen as Christians?

REACT

1. In what specific ways could we avoid darkness-fellowship?
2. How can we let our light shine in a society that is becoming impersonal?

By Owoabasi Ikenna, a chemist from Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Understanding the Light

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Tim. 2:7

“Consider what I say; and the Lord give thee understanding in all things” (2 Tim. 2:7).

God has given us His light for understanding of all things, just as a mirror reflects what is in front of it, allowing us to see our physical circumstances.

Charles was chopping wood. Without protection for his eyes, he chopped three cords of wood. All of a sudden, a small foreign object popped into his eye. He stopped everything, threw the axe out of his hand, and ran into the house. When he got into his bathroom, he looked into the mirror to find that foreign object. With the aid of that mirror he was able to see what was in his eye and without much thought he carefully reached in and took out the small foreign object. From this experience Charles learned to put protection on his eyes before chopping wood.

Just as Charles learned his lesson, so we must obtain a full understanding of how God wants us to live our lives:

First, we must accept Christ as our personal Saviour and believe He will save us from our sinful state (1 Tim. 1:15). We must ask God to intervene in our lives and to give us the protection He wants us to have.

God gave us the Bible to teach us how we are to live our lives.

Second, we must study God’s Word and know that it is true. “Study to shew thyself approved unto God” (2:15), searching the Scriptures so we will know God’s testimony (John 5:39).

Third, practice makes perfect. If we would do what the Lord would have us do, our Christian lives would be so much more fulfilling, making us ready to enter into the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 7:21).

God gave us the Bible to use as a tool to teach us how we are to live our lives. Just as Charles used the mirror to locate the foreign object in his eye, we must study God’s Word, using it in our daily lives so we will no longer be in darkness, but by His grace walk in the Light.

REACT

What personal steps would you need to take in order to understand and follow God’s will for your life?

By Yvonne D. Williams, a financial-services consultant for PNC Bank Corporation, Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania.

Walking in the Light

OPINION

Key Texts: 1 John 1:5; John 8:12

A dispatcher at 911 received a phone call from a 5-year-old.

“My grandfather is dead,” she said. The dispatcher asked her to repeat this.

“My grandfather coughed up blood, and I think he died.”

“Where is your mom and dad?” the dispatcher asked.

“My mommy is at work and my daddy is at work. My mommy is coming home soon.”

“Is your grandfather breathing?” the dispatcher asked.

The child could be heard over the phone saying, “Papa, papa, are you breathing? Yes, he’s breathing. Now I want you to send an ambulance right away to my house. Send an ambulance and make them stay awhile.”

The child then said to her grandfather, “Oh, papa, please don’t die. I love you.”

I could not hold back the tears as I watched and listened to the actual 911 tape on television. The child received a hero’s award for saving her grandfather’s life.

You and I may smile at this child’s valiant effort to save her grandfather’s life. We all know that you do not check someone’s breathing by asking him whether he can breathe. We also know that when the ambulance comes it will “stay awhile.”

This story and what happens in our own relationship with God are strikingly

“Is your grandfather breathing?” the dispatcher asked.

similar. When we find ourselves in the midst of a difficult situation that we have no control over, how many times do we pray and give God instructions on how to take care of it? I believe that God smiles at us in the same way we smile at this little girl, because He knows that our comprehension is limited in that situation. We are unable to understand, because we cannot see the end from the beginning as God can.

Jesus said, “I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life” (John 8:12). Now let’s look at this logically. If Jesus is the light, the only light, what light do we have in and of ourselves? And if Jesus has all the light, that is understanding, then what is left for us to do when we are faced with a difficult no-win situation? Come, let us take hold of our heavenly Father’s hand and walk in the light with Him, allowing Him to show us the way.

REACT

In what areas of my life do I have difficulty allowing God to lead?

By Dianne Bigby, a physical therapist for Eagle Physical Therapy, Bradford Woods, Pennsylvania.

WALKING IN HIS SHOES



“He who says he abides in Him ought himself also to walk just as He walked” (1 John 2:6, NKJV).

Look Inside

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 2:5, 6, 9

Ken spent long hours working on the Limburger project. John was due to retire, and just about everyone in the company expected Ken to replace him as the department manager. Ken had served the company for eight years, and he put in an extra-big effort in the hopes of securing the promotion. When John retired, Andrew, the general manager's son-in-law, assumed the role of department manager. Ken was assigned a subordinate position, as his assistant. Andrew had been with the company for only seven months.

Tarina was the sort of friend you'd have despite yourself. She somehow managed to be an authority on all subjects, especially those of which she was ignorant! Her tongue would run along with the wind; mindless chatter was her specialty. People wondered how Milissa could put up with Tarina's mood swings and constant criticism. Her possessive friendship was stifling.

Allan came home to a scribbled note on the fridge from his wife of 11 years: "I'm so sorry. I hardly know what to say. Jim and I are going to have a baby. I want to stay with him. Please don't come after me. I hope you can forgive us some day."

She was an authority on all subjects, especially those of which she was ignorant.

Allan and Sue had befriended Jim three years earlier. Although he and Sue had been facing tough times, Allan never suspected an affair between his wife and their friend.

Darren and Mick, two brothers, were walking home from school when a middle-aged man drove by, gunning down both boys in an attempt to "purify" his neighborhood. It was undecided whether his motivation stemmed from insanity or cold-hearted bigotry. Liz, the boys' mother, had lost both her sons in one freak, tragic moment. Other than an aging great aunt, they were the only family she had. The gunman himself was unrepentant.

Step back a moment and put yourself in these people's shoes. How would you react if you were Ken, Milissa, Allan, or Liz? Would the room inside your heart be occupied by jealousy, bitterness, resentment, anger, or hatred? How do you think Jesus might have reacted? Those traits that marked His character—humility, grace, understanding, forgiveness, and unconditional love—should be present in His followers as professed Christians. Now think again: How Christlike is your character?

By Elvina Hughes, accounts clerk at Sanitarium Health Foods, Cooranbong, New South Wales, Australia.

No Halftones

LOGOS

1 John 2:1-11

When I look at my *TV Guide*, I have this little scale in mind. On the bottom end are the forbidden movies—you know the type. And the other end has the good ones—true stories about animals or human courage. But somewhere in the middle are those movies on the borderline. Movies that aren't too bad, but aren't too good either. Now from where do you think I'll choose my movies? You guessed it; I just love those borderline ones. There is something about seeing how close we can get to Satan's territory.

This week's lesson talks about walking as Jesus walked. And John tells us to live righteous lives. How do we define righteousness? So often it goes like this: We don't eat meat, we don't dance, we don't watch TV on Sabbath. I heard someone say of us once, "You can cheat, you can lie, you can even sleep around, just so long as you don't drink Coke and don't swear." Does that comment reveal a chink in our righteous armor?

The problem begins with a faulty understanding of sin. We are tempted to work out a list of sinful actions and then avoid them. And if we do well enough, there we have it—righteousness. The person mentioned above was talking about just this mentality. He saw us putting Coke on the list of sins, but somehow omitting dishonest work.

I see this simplistic view in my own attitudes. When I read, "I write this to you so that you will not sin" (1 John 2:1, NIV), my immediate reaction is to think in terms of not doing any of those actions in my own neatly defined box of sins.

If the problem begins with our definition of sin, let's begin there. One group sides with what John seems to be saying, believing sin to be nothing more than breaking the commandments (3:4). If the rules are obeyed, then we can live without sinning. The other group sides with Paul's description of sin as an independent force waging war within us and causing us to commit sins (Rom. 7:7-25). But both of these views are aspects of the same problem. If we accept one and reject the other, we'll end up with a distorted view.

What we need is to take a good look at what John is really saying. He does tell us not to sin (1 John 2:1), and he does talk about obeying Jesus' commands (verse 3). But John gives us no neatly defined list of sins.

John sees sin as acting without love (verses 9, 11). When he calls us to obey Jesus' commands, he is not calling us to obey the law as a list of specifics; rather, he is calling us to embrace the spirit of the law as demonstrated in Jesus' life.

If sin is acting without love, how then does John perceive righteousness? John sees righteousness in terms of what we do, not merely what we *don't* do. Righteousness is a way of living based on Jesus' life. When John calls us to obey Jesus' commands, he is primarily calling us always to act in love. John boils down the essence of righteousness to this: "Whoever loves his brother lives in the light, and there is nothing in him to make him stumble" (verse 10). What counts is a Christ-like attitude to those around us. It involves more than whether or not we smoke or drink.

Now we find John and Paul in agreement. Paul talks about serving "in the new

way of the Spirit, and not in the old way of the written code” (Rom. 7:6). “The old way of the written code” is to set up a list of neatly defined sins. Paul sees this as obsolete. He agrees with John: we no longer define righteousness by what we *don't* do. We now focus on how closely we can emulate Jesus.

So let's apply this understanding to our *TV Guide*, or, for that matter, to anything in our daily lives. What are we showing about how we serve God when we experiment with the edges of Satan's territory? Are we showing ourselves to be focusing on Jesus? Or are we showing that we are still serving in the old way of the written code? John's words to us today call us to focus on how close we can get to Jesus, not to play hide-and-seek with Satan. He calls us not to look to a list of neatly defined sins, but rather to “walk as Jesus did” (1 John 2:6).

REACT

1. What is easier, avoiding a list of neatly defined sins, or living as Jesus lived? Explain your answer.

2. How does replacing the list of sins with the life of Christ affect one's realization of his or her failings before God?

3. If we aren't willing to ask of our daily activities, “Does this genuinely reflect Jesus' values?” what does it tell us about our spiritual condition?

4. When we fail, John says we have an atonement (verse 1). What do we mean when we use the word *atone/atonement* in common language today? Use this word

There is something about seeing how close we can get to Satan's territory.

in a secular sentence. If we apply the secular usage of the word to spiritual things, how does it affect our understanding?

5. How can a life of love as a member of God's family be possible in a world hostile to God and that is constantly undermining God's good intentions with evil suggestions?

6. What could be a final definition of Christianity according to John's Epistle?

By Robert Dehn, maintenance mechanic at the Sanitarium Health Food Company, Cooranbong Factory, New South Wales, Australia.

Our Duty to Others

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 2:9

“He that saith he is in the light, and hateth his brother, is in darkness even until now” (1 John 2:9).

“As disciples of Christ we shall not mingle with the world from a mere love of pleasure, to unite with them in folly. Such associations can result only in harm. We should never give sanction to sin by our words or our deeds, our silence or our presence. Wherever we go, we are to carry Jesus with us, and to reveal to others the preciousness of our Saviour. But those who try to preserve their religion by hiding it within stone walls, lose precious opportunities of doing good. Through the social relations, Christianity comes in contact with the world. Everyone who has received the divine illumination is to brighten the pathway of those who know not the Light of light.

“We should all become witnesses for Jesus. Social power, sanctified by the grace of Christ, must be improved in winning souls to the Saviour. Let the world see that we are not selfishly absorbed in our own interests, but that we desire others to share our blessings and privileges. Let them see that our religion does not make us unsympathetic or exacting. Let all who profess to have found Christ, minister as He did for the benefit of men.”¹

“We should never give . . . the false impression that Christians are a gloomy, unhappy people.”

“The Christian is ever to realize that he has consecrated himself to God, and that in character he is to reveal Christ to the world. The self-sacrifice, the sympathy, the love, manifested in the life of Christ are to reappear in the life of the worker for God.”²

“We should never give to the world the false impression that Christians are a gloomy, unhappy people. If our eyes are fixed on Jesus, we shall see a compassionate Redeemer, and shall catch light from His countenance. Wherever His Spirit reigns, there peace abides. And there will be joy also, for there is a calm, holy trust in God.

“Christ is pleased with His followers when they show that, though human, they are partakers of the divine nature. They are not statues, but living men and women. Their hearts, refreshed by the dews of divine grace, open and expand to the Sun of Righteousness. The light that shines upon them they reflect upon others in works that are luminous with the love of Christ.”³

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 152.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 417.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 152, 153.

By Phil Page, electrician at the Sanitarium Health Food Company, Berkeley Vale Factory, New South Wales, Australia.

Recall to Fundamentals

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 13:8

John's Epistle reflects a fatherly affection for his children and the authority of an eye witness. He begins by powerfully stating that he has seen, heard, and touched Jesus, whom he has been proclaiming as the loving Saviour.

Obviously John had an error to combat. Wisely, he did this by presenting the truth and thus exposing the counterfeit. Gnosticism was the counterfeit that had infiltrated the believers. This was a system of beliefs prevalent in the first two centuries of our era that combined Christian teachings with the concept of "a higher knowledge." Gnostics claimed that this knowledge was not attainable by ordinary intellectual processes, but only by mystical enlightenment. To make John's task more difficult, the central idea of Gnosticism was redemption.¹

John had presented redemption through Jesus Christ, who had put self aside to take on human nature without affecting His equality with God. The Gnostics were saying that redemption was a deliverance from an intrinsically evil material world into a world of freedom where the soul is, but where the body, considered evil, has no place. The Gnostics maintained a false distinction between Jesus and the Christ.²

Furthermore, the Gnostics thought they were so holy that they never sinned

Love is not love until it finds active expression.

and were not bound by the commandments, even by the commandment of loving fellow Christians.

In response, with a tactful use of "if" and "He that saith," John presents seven tests of genuine Christlikeness. (See 1 John 1:3, 6, 10; 2:4, 6, 9; 4:10.) If we say we are friends with God but practice deeds of darkness, we're a liar. If we say we are God's friends, we ought to do the things that Christ did. If we say we're walking in the light but hate our brother, we are in darkness and don't understand what love is all about. If we say we've never sinned or if we refuse to admit that by nature we are sinners, we are deceiving ourselves, and the truth is not in us. Love is not love until it finds active expression.³

These tests show that Christlikeness implies honesty with others, with ourselves, with God, with Christ, and with the world. By avoiding falsehood and abiding in the truth we shall know the pure joy of a closer walk with God.⁴

1. *Encyclopedia of Religious Ethics* (Edinburgh: Hastings T & T Clark, 1913), vol. 6, pp. 231-233.

2. *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 946-952.

3. J. C. Blanco, *The Clear Word* (Washington, D.C., Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1994).

4. *Explore the Book* (Edinburgh: J.S. Baxter, Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1966), pp. 321-331.

By Theo Maas, color-printing consultant, and Serge Félix, color printer, Sanitarium Health Food Company, Cooranbong Factory, New South Wales, Australia.

The ABCs of Walking With Jesus

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:17

To walk with Jesus, we must first aspire to be like Jesus and, in doing so, act as He acted. If we can take Jesus as our personal mentor and follow His teachings, then we will be able to follow Him. Just as young athletes aspire to be like their heroes, so must we dedicate ourselves to follow Jesus' teachings.

To have Jesus as our role model we need to consider four important points:

1. Study Jesus' character. In this way we can discover who He was, what He believed, and how much He loves us individually. We can do this through prayer, which is simply talking and listening to Jesus; studying His written Word; reading books about Him such as *The Desire of Ages*; appreciating His creation; sharing personal testimonies, and watching audio visuals such as the "Matthew" series. As we allow the Holy Spirit, who is one with Jesus, to fill our lives He will change our lives to reflect Jesus. Second Corinthians 5:17 leaves us with a promise of change.

2. Recognize that we can never obtain perfection on our own merit. We may try to keep God's commandments on our own, and on the surface may appear to

A person who professes to be a Christian but who hates his brother is not a true follower of Christ.

be achieving positive results, but it is impossible for us to keep the commandments on our own. Romans 3:23 uses two significant words, "all" and "short," but 1 John 2:1, 2, promises One who stands and pleads our case—Jesus who is now my righteousness.

Realizing our humanness, we must then ask for forgiveness of our sins, accept God's sacrifice and redeeming love, and be made whole through Christ and able to overcome sin. Only through God's forgiveness can we be perfect. Therefore we must also forgive our brothers and sisters. A person who professes to be a Christian but who hates his brother is not a true follower of Christ. First John 2:10, 11 encourages us to love our fellow humanity so we don't cause anyone to stumble. It seems that hatred, darkness, and stumbling go together.

3. Look at Christ's life. He loved the unlovable, and even though His own people hated and rejected Him, He did not reciprocate their animosities, but only had love for His fellow human beings (John 3:16, 17).

4. We must have a daily commitment to follow Christ. We must dedicate our lives to Him every day, communicate with Him, and offer our lives in service and sacrifice for Him.

By Malcolm Eastwick, electrician in the plant-development division; and Juanita Eastwick, laboratory assistant, Sanitarium Health Food Company, Cooranbong Factory, New South Wales, Australia.

What's in a Name?

OPINION

Key Text: Acts 4:12

I have two names. Each of these names describes who I am, and both have meanings that present me with a rather tall order for how I should live.

The first name was given to me by my parents when I was born. This name is Chrys. The second name I took on when I accepted Jesus Christ as my Lord and Saviour. This name is Christian. I use this second name when I am telling others about my religious beliefs. Both names convey a similar meaning, that of one who upholds the name of Jesus Christ and follows in His footsteps.

Jesus Christ came to this earth, not only to save the human race but also to show to the universe the true nature of God, that God is love. When we accept Jesus Christ into our lives and take on the name of Christian, we are accepting the responsibility of reflecting the true nature of God, which we have seen in Jesus Christ, to those with whom we come into contact.

To be able to describe a person to someone, you must know whom you are describing. It's the same in the Christian life. Unless you know Jesus Christ, how can you tell others what He is like and how He wants them to live? To get to know Jesus, just like any friend, you must spend time with Him, and you can do this only through study and prayer.

Let us put Christ back into the name *Christian*.

Let us put Christ back into the name *Christian* and stop wearing it as a mask over our own ideas and plans.

Most of us are not ministers, evangelists, or teachers, but every moment of every day our lives are preaching a powerful message of what we believe in. Not only do family, friends, and colleagues watch us, but so do strangers and others who come into contact with us. Our words, actions, behavior, deportment, and attitudes tell others about who we are and what we stand for.

If a picture is worth a thousand words, what kind of word picture are we painting of God with our lives? Can others see in that picture a loving, forgiving God?

On a number of occasions I have had complete strangers come up to me and ask me whether I was a Seventh-day Adventist Christian. When I asked them how they knew, they simply said that they could tell. This kind of experience is very sobering. Was I representing Jesus Christ aright? It makes you stop and think. Am I walking like Jesus?

By Chrys Martin, human resource systems support officer of information technology services for the Sanitarium Health Food Company, Cooranbong Factory, New South Wales, Australia.

A WOLF IN THE WOODS?



“I write to you, dear children, because you have known the Father” (1 John 2:13, NIV).

A Little Knowledge . . .

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: John 8:32

A new dog recently appeared in our neighborhood. My boys saw him first. "Hey, Dad, there's a wolf in the woods," I heard them calling.

"Sure," I said skeptically, but I went anyway, just to have a look.

"There, do you see him?" they asked, pointing down into the underbrush at something slinking along the stream below the deck.

"No, boys, he's a German shepherd. Kind of a strange one, I'll admit, but he's a German shepherd all right." I was sure of it; he had the same grey ruff at his neck, the same pointed ears and dark muzzle. He seemed much slighter, however, and there was something uncharacteristic but familiar about the downward slant of his profile, from neck to tail. The boys were disappointed but soon recovered.

We've caught glimpses of the dog from time to time, but never for more than a moment. Shadowlike, he's there and then he's gone. I'm not much of a naturalist, but this dog seems more furtive than most I've seen. Something about the way he noses about in the leaves suggests secrecy.

I saw it again just a couple of days ago. At the time I was down in the woods with an ax, splitting logs for the fireplace. I've heard people describe the feeling that they were being watched, but I'd never had that feeling until now. I set the maul

"Hey, Dad, there's a wolf in the woods."

down and looked around me. At first I didn't see anything, but then I caught sight of the dog standing on the other side of the stream; his head was just visible above a fallen tree as he studied me carefully. For a moment we considered each other, then abruptly he turned and trotted away. Once he turned and looked back over his shoulder at me, then he disappeared.

Yesterday, talking with my neighbor, I mentioned the dog. "Oh, you mean the wolf?" Mr. Clark asked. "He belongs to your neighbors on the other side."

Suddenly I felt very different about the animal. I remembered those tales I'd read about hungry wolves devouring stranded travelers, yet I consciously reminded myself that wolves aren't dangerous and that this one seemed even less likely so. Still, I warned the boys not to approach him if they encountered him while playing in the woods or exploring down near the river.

Have you ever noticed how some bit of knowledge can change completely how you think about something you took for granted?

Or Someone?

By Bruce Closser, director of the writing center and teacher in the English department at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Known and/or Knowing

LOGOS

1 John 2:12-17

“The world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17, NKJV).

This is the conclusion of the matter for our text this time, but it is where I would like to begin. The goal here is to abide with God forever. The means, according to this passage, is to do His will. The motivation is that this world and her way of doing things will soon be history, and any human who remains alive will be in God’s company. So now we can move back and look at a bit more of the context that brought us to the conclusion we introduced.

“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life—is not of the Father but is of the world” (1 John 2:15, 16, NKJV). The three categories that *all* sins fall under are highlighted here and identified as foreign and antagonistic to God. You will recall that these are the broad categories of the temptations that came to Jesus in the wilderness after His fast. To succumb to these temptations is to display a love for the world rather than a love for God.

So now we can go back and talk about what it means to do His will so that I can abide with Him forever. We can also acknowledge that the preceding context of our text is very helpful. “But whoever keeps His word, truly the love of God is perfected in him. By this we know that we are in Him” (verse 5).

“I write to you, little children, because your sins are forgiven you for His name’s sake. I write to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you have overcome the wicked one. I write to you, little children, because you have known the Father. I have written to you, fathers, because you have known Him who is from the beginning. I have written to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God abides in you, and you have overcome the wicked one” (verses 12-14).

There is really quite a lot to unravel in all this poetry. The obvious divisions come with those addressed as fathers, young men, and little children. It seems likely that these are analogies for maturity in Christianity or godliness. The neophyte knows the Father and understands personal forgiveness. With a little more maturity there is the boldness to stand up in God’s strength and face the wicked one and even overcome. And the father knows the Creator, “Him who is from the beginning.”

To define *know* in the biblical sense is difficult for me. I have always been more than a little uncomfortable with the analogy of our relationship with God being compared to the sexual relationship between a husband and wife. Not that I think God is not much fun or that I think of sex as dirty—it just seems like such an unreal comparison.

If the intent is to describe a very intimate relationship, great! Special? Yes! Unique? Yes! No one else relates to God just as I do, and He is capable of relating to me uniquely as well—even in light of all the billions (just on this planet) He has created. Hallelujah! Self-serving? No! But the sexual encounter even

among marriage partners can sometimes take on very selfish overtones.

So for our purposes, let's take the best. The mature Christian has a very intimate, special, even unique relationship with God. He or she knows God. The good news in this passage is that there is salvation for "little children," "young men," and "fathers!"

It is desirable to know and be known by God. Little children can have an intimate, special, even unique relationship with the Father, and so can the fathers. So what is the difference? Is it better to be a father or a little child or maybe even a young man?

Wherever you are on your journey with God, you can know Him and be known by Him. You can overcome in His strength. You can do His will and you can plan on *enjoying* His intimate company for eternity, which began before you were and will continue . . .

So there it is. God loves me, and I respond and am promised special, intimate, unique fellowship with Him forever. I will reply to His summons by seeking, through His strength, to be victorious over temptation. This is possible because

To define *know* in the biblical sense is difficult for me.

He doesn't expect me to respond beyond my maturity, and He will not leave any Christian He is growing in a dormant state—all are growing.

So what if you *feel* that you're *not* growing?

So what if one of the temptations mentioned in 1 John 2:16 is still very much a problem for someone who wants to know and be known by God?

Does a *real* Christian know whether he or she is a child, youth, or parent on the maturity scale of 1 John 2?

What is the *most* hopeful reality in 1 John 2:12-17 for you?

Because Ye Have Known Him

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 2:14

The key text for today is revealing for what it tells us about knowing God. In the introduction to his letter, John says he has written to the older men of the church, the fathers, because they have known God for such a long time, and to the young men because the word of God is in them. Ellen White shares some thoughts about knowing God that relate to this passage.

About the young men, she says that the strength is both physical and spiritual. Through study of the Scriptures, they have trained their minds to think on God and have kept them open and clear by practicing healthful habits. She correlates their relationship with Christ with the condition of their bodies.

Most important, Mrs. White says that the young men had found a way to involve God in every aspect of their lives. She says that they were “connecting the religion of Jesus Christ with every-day life, and bringing Christ into their every-day duties and enjoyments.”¹ Knowing God wasn’t reserved for a certain time of

The young men had found a way to involve God in every aspect of their lives.

day or particular day of the week, but a part of everything they did. They had found a practical, relevant relationship with Him.

As for the fathers of the church, Mrs. White says that they knew God because “they have been so thoroughly acquainted with the wiles of Satan that they will not be easily moved from the old paths.”² Their relationship with God is one that has developed over time. As in any relationship, getting to know someone is an on-going process. “They remember the days of old.” Knowing God and resisting the devil are a part of their memories. God was not contained only in their childhoods, but has become a part of who they are as older men.³

Mrs. White makes it clear that both these groups knew God. They were able to accomplish this by continuously making Him a part of their lives and by studying His Word. She says that our knowledge of God will manifest itself visibly in our lives through our willingness to work for Him and by trusting Him to direct our everyday activities.⁴

REACT

Would someone like John, looking at you, be able to say that you “know Him”?

1. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 204.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 585.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, pp. 196, 197.

By Laura Williams, an English graduate student who supervises the writing center at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Know What?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Cor. 13:12

“Shall I tell you what knowledge is?” Confucius was reported to have asked. “It is knowing both what one knows and what one does not know.”

The disciples thought they understood exactly what Jesus was up to. It was perfectly clear, wasn't it? They had studied their Scriptures and they were sure. But in the end, their small, secure worldview was shaken. Jesus did exactly the opposite of what they had imagined. The disciples didn't get what they had bargained for at all; they got far, far more. Instead of an earthly kingdom, they received the hope of a heavenly kingdom with peace and prosperity not only for Israel, but for the entire world.

Throughout history, we see similar dramas played out. The medieval church *knew* that Galileo was wrong; the Scriptures indicated that the sun revolved around the earth, didn't they? William Miller *knew* that Jesus was going to return in 1843 or 1844. After all, that's what the Bible said, wasn't it?

The disciples didn't get what they had bargained for at all.

Perhaps, in the end, knowing God isn't about knowing proof texts or being able to explain the 27 fundamental beliefs. Confucius would say it is identifying both what we know about God, and what we don't know. According to John, what we know is that we have been saved, and that it is God who does this. What we can know is what John tells us: that God is love; that He loved us enough to sacrifice His Son for us, and that we can have eternal life through Him. With Job, we can say, “I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end He will stand upon the earth” (Job 19:25, NIV). Beyond this, we can speculate and hypothesize, but we must realize that there are some things we will not know or understand until we have spent eternity with God. We must, to some extent, be content to admit that we don't know. We may be wrong on some points.

In the end, we may not get what we've been bargaining for all along. We may get far more.

REACT

1. How can our existing knowledge get in the way of continued growth and development in faith?
2. How much can we expect to know about God in this lifetime? From what source or sources does our knowledge come?

*Confucius, *The Sayings of Confucius: A New Translation* by James R. Ware (New York: New American Library, 1955), p. 27.

By Kendra Banks, a junior English, German, and secondary-education major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Getting to Know You

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 2:14

Our society assumes that the more one knows about a potential spouse the greater the chances for a successful marriage. "I just don't know him/her any more," divorcees say, excusing their failed marriages. The Bible often talks in intimate terms about a man knowing a wife: Adam "knew" his wife, and she conceived and bare him a son. The Bible's use of "knowing" suggests that the intimacy of marriage is a metaphor for knowing God, who often describes His relationship with His people in terms of a husband's relationship to his wife. How can we know God as we know a spouse?

1. Spend time with God. Four years after the issue first came up I decided to marry Linda (many things I am; speedy is not one of them) so I knew a fair amount about her before I jumped in. Over those four years, knowing looks, tones of voice, subtleties of body language, became clues to what Linda was thinking. When we were finally married, I knew Linda well. Though we don't often stop to examine it, the admonition that we should spend time with God remains true. Some sort of devotional time matters more than we admit; the more we and God communicate with each other the better we know Him.

An offhand comment on my part elicits an unexpected reaction from her.

2. Vary the kind of time you spend with God. Despite a four-year courtship during which I learned a lot about my prospective wife, I am still surprised more often than I thought possible 14 years ago. An offhand comment on my part elicits an unexpected reaction from her, or an unpredictable circumstance creates tension, and a side of Linda emerges that I never saw before. Knowing my spouse means spending time with her in a variety of circumstances. It means nursing her through bad headaches, taking her to family reunions (on both sides), displeasing her and making up, window shopping, planning family budgets, disciplining children, or whatever situations arise as a natural consequence of our merged lives. While it's important that I set aside time each day to let God speak to me in some way, I must also take God with me everywhere. He must influence how I drive my car, how I use the World Wide Web, how I correct my kids, how I . . . , well, you get the idea: The more time I spend with God, the greater the variety of circumstances in which I allow Him to influence me, the more I learn to understand those inklings I have about right and wrong as clearly as I know the particular tone in my wife's voice when I call to say I'll be late.

By Bruce Closser, director of the writing center and teacher in the English department at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Knowing = Faith = Foolishness

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 2:14

In 1871, a 6-year-old British boy and his father traveled by ship from India to England. The father was taking his son, an unusually bright and curious child, to a boarding school in London. One day during their storm-tossed voyage, the inquisitive boy crawled out onto the rearmost deck of the ship, which jutted out over the dark waters of the South Atlantic Ocean. A single rope tied to the very end of the deck was all that kept the child from falling into the waves below. Some sailors discovered the boy's predicament, and one of them ran to warn the boy's father.

"Sir Lockwood," he cried, "your son is out on the poop deck! If he lets go of the safety rope, he'll fall and drown. Come quickly!"

The father calmly replied, "No need to worry, sailor. I know my son: he won't let go." He then walked out to the poop deck and patiently convinced young Rudyard Kipling to climb back in to safety.

Faith or foolishness? It might be easy to think that Sir Lockwood Kipling was foolish not to rush out and command his son to "get back here this instant!" But the father's response shows the reason for his calm: He *knew* his son. He knew

A single rope was all that kept the child from falling into the waves below.

that little Rudyard was not stupid enough to let go of the very rope that was saving his life. And Sir Lockwood also knew that his son would obey his directions when he gave them.

We Christians who put our faith in a God we cannot see can also seem foolish. But, praise God, we aren't! We *know* our Father, and the proof of this knowledge lies in our complete and unquestioning obedience to Him. The writer of 1 John tells the people of the Ephesian churches that he wrote his letter to them because "you have known him who is from the beginning." John recognized their intimate relationship and familiarity with God. How? "Because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one" (1 John 2:14, NIV).

Warning! Don't confuse the cause and effect here: knowing God does not come *after* you defeat Satan and his temptations. Instead, we can defeat the devil only when we know God and how He wants us to act. The people of Ephesus allowed God to know them *first* by opening their souls to Him, and *then* they were able to know Him, His love, and His will.

REACT

What does it mean to know God? How does knowing God change how you think of Him?

By Austin Bacchus, a junior psychology major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

AT THE LAST MINUTE!



“And now, little children, abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28, NKJV).

Time to Decide

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 2:18

It is really not difficult to know how false doctrines have been infiltrating our churches. Actually, science has multiplied, and with it false doctrines have been able to enter our lives easily through radio, TV, and music.

Therefore, we should be careful about what we hear, what we see, and what we do, because we will have to give an account to God. We believe that going to the movies is sinful, yet we pay no attention to the content and message of the movies that we see at home, a movie filled with violence, sex, and New Age currents (reincarnation, meditation, spiritism).

It is time to take a retrospective look and reflect on our past life. Are we comfortable with what we have done with our lives? It is time to dedicate ourselves, body and soul, to God's service, knowing that we are living in the last moments

**We pay no attention to the content and message
of the movies that we see at home.**

of earth's history, a time when the enemy is working very hard because he knows he has little time left.

Nothing is more beautiful than to decide to serve Christ every day.

By Andrés Sáenz González, a seventh-semester medical student, Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

Who Is My Lord?

LOGOS

1 John 2:18-29

To avoid being deceived by a counterfeit, we need to know the original very well. This seems to be John's mission when he portrays God and Christ as precisely as possible. Have you ever asked yourself what aspects of Christ's character have been misrepresented the most by Satan? To what degree has this affected you? How can I prepare myself to resist the deceits of this "last hour"? (1 John 2:18, NIV). Can our attention be diverted toward another savior?

Years had passed by, and the elderly apostle writes his message as a last testimony of the greatest miracle that ever happened: God had become flesh. He had known the real Christ, who had transformed him from a son "of thunder" (Mark 3:17) into the "beloved apostle." In his personal experience, he knew the joy of sharing the real Christ with others, and he had dedicated his life to that end. But he also knew that Christ's work is the core of the great controversy between good and evil, and that Satan would persist in his work of deception. That is why he insisted on something his readers already knew: Satan was determined to divert the attention to other christis that only Christ is worthy of receiving, and to show other ways of obtaining salvation.

The apostle gives us certain characteristics with which to identify the work of the antichrist, since "the real name means, not what it sometimes pretends to be, a declared enemy of Christ, but someone who professes to be a substitute, a rival,

Can our attention be diverted toward another savior?

that would take the character, place and function of Christ."¹ When someone who is not Christ tries to appear as Christ, he not only negates the true concept of Christ, but also that of the Father, since Christ came to display His Father's character, unmasking thereby the lies of Satan, who has defamed God's character.

One characteristic of the antichrist is that he comes from among God's people, who appear to be pious and who are attempting to carry on the work of salvation, but through another savior. Another sign is that he comes to the Father and the Son, not like the atheists, but by "teaching a doctrine whose final result, and whose practical effect, are really a denial of God."²

Over the years, history has given us a testimony of what has been the work of the antichrist. John testifies that the antichrist was already working in his day through false believers who brought errors into the early church when certain truths about God and Jesus were denied. His work continued over the ages, manifesting itself through the enemies of truth throughout history, who have pretended to occupy Christ's place.

However, the apostle's message also encompasses future events as he places them in what he calls the "last hour" (1 John 2:18, NIV), where he contrasts Christ's coming with that of the antichrist. "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 different parts of the earth, Satan will manifest himself among men as a majestic being of dazzling brightness, resembling the description of the Son of God given by John in the Revelation. . . . The glory that surrounds him is unsurpassed by anything that mortal eyes have yet beheld. . . . This is the strong, almost overmastering delusion. . . . Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive."³

REACT

1. How does it affect your life to know that we are living in the "last hour"?
2. Is someone or something occupying the place in your life where Christ should be?

1. Alfred F. Vaucher, *La Historia de la Salvación* (Madrid, Spain: Editorial Safeliz, 1988), p. 454.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 624, 625.

Human Reason Versus Wisdom of God

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 2:18, 19

“Many exalt human reason, idolize human wisdom, and set the opinions of men above the revealed wisdom of God. This affords opportunity for the working of Satan, and the spirit of Antichrist is far more widespread than any of us imagine.”¹

“The greater man’s influence for good, under the control of the Spirit of God, the more determined will be the enemy to indulge his envy and jealousy toward him by religious persecution. But all heaven is on the side of Christ, not of Antichrist. Those who love God and are willing to be partakers with Christ in His sufferings, God will honor. Antichrist, meaning all who exalt themselves against the will and work of God, will at the appointed time feel the wrath of Him who gave Himself that they might not perish but have eternal life. All who persevere in obedience, all who will not sell their souls for money or for the favor of men, God will register in the book of life.”²

The time of the end has arrived. Each of us should be steadfast in prayer and constant Christian meditation so that we may participate with the Holy Spirit, who

All heaven is on the side of Christ, not of antichrist.

prepares us to understand fully the prophecies found in 1 John. The prophecies present truths to the world that each of us should understand.

No time is left for us to be like the world. The light has no communion with the darkness, which would create a false interpretation of the true significance of the antichrist. To drink of the wine of the wrath would cause us to lose eternity, but, what is worse, we would lose the love of Jesus.

Be vigilant, therefore, to receive the blessings of God and be able to identify the false christ or antichrist with clarity and security.

REACT

Who are considered to be antichrists? Is there only one?

1. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 950.

2. *Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 402.

By Filiberto Cruz Mancera, an accounting major, Universidad de Veracruz, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

The Anointing

EVIDENCE

Key Text: John 14:15-31

A flash of light blazed through my body, brighter than the sunshine on that clear June morning, bathing the ridge on which I sat. Suddenly I felt—down in my gut where one feels love for God, country, and mother—that I am important to the Ruler of the universe. And I felt driven to share this good news. I have carried these attitudes with me since that day almost three years ago.

John warns his readers that people will try to deceive them, but assures them that they have the resources to distinguish right from wrong. This is called the “anointing” (NIV) or “initiation” (NEB), another metaphor that God uses to describe the changes that occur when we make Him ruler of our lives.

In 1 John 2:27, John lists several characteristics of the anointing: (1) it stays with you; (2) you have no need of another teacher; (3) it dwells with you.

He sent His Spirit when I cried out from my absolute helplessness. Being nothing was reality.

Jesus uses these same characteristics to describe the “Advocate” (NEB) or “Spirit of Truth” (Phillips) in John 14:16.

The Anointing: (1) will be with you forever (verse 16); (2) will teach you everything (verse 26); (3) dwells with you (verse 17).

Luke records Jesus speaking again of waiting for “the promise of the Father” in Acts 1:4, (KJV). He calls the promise “the Holy Spirit” (verse 8, NIV) and the reception of the Spirit “baptism.” In Acts 2, the Spirit is manifest in the believers by the tongues of fire and speaking in tongues.

The changes in our lives begin with our permission to let Him work in us (acceptance) and continue as He transforms us. As a child I accepted Christ and was baptized in water as a teenager. But I did not experience the event that I recognize as the baptism of the Spirit until more than ten years later. And, believe me, I prayed for the Spirit. But He sent His Spirit when I cried out from my absolute helplessness. Being nothing was reality.

The gift of the Spirit is the “here and now” of life, the anointing that guides us in the will of God and shows us the deceptions of evil. We are not equipped to live in this world or the next without our anointing. Don’t leave home without it!

REACT

1. How does one know whether he or she has the anointing?
2. What metaphor for the changes God makes in us are you more comfortable applying to yourself? Why? (Baptism of the Spirit, epiphany, anointing, born-again, facial glow, rapture, perfection.)

By Bonnie Kay Pyke, a fourth-semester medical student, Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

Be Not Deceived

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 Cor. 10:12

Today we can look at our surroundings and realize that we are living in the last stages of the great plan of salvation. Satanic deceptions are appearing everywhere, spiritism, the immortality of the soul, hypnotism, wars and rumors of wars, pestilences, hunger, earthquakes (Matt. 24:5-7). We are at the doorstep of our hope: eternal life. We should firmly take hold of the Lord's arm because if we are not protected by God's power and by faith in His Word, we will be enveloped by deceit.

What was John referring to when he said: "Let that therefore abide in you, which ye have heard from the beginning"? (1 John 2:24).

John asks his readers to keep the faith given them by the apostles. He assures them that if they do that they will continue to have something that the followers of antichrist will have lost, a constant communion with the Father and Son. The key to success is given to us in 1 John 2:28, "Abide in him." We can abide in Christ by following three practical counsels:

1. Prayer. In any effective relationship, there should be communication. We praise God and communicate with Him through prayer. When we pray, our appreciation of the grace of God improves greatly.

2. Study of His Word. Everything in this world may disappear, but the Word

John asks his readers to keep the faith given them by the apostles.

of God shall stand forever (Isa. 40:8). Never before in the history of this world has the Bible been within such convenient reach of the general population. We can find different versions almost everywhere. There we can find the answers to our questions, comfort for our pain, hope for our hopelessness, faith in times of uncertainty, and the full knowledge of God and His will, among many other things.

3. Meditation. In Philippians 4:8, the apostle Paul counsels us that anything of a high moral standard should be permitted to influence our life. Instead of thinking about our differences with others, or concerning ourselves about our daily needs, we should focus our minds on positive virtues.

"The people of God will not be misled. The teachings of this false christ are not in accordance with the Scriptures. His blessing is pronounced upon the worshipers of the beast and his image, the very class upon whom the Bible declares that God's unmingled wrath shall be poured out. . . . Only those who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive."

**The Great Controversy, p. 625.*

By Daniel E. Contreras Cordero, director of the Adventist Rescue Corps, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

“Ye Know All Things”

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 2:20

The apostle John has written to us, saying we “have an anointing from the Holy One” and “know the truth” (1 John 2:20, NIV). This is similar to what the apostle Paul wrote concerning those in the last days. “But ye, brethren, are not in darkness. . . . Ye are all the children of light” (1 Thess. 5:4, 5, KJV). God’s end-time remnant is defined in the book of Revelation as a remnant that “keep the commandments of God, and have the testimony of Jesus Christ” (Rev. 12:17). “The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy” (Rev. 19:10).

In these final days of earth’s history, God’s people are instructed to “despise not prophesyings. Prove all things; hold fast that which is good” (1 Thess. 5:20, 21). The testimony of Jesus Christ, or the spirit of prophecy, is from the Spirit of God, and if we allow it to “remain” in us, we shall not be in darkness, but rather we will be children of the light.

Prophecy tells us the devil is at “war with the remnant” (Rev. 12:17). We can see the effects of this war on our church. Many are despising the Spirit of Prophecy. Others, who claim to be “historic Adventists,” are teaching a revised understanding of Bible prophecy that contradicts the light given to the early Adventist Church. The apostle Peter assures us “the prophecy came not in old time by the will of man, but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost” (2 Pet. 1:21).

We can see the effects of this war on our church.

John says, “Ye need not that any man teach you” (1 John 2:27). The devil causes church members to rely on others to teach them and shape their opinions. “To the law and to the testimony; if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them” (Isa. 8:20). God has given His end-time people 66 books of the Bible and more than 20 million words of inspired commentary. We need not be blown about by every wind of doctrine.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is not in darkness that the day of the Lord shall overtake it as a thief in the night. When a member will love to talk of Christ, sing songs to Christ, read from His Word, and practice the religion of Christ, then he gives forth evidence that Christ abides in him and he in Christ. We know “that every one that doeth righteousness is born of him” (1 John 2:29).

REACT

1. Why does division exist in the remnant church?
2. How can the clear teaching of the Spirit of Prophecy unite believers?

By Shane P. Linder, a Spanish major, Universidad Autónoma de Guadalajara, Guadalajara, Jalisco, México.

BEST FRIENDS



“Behold what manner of love the Father has bestowed on us, that we should be called children of God! Therefore the world does not know us, because it did not know Him” (1 John 3:1, NKJV).

Taking a Dare

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eccl. 3:1, 4

When I was a young child, God was as real to me as the children I played with on the merry-go-round. I knew I could laugh and cry with Him as I did with my sister. I prayed to Him about things that troubled me, great and small, and when I was lonely or afraid I prayed for peace. Unfortunately, as I began doing things for myself and became an “independent teenager” my dependency on God diminished. Inconvenient and difficult situations began happening in my life that caused me to wonder how God could allow His children to bear heavy burdens. I still prayed to Him; however, I no longer believed that He could sustain me or even answer my prayers.

Although He has brought me through endless nights of despair, I still feel the need to work everything out for myself. The sad thing is, I always wind up doing it His way after I have made matters worse. Just the other day, I told my mother that I trusted God to work out the small matters in my life, but I still struggle with letting Him handle the difficult problems. I feel, at times, that I must be in control

I dare you to experience His love for you this week.

because God may not do what I think needs to be done.

Many people envision an intimate relationship with God as difficult or unobtainable; however, I have learned, through experience, that God is, in fact, as real as the children I played with on the merry-go-round.

Allow me to sketch a portrait for you of the relationship God wants to have with His dear children. Just open the doors to the halls of your mind and imagine a little child discovering a countryside prairie hand-in-hand with his lifelong best friend. Can't you see them. They run up a hill and tumble down it. When they land, they laugh with each other and make images out of the clouds. They roll over on their bellies and begin to play with the rabbits and the field mice. The young, bright-eyed friend asks his older friend about the animals in the prairie. The older confidant tells him how each one lives and survives day to day. He also warns him of dangers in the prairie and the animals to be cautious of. There is no doubt in the youth's mind, because he has grown to trust his friend. This is the childlike trust God desires you and me to have. He wants to be there to instruct us, warn us, laugh with us, and even cry with us. I dare you to experience His love for you this week.

By Sincere Renee Gunn, a nursing student at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

“It’s a Family Thing”

LOGOS

1 John 3:1-10

In these passages John the beloved speaks of an aggressive love. This love spares no positive means to claim those who will accept it. This love is so powerful that it will transform us, causing us to exhibit the characteristics of the One who bestows it—God. Wonderful, indeed!

However, those traits of character will inevitably cause us to be treated in the same manner as was Jesus the Christ. Therefore, when we identify with our brother Jesus we are boldly stating that we are willing to meet the opposition that faced Him. Part of that package means being rejected by the very ones we are trying to reach. In reality, how many of us can truly accept not being accepted? Yet we must hold fast to the hope that if we claim to be the children of God, we have more to look forward to than the oppressive stretch of this modern-day wilderness. This knowledge must dominate all negativism that we encounter. Our hope is underscored by the aggressive love that has laid claim to us.

God is synonymous with love, a complete encompassing love that goes beyond our finite terminology and comprehension. For that reason we must give all we have and allow Him to fill the gaps. Truly to claim a family relationship with God means to be identified with His nature, His commands, and His concerns. This can be accomplished only by those who directly or indirectly identify with Jesus, who in turn identified with the oppressed and labored on their behalf (Isa. 61:1).

“Powerless love and loveless power are contrasted.”

In describing His earthly mission, Jesus said, The Lord “hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the brokenhearted, to preach deliverance to the captives, and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty them that are bruised” (Luke 4:18). “This was his work. He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed by Satan.”¹ He exhibited the essence of love not only when healing or comforting but when driving out the money changers. Take note that they “sought to destroy him” (19:47).

There are only two major forces at work in this final age, the force of good and that of evil. Since the living God has no grandchildren, or foster children, all who are not of His immediate family are the children of the opposing force—Satan. The children of God are distinctly different (1 John 3:7, 10). When this difference begins to diminish, we must seek to draw even closer to God, again making visible the dividing line of good and evil. We are admonished as children of God to “let no man deceive you” (verse 7).

Our standing in God’s sight, which is the only standard worth being measured by, determines whose family we are in. Those who remotely demonstrate the characteristics of Satan are his and there is no righteousness in them. So-called Christians of past and present history, who sought and seek to deceive by showing a form of godliness (2 Tim. 3:5), chose to enslave rather than abide with brethren

in love. This work of deception remains a stumbling block to those who are, even now, being sought out by the true love of God.

We must decide whether we will be Christians strictly by title or wholly by lifestyle. The power of our love will determine how far we are willing to go for our fellow man and, furthermore, will reveal our family affiliation. Not only will the power of love prevent us from oppressing a brother but it will cause us to stand for him, even in the penetrating face of death. John 15:12-14 describes the highest love. John 19:30 is a manifestation of that love. Paul Tillich writes: "Love and power are often contrasted in such a way that love is identified with a resignation of power and power with a denial of love. Powerless love and loveless power are contrasted. . . . But such an understanding is error and confusion."² He further states that, "It is the strange work of love to destroy what is against love."³ We must realize that true love is inseparable from power. Therefore, as James H. Cone states, "It thus becomes the act of Christian love to proclaim the Good News of freedom by actively fighting against all those powers which hold men captive."⁴ That, my brothers and sisters, is the family affair.

REACT

1. Explain what you think the expression "powerless love" means in everyday terms.

2. In what ways is our relationship with God similar to a family relationship? In what ways dissimilar?

3. Explain why you agree or disagree that "true love is inseparable from power."

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 11.

2. James H. Cone, *Black Theology & Black Power* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 1989), p. 54.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

Beverly's Boy

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 3:1, 16-18

As a small child I enjoyed a wonderful relationship with my mother. I enjoyed spending time with her. To my brother David, I was a "Mama's boy." I was broken-hearted when my mother, Beverly J. Irvin, died. I was only seven years old at the time, and it hurt me to realize that my mother was no longer with me; and I prayed that I would see her when Christ comes again.

As my family and I grieved the death of my mother, God comforted our broken-heartedness. And I soon realized how much of a "Mama's boy" I really was. As far back as I remember, people have always told me that I look just like my mother. Everywhere my family and I would go to visit other family and friends who knew my mother, people would always exclaim, "This must be Beverly's boy!" I didn't necessarily see it for myself, but I did like the attention, and I considered it an honor to be identified with my mother in such a way. It was difficult at family gatherings not having my mother with us, but my family sometimes would look at me and marvel at my resemblance to my mother and reminisce about the fond memories of my mother. I soon realized that I would always be to some a reflection of my mother. In that sense she is still with us.

Just as my family sees me as a reflection of my mother, others should see us

To my brother David, I was a "Mama's boy."

Christians as reflections of God's character. God has given us ways in which we can tell that we are His. "The tender sympathies of our Saviour were aroused for fallen and suffering humanity. If you would be His followers, you must cultivate compassion and sympathy. Indifference to human woes must give place to lively interest in the sufferings of others." "For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God. For ye have not received the spirit of bondage again to fear; but ye have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, Abba, Father. The Spirit itself beareth witness with our spirit, that we are the children of God" (Rom. 8:14-16). For Christians, everywhere we go, others should see the reflection of Christ in us. By our kind deeds of mercy and love, we let the world know that we are children of God.

REACT

1. How specifically can others tell by your character that you are God's child?
2. How can we become more like Christ, so that we might have the honor of being identified with Him?

**Welfare Ministry*, p. 26.

By Devon Noel Irvin, a sophomore social-work major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Whose Child Are You?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 3:1-10

“Whose children are you?” is precisely the question John implies in 1 John 3:1-10 to the early Christians at Ephesus. The last of Christ’s original disciples, John has “waxed old” at this point, but when heresy began to rear its ugly head the “son of thunder” lifted up the sword of the Spirit and attacked it. This is particularly relevant for us as young people because the Ephesians too were young, maybe not in years, but certainly in knowledge of Christ. Thus we should be careful of the devices of Satan in our day as they were revealed by John.

In defending the faith against the heresy, John must expose how biblically incorrect are the tenets of gnosticism and docetism. Gnosticism was an attempt to assimilate the Christians by fusing Christianity and Judaism with Oriental religion and Greek philosophy.¹

A major teaching of gnosticism was that the spirit, though incorruptibly pure, was imprisoned in sinful flesh (i.e., the body) and that *gnosis*, the Greek word for “knowledge,” was the only means of freedom for it. This knowledge was not intellectual, but mystical, thus “the focus of Gnostic redemption is not on God but

Proponents of gnosticism taught that personal ethics were unimportant.

on the individual’s self-understanding and the resulting freedom it provides.”² Subsequently proponents of gnosticism taught that personal ethics were unimportant because the spirit seeking freedom from the body could not be tainted by sin.

Docetism, (from the Greek word *dokeo*, meaning “seem”) taught that because the flesh and the spirit are at war with each other, Jesus could not truly have come in the flesh, that it only *seemed* that way. John combats docetism in verses 2, 5, and 8; verses 3, 4, 6, and 7 combat gnosticism. First John 3:9 and 10 sum up John’s argument against these heresies by stating: “Whoever is a child of God does not continue to sin, for God’s very nature is in him [contrary to the teaching of docetism]; and because God is his father, he cannot continue to sin. Here is the clear difference between God’s children and the Devil’s children: anyone who does not do what is right or does not love his brother is not God’s child” (TEV).

REACT

1. In what religions or philosophies are gnosticism’s doctrine of exalting self-knowledge being taught?
2. How can such influences on our church be counteracted?

1. See Everett F. Harrison, ed. *The Wycliffe Bible Commentary*, 1463.

2. Allan C. Meyers, ed., *The Eerdmans’ Bible Dictionary*.

By Derek M. McCray, junior religion and political-science major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

A Childlike Role

HOW-TO

Key Texts: 1 John 3:2-6; Ps. 41:4; Matt. 9:13

“I would rather you not go out with them tonight,” Mother said. “I do not know that group of friends very well, and I do not believe that needs to be your new hang-out group.”

“But, Mom,” Jerry said, “we’re only going bowling tonight, and then we’ll come straight home.”

“I’m not going to repeat myself,” Mother responded.

After being told all of this, Jerry, in his mind, was determined that he would still go out with his friends. For some particular reason, going on this outing was very important. Maybe it was important for his social acceptance. That seems to be a valid reason for explaining why we as Christians do some of the things we do.

Jerry sneaked out and went to the bowling alley. While he was there with his friends, he bowled one game, but he didn’t feel comfortable. He could not even share in the refreshments. Before he could think of it twice, his mother was standing at the entrance of the alley, with an upset look on her face.

The very fact of Jerry’s realizing that he was uncomfortable is the point of

“We’re only going bowling tonight, and then we’ll come straight home.”

focus. When we, children playing that childlike role, go against what we know as humble obedience to God’s will, we feel uncomfortable. That uneasy or uncomfortable feeling should be recognized as the Holy Spirit penetrating one’s mind to do right.

We need to recognize a few important points:

1. Self-purification. Realize with God’s leadership that when we commit sins we are transgressing the law. However, God has promised to take away our sins because in Him there is no sin.

2. Acceptance. Understand that God’s mercy has cleansed you of sin once you’ve asked in sincerity for forgiveness. “Behold, thou art made whole: sin no more” (John 5:14). Accept forgiveness and sin no more.

3. Display thanksgiving. After you have denied self and accepted God’s forgiveness, do not stop there. Praise and thank the Lord for being merciful and standing by your side.

REACT

How does disobedience relate, if at all, to God’s protection?

By Ingrid McFarlane, a senior high-school student at Huntsville (Alabama) High School.

Theological Oppression

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 3:12

As you study American history, you cannot help studying the theology taught by the American church in general. Unfortunately this is an area of great disinformation. A great Christian minister defines disinformation as “to deprive of, through communication or reception, knowledge or intelligence.” For too long, the church has played a serious part in disinforming African-Americans. I know this is a subject that many of us like to ignore, or sugar coat, but, glory to God, I am not that kind of person.

A root of this disinformation is called white supremacy. White supremacy created this country; it positioned the church, and the church positioned us. We must understand that this form of rule is a doctrine of devils, a principality and power and spiritual wickedness in high places. If we do not understand white supremacy for what it is and what it does, then everything else will confuse us.

The image of Jesus portrayed across this country is a product of evil and disinformation, and if a picture is worth a thousand words, then people are being lied to a thousand times over. But God’s people will change the flow of this world with truth and love. We live in a time that does not allow for sweet talk, digressive

If a picture is worth a thousand words, then people are being lied to a thousand times over.

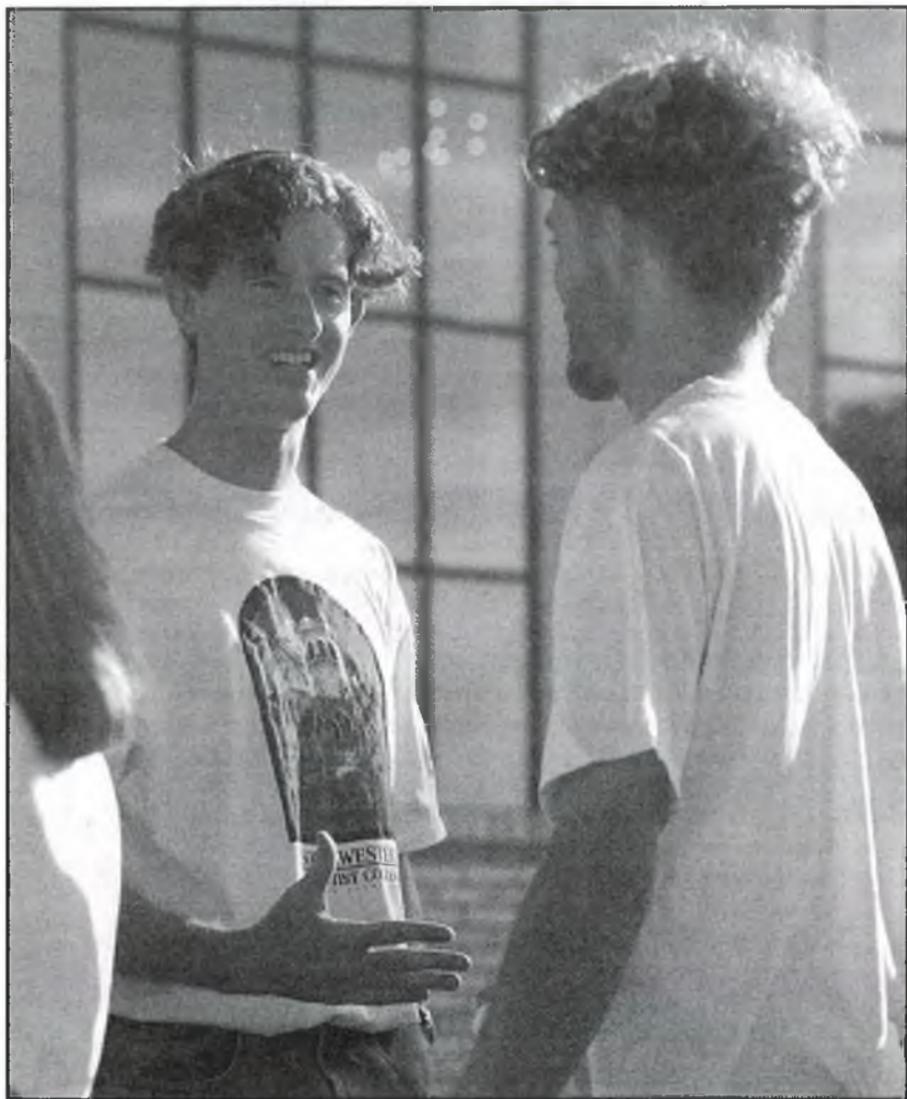
thinking, and shackled religion. We must search for truth and seek understanding from the almighty God Himself. So we must be on God’s side. We must move away from the ideologies that separate us as a people and know ourselves, love each other, and trust in God. We must throw off the shackles of mental, emotional, and theological oppression today. And, in the words of the Jamaican singer Robert Nesta Marley, we must “emancipate ourselves from mental slavery, none but ourselves can free our minds.” So fear not, brothers and sisters. God is on our side.

REACT

1. What can we do to combat evil doctrines?
2. How will we know that we are children of God?
3. In what ways, if any, should a Christian question authority?
4. In your own words, define the expression “theological oppression.”

By Timothy Moore, an accessories designer for Pan-African Alliance, Huntsville, Alabama.

SEEING LOVE IN ACTION



“Little children, let us not love in word or speech but in deed and in truth” (1 John 3:18, RSV).

Does Anyone Know What Love Is?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 3:14

We speak so much about love, but does anyone know what it is all about?

Young people—in general, *everyone*—feel attracted by love. Love is associated with many interesting and motivating aspects of our life. Love is everything.

However, love is usually related to feelings, as if it were the only possible alternative. Nevertheless, this word—which is used and abused so much, so frequently heard in sermons, in popular songs, and even in political meetings—says very little about its true meaning.

Many people say they know what love is when they fall in love; others say “Love is fashionable today” or that “I’m a lost lover.” Is it that love has to do only with experiencing physical attraction, dating, and marrying?

Maybe it is time we are capable of seeing love in action in the beauty of nature, the trees, the flowers, the birds; in the struggle of a mother caring, protecting, and nurturing her children; in the visit to some sick or elderly person; in a smile or an encouraging word. That, too, is love.

The Spanish poet Francisco Villaespesa, in his poem “¿Conoce alguien el

“Love is . . . a sad wave of life that washes over us as though we were shipwreck survivors in the sea.”

Amor?” (“Does Anyone Know Love?”) says that love is an unending dream, a mysterious desire that causes us to sigh. He calls it the palm of peace in the deserts of pain, a path of roses. Peace in the midst of war, to melt two beings into one. Yet, having given us all these poetic descriptions, he adds: “Everyone knows what love is!” and he declares that it is like a poisoned garden of pain where pain never ends, a labyrinth without an exit, a sad wave of life that washes over us as though we were shipwreck survivors in the sea. Who knows what love is? Obviously, the poet does not know.

Do you clearly understand what love is about? During our studies this week, we will refer to this concept. It is an important concept that we should think about, even though it seems familiar. To stop and think for a moment what we mean when we say “love” is to begin to see the light in the midst of the tangle of definitions that abound. To ask God and His Word means to come finally to definitive and appropriate conclusions about love, our only alternative.

*The name of a popular soap-opera in Chile.

By Hans Alban Pasquel, a commercial-engineering student at the Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillan, Chile.

Love in Action

LOGOS

1 John 3:11-24

A man notices that there are abandoned children on the streets, but instead of talking about it, as many do, he organizes a program to help get them out of this situation and takes them to homes that are properly staffed.

A woman notices that many destitute old people are taken to hospitals where nobody cares about them during their last days on this earth. Instead of lamenting their condition, she organizes a permanent and effective social work.

A physician becomes concerned by the large number of people who survive by eating from a garbage dump. Not only is this their means of sustenance, but their daily living quarters. He begins to tell them about Jesus, but at the same time he establishes a small business around the dump site to teach them how to recycle the garbage and thereby help to lift themselves out of their poverty-stricken living conditions.

A group of young people organize themselves to help all the church members who are incapable of helping themselves because of sickness or senility. They shop for the elderly, clean their homes, take care of their gardens, cut their wood, etc., free of charge.

We find in each of these real-life cases not simply philanthropy, but love in action—genuine and authentic love.

The human race has expressed what it believes to be love through majestic poems, extraordinary paintings, and beautiful melodies. Although love inspires and

The human race has expressed what it believes to be love through majestic poems, extraordinary paintings, and beautiful melodies.

will continue to stimulate humankind's creativity, it is not always well understood. For the great majority of people, love is simply a feeling that moves us to seek some kind of satisfaction. If we believe in such works as Shakespeare's *Romeo and Juliet*, love is so insatiable that it leads to absurd decisions, without thinking about the needs of others.

But what is love? Is there any difference between our love for our neighbor and our love for God?

Christians are frequently accused of being impractical, of living in an unreal limbo. Today, when people adore pragmatism, this seems to be a serious accusation. It is true that many Christians live a life of formal Christianity. On the other hand, many who have accepted Christ as their Sovereign and Saviour have understood that Christianity is a way of life that involves having an attitude of love toward those around them.

This is what John is talking about in the third chapter of his epistle. Love that is inspired by God is a principle. This means that it is not motivated by sentimentality, but by the will. It is not a simple emotion that goes and comes, but a conscious decision to do what is right, whether it seems reasonable or not.

Only a love that is regarded as a principle is capable of seeing another person as a neighbor, someone who is equal to oneself. Only love recognizes the rights of others. Every denial of love eliminates a human being. One who loves considers the effect that his or her actions will have on the lives of others. Love demonstrates solidarity with those around us. One who loves suffers empathetically the pain of others.

Love thinks about the welfare of those around us because it understands that that is the way to grow.

The central message of 1 John 3:11-24 is: love means living among others. And it exists on the principle that Christ expounded: do unto others as you would have them do unto you. To love is to be loved. And to love, in the biblical sense, is to listen, to empathize, to help others in their need, to cooperate with others—in a word, action, not theory.

For that reason, if I hate my brother, I am a murderer; and if I close my heart in the presence of someone in need, I demonstrate that I do not have the real love of God. We should truly love and, therefore, show by our actions that God lives in us. It is easy to talk—everyone does that—but difficult to move into action, to live by our words. Otherwise what we say does not make sense.

God demonstrated His love, not only in words but in action. He sent His Son to give His life for us; He gave His only begotten. In giving Him, God gave Himself. Loving God also implies loving others, because one thing leads to another. Those who say they love God but do not express it tangibly in acts of love for their neighbor simply do not understand the depths of God's love, but they deceive themselves and cannot enjoy the extraordinary privilege of true love.

REACT

1. What is love?
2. What is the difference between the love the Bible portrays and everyday love?
3. What is love in action?
4. What can you do in your community to live practical love in action?

By Bolivar Alaña Poseck, president of the Pacific Chile Mission, Quilpue; and Miguel Angel Nuñez, pastor and professor of theology, Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillan.

The Heart: Closed or Protected?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 3:17

The apostle John emphasizes the insistent need of loving God and your neighbor. His statement is simple: “That we should love one another” (1 John 3:11). Ellen White maintains that love “is the perpetual life of the church,” that its members “love God supremely and to love others as they love themselves.”¹

Real love is linked with giving (verse 16; cf. John 3:16; 15:13). Not sharing with others in need, when one is able to share, is a sign that love is lacking. When we are faced with the needs of others, our love is tested. Ellen White says that selfishness marks the course of many people.² A Christian’s love cannot be merely words, utterances of the tongue; it should be a love expressed by works.

“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?” (1 John 3:17, NIV). We cannot safeguard our heart by closing it to our neighbor’s need, because by doing so we are closing it to the possibility of life. “Anyone who does not love remains in death” (verse 14). If we wish to protect our hearts, the way to do that is to open them.

Ellen White admonishes us: “My young friends, you are judgment-bound, and

Love “is the perpetual life of the church.”

through the grace of Christ you may render obedience to the commands of God, and daily gain fortitude and strength of character.”³ One of those commandments is “Thou shalt not kill.” John reminds us that “anyone who hates his brother is a murderer” (verse 15, NIV). Regarding this Ellen White states: “All acts of injustice that tend to shorten life; the spirit of hatred and revenge, or the indulgence of any passion that leads to injurious acts toward others, or causes us even to wish them harm . . . ; a selfish neglect of caring for the needy or suffering; all self-indulgence or unnecessary deprivation or excessive labor that tends to injure health—all these are, to a greater or less degree, violations of the sixth commandment.”⁴

Many lives have been changed when people attempted to love. Salvation and eternal life need to be assured, and for them appearances do not exist. The only thing that assures us in this life is love.

REACT

1. In what specific way is love the “perpetual life of the church”?
2. What does it mean to kill or commit murder?

1. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 95.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 161.

3. *Youth’s Instructor*, Nov. 7, 1895.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 308.

By David Sandoval Romero, a fourth-year theology student at the Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillán.

A Transformed Life

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 3:16

Imagine meeting today your eldest and best friend, weighted down with years and wanting to leave you a message distilled from his long walk with the Lord. As young people filled with dreams, new heights to conquer, bitter cups to taste, living in one of the last generations of this world's history, the words of this dear old man living his last days undoubtedly would be taken seriously as a counselor who has learned over the years what we need to know.

John, our beloved elder, Jesus' loving disciple, left a challenge for our life. Ellen G. White says: "The confiding love and unselfish devotion manifested in the life and character of John present lessons of untold value to the Christian church."¹

"John had, by nature, serious defects of character," and like so many of us "was proud and ambitious, and quick to resent slight and injury," nevertheless, he "desired to become like Jesus."² And that is the great difference with our lives! He wanted to be like Jesus. It is important to ask ourselves whether we want to be like Jesus in our conduct, our work, our speech, our sharing with our friends.

"Under the transforming influence of the love of Christ . . . [John] became meek

"We are not to unite with the rebellious and call this charity."

and lowly of heart. Self was hid in Jesus."³ This is the greatest evidence of Christ's grace working in us through the Loving Counselor! We can live real sanctification today! But this requires a daily decision. To wake up each day with our friend Jesus, to search His advice, to contemplate His wisdom, His sweetness, to invite Him to become a part of our plans, studies, courtship, is the only way that we will be transformed daily to the likeness of Jesus.

"While we are to love the souls for whom Christ died, and labor for their salvation, we should not make a compromise with sin. We are not to unite with the rebellious, and call this charity. God requires His people in this age of the world to stand, as did John in his time, unflinchingly for the right, in opposition to soul-destroying errors."⁴ The greatest evidence that we can give to a chaotic world is to demonstrate that the Spirit of the Lord lives within us!

REACT

1. What is the greatest evidence of a transformed life?
2. What is the Holy Spirit waiting to do for us?

1. *The Sanctified Life*, p. 54.
2. *Ibid.*, pp. 54, 55.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 55.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

By Mauricinho Tapia, an agronomy student; and Edwin Apaza, an auditing student, Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillán.

Leave It in the Hands of God

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 3:18

I am in my room with one of my best friends and reading: “That we should love one another” (1 John 3:11); I look at my companion and think: “To love him is easy, but how about loving people with whom I disagree? How do I love those who are hateful?”

Verse 18 affirms, “Let us not love in word, neither in tongue; but in deed and in truth.” What is that?

To love “in tongue” is to love externally. That is easy to do, anyone can learn to be a flatterer or to practice a formal courtesy that imitates love; but to love truly is different because it implies a radical change of attitude toward those around us. It includes the idea of acceptance and surrender.

But our natural selfishness precludes such conduct. A miracle is necessary for us really to love others. That miracle occurs only when we give ourselves to Jesus and He transforms our existence by converting us into new persons—people who love. Only by loving Jesus can we really love. Our commitment to Jesus will help us to commit ourselves to others and finally reflect in our behavior an imitation of Jesus. Only then will we be able to accept the divine command: “That we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ, and love one another, as he gave us commandment” (verse 23).

When you do that which is possible, He will do that which is impossible.

God asks us to love Him and our neighbor (Luke 10:25-37). The essence of Christianity is love, which is basic. But to love, it is necessary to know God, to submit ourselves to Him and live with Him.

Personally, it is very difficult to take Jesus along with me when I enter a football field because I tend to be another person. I need to ask Him beforehand to transform me, during and after the game.

Think of the most difficult place for you to invite Jesus and to tell Him sincerely and honestly in prayer that it is difficult. Then trust in Him, leave the problem in His hands, and concentrate on what you can do: reflect, pray, obey. When you do that which is possible, He will do that which is impossible.

REACT

1. What does it mean really to love and not just love “by tongue”?
2. In what situations is it difficult for me to invite Jesus to accompany me?
3. When does the miracle of love happen?

By Daniel Bullon, a fifth-year student of commercial engineering at the Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillán.

Are You a Murderer?

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 3:14

Have you ever hated or felt angry with someone? If the answer is “yes” I believe you are in serious trouble with God. First John 3:14 states that indifference (not loving your brother) is like being dead. If the problem is hatred or rancor, verse 15 catalogues it simply as murder.

This section belongs to a larger context that should be considered in order to capture the idea fully. To understand the meaning John had in mind, it is basic to understand what love means in the biblical sense.

Normally, we are admonished to show love for those around us. But what happens when we are not capable of feeling anything positive about those who have offended us? Jesus not only says that we should love, but He contrasts us with God Himself (Matt. 5:47, 48), which leaves us in a very complicated situation.

In the sight of the Bible, it is evident that love is not one of our natural qualities. John simply defines love around a person: God (1 John 4:8). In other words, God is love and it is only possible to obtain it from Him.

The problem for Christians begins when we believe that it is our duty to “feel” love toward our neighbor, and we make every effort to comply, which eventually causes frustration and estrangement from true love—from God.

I have seen throughout my life disagreeable situations, destruction, immorality,

It is evident that love is not one of our natural qualities.

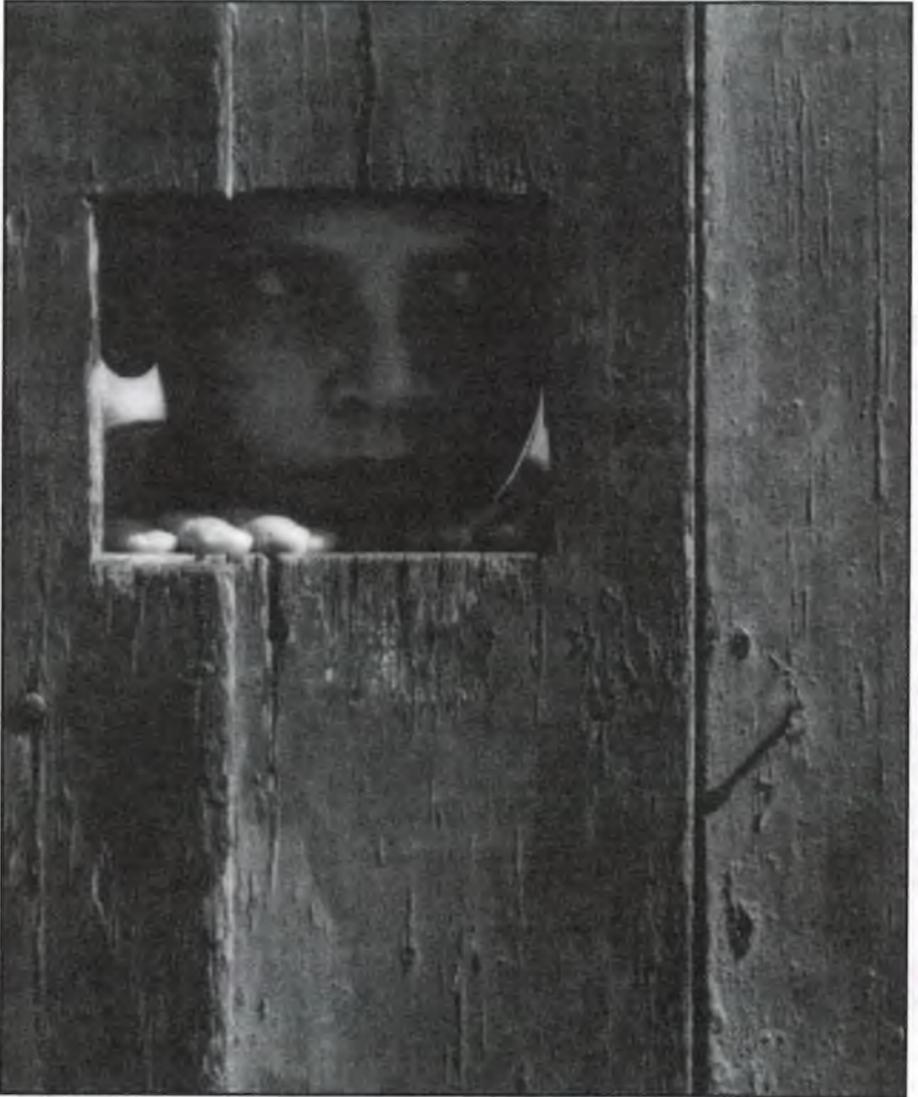
and mishaps. My first reaction has always been to punish and pressure the author of such acts, but I always felt that something was wrong with my attitude. Supposedly, I should have “felt” love toward him or her, but the opposite was what happened. I discovered in the Bible that love is a principle that is based on a relationship with a Person—God. Only God can help us to hate the sin, while at the same time to love the sinner.

“And this is his commandment, That we should believe,” John says (1 John 3:23). Instead of two points, the Greek uses the expression *iva*, which means “for” or “so that.” If we translate it literally, it says: “And this is His commandment, so that we should believe on the name of his Son Jesus Christ and love one another.” To believe and love are the result of a commandment, of a request. They are the fruit of accepting a gift, His love, which He wants to perfect in us (3:1).

If we want to love God first (Matt. 22:36-40) and then our neighbor, we should fervently ask for His love and only then will God’s process of change begin in us, resulting in changed attitudes, different acts and words (1 John 2:5). That is God’s work, not ours.

By Johnny Burdiles, a former student of music teaching at the Universidad Adventista de Chile, Chillián.

THE SPIRIT'S LITMUS TEST



**“Test the spirits to see whether they are from God”
(1 John 4:1, NIV).**

Will the Real God Please Stand Up?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: John 9:16

Among western Christians, the "Toronto Blessing" has been the most dynamic and widespread move of God for decades. Or was it a move of God?

In December 1993, John Wimber announced to his home church, Anaheim Vineyard, that God was about to move and that church members should dedicate themselves to prayer and preparation. A few weeks later in January 1994 a regular church meeting was interrupted as the Spirit of God moved on the people bringing healing, repentance, and praise accompanied by physical manifestations such as falling in the Spirit.

This seemed to spread to other Vineyard fellowships, notably the Toronto Vineyard which has become the epicenter of what is now known as the "Toronto Blessing." At the time of this writing, the senior pastor at Toronto, John Arnott, reckons that about 600,000 people have passed through his little church, having come from all over the world to receive a touch from the Holy Spirit.

Amid the physical manifestations of falling, laughing, and crying in the Spirit, claims of physical, emotional, and mental healing have been made. Others have spoken of gaining an increased love for God and desire to read the Bible. One of

Claims of physical, emotional, and mental healing have been made.

the more bizarre manifestations has been the animal sounds induced in some people and the free-for-all nature of some of the meetings.

Here in the United Kingdom, thousands of churches have been affected, catching the attention of the media. In the last few days, however, John Wimber has just disfellowshipped the Toronto Vineyard. One of the main reasons cited on Ecunet was that the ministry team had failed to test the spirits.

As Adventist Christians we are aware that at the end of time there will be a great outpouring of the Holy Spirit; this is what we call the latter rain. We read of some of the bizarre and sensational stories in Acts, such as healing handkerchiefs and aprons (see Acts 19). We also know that the latter rain will be greater than anything preceding it. It will include the spectacular. However, we are also aware that the devil will be frantically busy as the final showdown unfolds. He will produce false manifestations, miracles, and other phenomena. How do we discern between good and evil and prevent ourselves from being deceived?

The surest way is to keep the Ten Commandments, return tithe, attend church on Sabbath, dismiss all miracles (and other weird stuff), and bury your head in the sand. This is the nonviable option most are taking. This week we look at how to know whether something is from God or not. Watch TV instead at your peril!

By Paul Wong, an architect from Newport, Wales, United Kingdom.

If in Doubt, Read the Instructions

LOGOS

1 John 4:1-6

God told him to murder his son—allegedly. A man claimed to hear a voice, asserting that it was God, telling him to kill another person.

Can you see the headlines “Man Arrested After Ritualistic Child Sacrifice”? Would you want to be branded a fellow cult member? But, of course, the man was Abraham, and the one to be killed, Isaac. And God really *did* tell him to do it.

How would you know whether it was God speaking to you? More important, how do you know now what God is saying to you?

First John 4:1-6 does not just pop out of the blue as a three-point checklist on spirit discernment; it is built on the preceding three chapters (what a revelation!).

Your Testimony (1 John 1:1-4)

Without any theological references and presuming a neutral jury with no bias or preconceptions, explain in simple words your experience of Jesus Christ. Remember, heresy is inadmissible. Only your personal experience is valid as testimony. If you have no testimony, you cannot be a witness—a witness to Jesus Christ.

John starts his Epistle: “That which . . . we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, . . . and our hands have touched” (verse 1, NIV). “We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard,” (verse 3).

The Effect of the Gospel (1:5-2:2)

John then gives these believers a reminder of the balance of the gospel. We are saved from sin but can never claim to be without sin (1:8). Christ “is the atoning sacrifice for our sins” (2:2, NIV).

If you commit yourself to Christ, you commit yourself to follow a leader, one who leads by example. “Whoever claims to live in him must walk as Jesus did” (verse 6). In following Christ, there is no room for hypocrisy. You cannot be all lovey to God and at the same time despise that annoying person at work (verse 9).

Remember the Holy Spirit

John steps it up a gear in 1 John 2:18: “This is the last hour . . . the antichrist is coming.” Time to panic? No! “You have an anointing. . . . The anointing you received from him. . . . His anointing teaches you . . . and as that anointing is real, not counterfeit—just as it has taught you, remain in him” (verses 20-27). This anointing is the Holy Spirit whom Jesus promised to us, who would teach us all things (John 14:25). This is the same Holy Spirit whom God anointed Jesus with to do miraculous signs (Acts 10:38).

At what John believes to be the last hour, he reminds these believers of the importance of their relationship and draws the attention to the person of the Holy Spirit, who will personally guide us just as He guided Abraham. Abraham knew it was God speaking to Him because he knew God.

To be able to discern false spirits, you have to know the real Holy Spirit.

The basis for positively being able to apply the tests in 1 John 4:1-6 are: (1) experiencing a personal relationship with God to which you can testify, (2) knowing

and growing in the gospel, (3) shunning distractions of the world, and (4) depending on the Holy Spirit, who lives with and in you.

Test the Spirits: 1 John 4:1-6

Joan mentions in Sabbath School class that in her friend's (Baptist) church they sing modern worship choruses accompanied by modern instruments—synthesizers, guitars, drums, etc. Attendance, particularly youth attendance, has steadily increased. However, Mrs. Crabworthy retorts that this is music of the devil and an argument (excuse me, a free-flowing debate) ensues. Beat, rhythm, and “decently and in order” all get thrown in. As the temperature heats up, someone declares that if these people really had the Holy Spirit they would keep the Sabbath! The fumes are still rising as Mrs. Peacehaven offers the closing prayer. Sound familiar?

Interestingly, nowhere in the Bible is Sabbathkeeping a test for authenticating Christianity. Nor is it mentioned to discern the Holy Spirit from false spirits.

1. “Every spirit that acknowledges that Jesus Christ has come in the flesh is from God” (verse 2). Why couldn't the devil just tell another lie to deceive us?

My teacher at Stanborough School told of a minister who was convinced that another spiritual Christian leader was in fact an operative of the devil. He agreed to a live local radio confrontation. The person argued brilliantly and biblically and the minister felt defeated. But then he asked, “Do you believe Jesus Christ came in

Without any theological references, explain in simple words your experience of Jesus Christ.

the flesh, died on the cross, and was risen again for the salvation of humankind?” The question blew the bogus Christian off his chair. For the devil to admit Christ came and died in the flesh is to admit he, the devil, has been defeated.

2. The spirit of the antichrists speaks from the viewpoint of the world, and the world listens to it (see verses 3-5). How many times have you planned some church project and been stifled with a lack of resources. That is starting from a worldly viewpoint. The question is: what is God's plan? He always has the resources for His own projects.

3. “We are from God, and whoever knows God listens to us. . . . This is how we recognize the Spirit of truth and the spirit of falsehood” (verse 6). What a bold statement for John to make. The application of this is identifying whether what we are testing is false within the parameters set by the Scriptures.

This Epistle as a whole provides the framework in which we will be able to test the spirits. It will help to keep us safe when the devil tries to deceive us.

Who's Afraid of Ghosts?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Exod. 7:10-12

“If there’s something strange, in your neighborhood, who you gonna call? GHOSTBUSTERS!” so sang Ray Parker, Jr., for the theme song to the film *Ghostbusters*. This film and countless others along with popular TV shows such as *Bewitched*, *Rent-A-Ghost*, *Scooby Doo*, (plus all the modern ones) have helped to popularize and familiarize the concept of evil spirits into twentieth-century Western living.

This was only just emerging as an interesting phenomenon when Ellen White warned about the increase in the “mysterious rappings” as spiritism was developing in the latter half of the past century. This present century has seen a decline in Christianity as a main cultural and sociological guide for our Western civilization. Most notably, the sixties was an accelerated time in shift of the mind-set of a generation. Now in the nineties we are the product of a generation without some of the fail-safe features coded into our community that previous generations would have had as a direct or indirect effect of the Christian religion’s influence over society.

Without this common framework, people have become much more open to,

Both God’s people and the devil’s will be performing miraculous stuff.

essentially, other spirits. Interestingly, it was believed at the end of the previous century that people would be far less “religious” by the end of this century as science increasingly answered our questions. The converse is true, we have more religion, churches, cults, sects, etc. But the question is: what are people believing in?

In *Early Writings*, Ellen White states, “I was pointed back to the time of Moses and saw the signs and wonders which God wrought through him before Pharaoh, most of which were imitated by the magicians of Egypt; and that just before the final deliverance of the saints, God would work powerfully for His people, and these modern magicians would be permitted to imitate the work of God” (pages 59, 60).

In other words, both God’s people and the devil’s will be performing miraculous stuff. Her advice is that we must be “stayed upon God” and that we should not emulate the world and “fear what they fear, and reverence what they reverence,” rather similar to what John says in his first Epistle.

REACT

1. What do you think should be the correct Christian response to films like *Ghost* or *Always*?

2. How should we, as Christians, present the supernatural aspect of our faith to our non-Christian friends or relatives?

By Paul Wong, an architect practicing in Newport, Wales, United Kingdom.

Teacher Says

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 22:17-19

In *Deceived by the New Age*, Will Barron states: "If people do not stand firmly behind the truth of the Bible as the inerrant Word of God, they are easily led astray when Satan appears in his shining angelic form. They automatically think that the great being of light in front of them is Jesus Christ—or at least one of God's great angels—no matter what unbiblical ideas the false messenger begins to propound."

Science lessons are a nightmare. Regardless of how much preparation I have done for my primary class, some child always has to stray from agreed guidelines. My class were testing snails' reactions to alkaline and acidic liquids. We used vinegar and lemon juice, respectively. Each child was simply to use a pipette to place one drop of each of the liquids near their snail. As I walked around the classroom pleased at the way things seemed to be going, I was drawn to the back of the room where chairs were flying back onto the carpet as the children were jumping up from their seats. I could see horror on their faces. As I neared the table I saw three snails

Chairs were flying back onto the carpet as the children were jumping up from their seats.

bubbling and frothing! I realized immediately what they had done, and, trying to keep cool, I asked, "Why did you pour vinegar over the snails?"

One boy chimed, "But, Miss, you said you wanted us to investigate for ourselves what the vinegar would do."

On reflection I realized that my methods of teaching were not at fault, the independent, thoughtful conclusions they drew proved that. Rather, they had failed to utilize other guidelines I had laid down in the classroom, such as regard for animals brought into the classroom. They had simply listened to one point I had made and disregarded everything else I had said.

Maybe we are that way with the teachings in the Bible. We read one part of the Bible and forget that everything else is interrelated. We need to know who God is, and the only way we are going to do that is through spending time with Him as you would with a friend. We need to examine all the Bible in relation to who Jesus is. The only way this is going to happen is if we spend the time studying the Bible and asking for guidance in our understanding. The more closely we know God through His Word, the easier it will be to spot false impersonators.

*Page 189.

Easier Said Than Done

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 7:36-50

A couple of friends in your circle at church are each facing a problem. Peter thinks God is impressing him to go out with one of the women in the church who has a reputation of having slept with at least a dozen men. In fact, your friend thinks God is saying this is to be his future wife.

Sarah, on the other hand, is convinced that she must respond to the need of the homeless in her community and is trying to rally a group together to raise funds and generate support. She is very keen and recently gave a talk to the youth group based on Matthew 25, about how helping the needy is the same as if you were doing it for Christ Himself.

How would you respond to each of these situations? Why?

Superficially it seems quite obvious. Why on earth would God want your good Christian friend to marry a wayward woman? On the other hand, helping people is right in line with what the gospel is all about. Well, let's try to apply the three tests given in 1 John 4:1-6.

You know that both Peter and Sarah are born-again Christians who have declared the risen Christ to be their Saviour. So the conditions in verses 2 and 3 seem to be satisfied. Next we will look at the condition given in verse 6. In this week's "Logos" section this was interpreted to mean that the test is to identify whether

So are we saying that the tests do not work?

the concept falls within the boundary of the Bible. Sarah's idea obviously falls within the boundaries. But you may be surprised to find that Peter's dilemma does too (see what God asked Hosea to do).

Now if we apply verses 3-5, we discover that these two situations may be interpreted either way.

So are we saying that the tests do not work? No, but as Paul correctly points out in his First Epistle to the Corinthians, spiritual things are spiritually discerned. It is an application of the Word and the Spirit that will bring the correct insight. You cannot judge superficially. Just as unsaved persons can agree with principles of the gospel and even live by them, unless they are born of the Spirit they cannot enter the kingdom of God (see John 3). This is important to us as Adventists because we all are prone to following individuals who seem to have everything wrapped up, and there are many good people who will help us in our Christian development. But it is our own relationship with God that we need to depend on. This is the key to applying successfully this week's lesson to our lives. Know God. Know His Word.

By John Wells, technical manager at an engineering company in Cardiff, Wales, United Kingdom.

Are You Known in Hell?

OPINION

Key Texts: Eph. 6:10; Acts 19:15

We need computer-simulated virtual reality to achieve what a child does naturally. As I watch children play in the park, they can let their imagination go and enter a whole new world of adventure just like in *The Neverending Story*. But, of course, we all grow up and learn to put away such childish games and learn to depend more on what we can see, feel, and touch. None of us believes in fairies, elves, or wizards. Equally many of us consign the concepts of evil spirits to the confines of mission-storybook land. So we don't need to worry about them.

There are just as many demons in leafy suburban Hertfordshire as there are in any idol worshiping tribe in the depths of a South American jungle, but do we ever give them a second thought? When was the last time you put on the full armor of God as the apostle Paul instructs us in Ephesians 6? Do we really believe that "our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, . . . against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms"? (Eph. 6:12, NIV).

If we do not take our stand against the devil, then we give him the freedom to wreak havoc in our lives, or just subtly divert us from Christ to other more press-

Many of us consign evil spirits to the confines of mission-storybook land.

ing things. Wherever Jesus showed up, demons were afraid and would beg Him not to treat them harshly. Jesus would cast demons out of people who were possessed. He also instructed and empowered His disciples to do the same. Some tried to do this without submitting to the discipling required. You can read about them in Acts 19. They thought that by just using the name of Jesus they could cast out a demon. But the response of the demon was "Jesus I know and Paul I know about, but who are you?" (Acts 19:15).

In Mark's account of the Great Commission, Jesus said that one of the signs that would accompany those who believe is that they would cast out demons. (See Mark 16:17.)

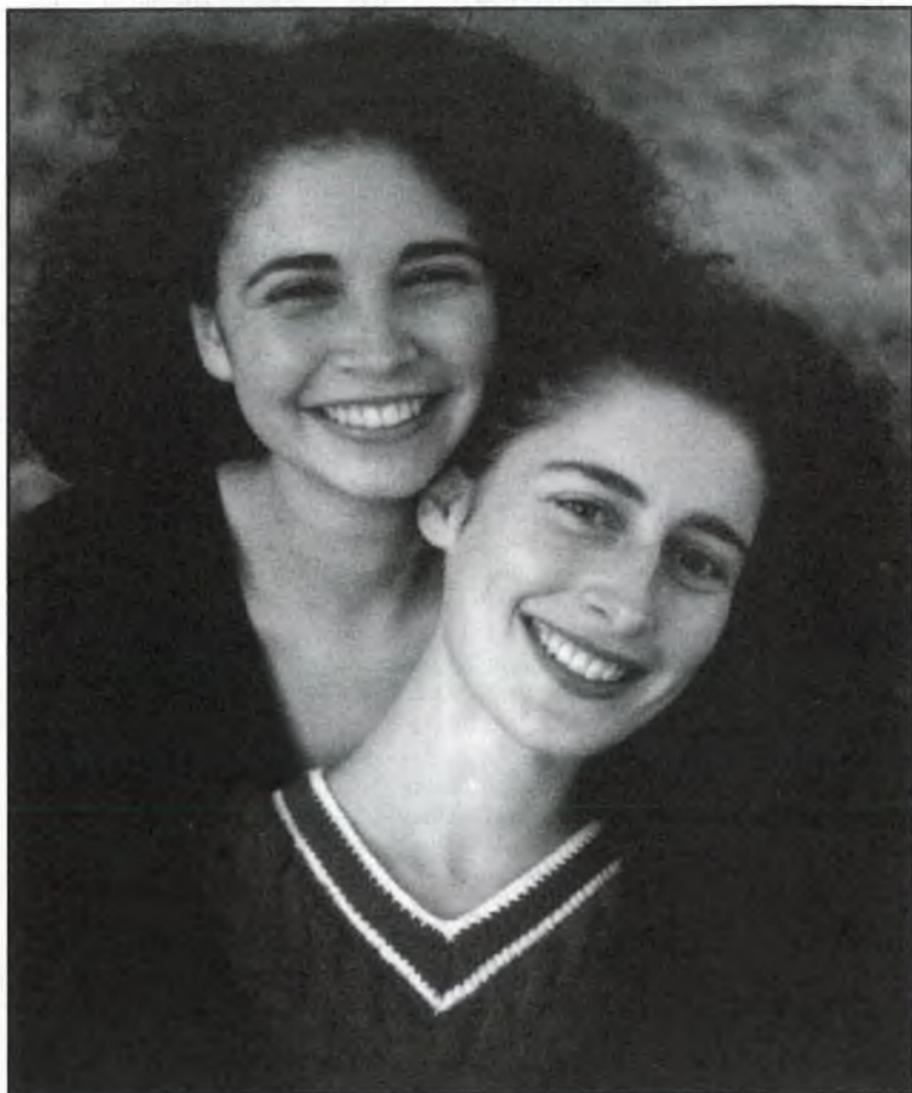
It is easy to ignore some parts of the Bible that seem difficult, frightening, or just to be in the realm of ghosts and goblins. But all of the Bible is there for instruction, and Jesus calls us to have the pure faith of a child when we read His Word and not to be cynical or skeptical about what He has told us.

REACT

1. Where do you think evil spirits are in your town?
2. If you were part of the local demon scene, how would you go about attacking the local Christian community? Would you use open or covert operations?

By Althea Mason, a nanny in Chiswick, London, England.

WHAT DOES HE SEE IN ME?



**“God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God,
and God in him” (1 John 4:16, NKJV).**

Irrational Love?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Jer. 31:3

I could never figure out what she saw in him.

She was attractive, intelligent, came from a secure and supportive family, and every guy in school wanted to date her. He was a bitter rebel.

Life had cheated him, and everyone was in on the scheme. He had dropped or been kicked out of school so many times he was three years behind everyone else in his class. He was bad news. When she first went out with him, reactions ranged from utter shock to admiration. To everyone's amazement, the relationship did not wither and die. She seemed to have a calming effect on him. At her graduation, he asked her to marry him. She said yes. We were skeptical but they had it all planned out. He had two more years of school, and she would get a job to help him pay for school.

I saw her two years after her wedding. We spent a long lunch catching up. When I asked about him, her expression saddened. They were still together, but he had fallen back into drinking again. He had dropped out of school permanently, had no job, and they were living off her income. I told her to get out of the relationship. She said she loved him.

I saw her seven months later and was shocked. Her face was haggard and worn,

When she first went out with him, reactions ranged from utter shock to admiration.

and she had aged 10 years. A thin scar stretched from her left ear across her cheek to her chin. I pushed her for an explanation, and reluctantly she revealed the story: In one of his drunken rages, he had grabbed a kitchen knife and slashed her across her face. The scar would stay with her for life. He had been unfaithful more than once. I spent the afternoon trying to convince her to leave him. She was encouraging his self-destructiveness by staying with him.

Couldn't she see that he was a selfish, no-good leech, who had spent their life together taking everything he could from her? I used terms like codependency, spouse abuse, victimization. But she was firm. She still saw hope in him. She was convinced that there was a good part of him that just needed nurturing to come out. They were going to counseling together, and he was always extremely remorseful in his more lucid moments.

Two years later I stood with her at his funeral. She had stayed with him through two children, a rocky marriage, and the terrible collision that finally took his life. I was certain she shared my relief that the ordeal was over; however, I still sensed no rancor. Incredibly enough, I sensed a deep sadness. This was the most irrational love I'd ever encountered.

I could never figure out what she saw in him.

By Robert Thomson, vice-president for finance, Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, Orlando.

Love Knows No Boundaries

LOGOS

1 John 4:7-21

Have you ever tried to limit an understanding of love to a definition? I have, and the more it is defined, the more the idea of love overwhelms the definition.

Demonstrating Love (1 John 4:9, 10; Jer. 31:3; John 3:16)

Because we cannot put into words what love is, and therefore about who God is, it was necessary for God to demonstrate what love is. First John 4:9, 10 reminds us of how God showed us how much love He has for us. I like the way it is interpreted in *The Message*: “This is how God showed his love for us: God sent his only Son into the world so we might live through him. This is the kind of love we are talking about—not that we once upon a time loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as a sacrifice to clear away our sins and the damage they’ve done to our relationship with God.”

These words tell us several things about love. First, the decision to love is costly. It means self-denial. If God had not loved us, He could have said, “Well, they turned their backs on Me; I’ll turn My back on them.” But God *does* love us, and turning away from us is not an option. To understand the price He paid goes beyond human understanding. He not only gave up His heavenly home and came to be a part of the mess that humanity had become, He gave up His life because of His love for us.

Second, the passage tells us that love originates from God. Without God, we cannot understand what love is. Life without God is existence without love.

Third, this passage tells us that love has something to do with relationships. Love builds whole, healthy, and intimate relationships. Not only this, but it rebuilds broken relationships.

There can’t be a more broken relationship than that between humanity and God. Humankind rejected God, and even though God through history calls us back to a relationship with Him, we have consistently removed ourselves from that offer.

Loving One Another (1 John 4:11, 12, 19-21; John 13:34; 14:15)

Love is not subjective. To love God and not our fellow human family is impossible. I sometimes wonder whether we as Christians don’t reinterpret these verses in 1 John to say, “Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another as long as the person we are to love has the same understanding as we do about Scripture; is from the same socio-economic background as we are, and is preferably of the same skin color as we are.” Is that how you read it? The truth is that the message here is that we are called by God to love all people regardless of age, sex, socio-economic background, race, creed or whatever else differentiates us as human beings. If we cannot love all people and say, “I genuinely care for you,” then this passage tells us that we need to develop a more intimate relationship with our Lord. These may be hard words to swallow. Think about it.

Jesus, the Center of Love (1 John 4:13-18; Rom. 6:23; Gal. 3:13, 14; Heb. 13:8, 4:14-16)

John describes Jesus as “the light [that] shines in the darkness.” “The true light

that gives light to every man” (John 1:5, 9 NIV). What was it that Jesus Christ came into this world to illuminate?

Most important, Jesus came into this world to reveal the love that God has for us and the desire that He has for us to be reunited in relationship with Him. In our human experience, relationships are not perfect. People in whom we trust and invest ourselves will at times let us down. When we are in relationship with God, He does not let us down. “We know and rely on the love God has for us” (1 John 4:16, NIV).

In a world of constant change and uncertainty, how calming it is to know that in Jesus we have a solid rock that we can depend upon. He will not let us down. The psalmist puts it like this: “He will not let your foot slip—He who watches over you will not slumber.” “The Lord will keep you from all harm—he will watch over your life” (121:3, 7).

When we are in a loving relationship with God, we don’t need to fear what His response to us is going to be. We already know what it is. God loves us and wants us to be in a close and intimate relationship with Him. He is in us, and we are in Him. If there is a true relationship of love, then there is no need to fear (1 John 4:18). Fear suggests doubt over the final outcome, but when we have a love rela-

Life without God is existence without love.

tionship with God, we know what the final outcome is, because Jesus has already secured it.

Jesus demonstrated perfect love to us, a love that was willing to sacrifice self in order for the loved one to gain. If this doesn’t prove to us that Jesus is trustworthy and that He loves us with a never-ending love, what else will?

REACT

1. In what ways do you see a loving God in the Old Testament?
2. What is more important, right doctrine or loving your neighbor? Are the two mutually exclusive? Explain your answer.
3. How do we in the church sometimes fail to love others?
4. What do we need to do to improve on this?
5. If we experience fear or doubt, does that mean we do not have a relationship with God?
6. Are we committed to transform gently from the inside out? Do we let others choose freely for themselves what to do with our love?

By Dean Elias, staff chaplain working in the cardiac areas, Florida Hospital, Orlando.

God's True Love

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 3:16

The love of God. True love is tough and costly. God is love and He loves us unconditionally. God loved us so much that He sent His Son to die for us. That's tough love!

“God so loved the world, that He gave His only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.’ What an incomparable love is this! A theme for the most profound meditation! The amazing love of God for a world that did not love Him! The thought has a subduing power upon the soul and brings the mind into captivity to the will of God. Men who are crazy for gain, and are disappointed and unhappy in their pursuit of the world, need the knowledge of this truth to quiet the restless hungering and thirsting of their souls.”¹

Each day of our lives God proves His love for us. Yet, we are a thankless world. We take His infinite love for granted. We scarcely recognize the lessons of love that He would like for us to learn. Is there anyone you love so much that you would be willing to send your only child to suffer and die in order to save?

“Those who love God cannot harbor hatred or envy. When the heavenly principle of eternal love fills the heart, it will flow out to others, not merely because

True love is tough and costly.

favours are received of them, but because love is the principle of action and modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and elevates and ennobles the affections. This love is not contracted so as merely to include me and mine, but is as broad as the world and as high as heaven.”²

REACT

1. What is, in your opinion, never-ending love?
2. Give examples of ways you can show God's love each day of your life.
3. How do you know when you've found “perfect” love?
4. Is there anyone you love so much that you would be willing to send your only child to suffer and die in order to save that person? What if you had more than one child? Remember, you can't go yourself, but have to send the child and watch him or her suffer. Would you be willing to send one of your precious pets? a spouse? a parent?

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 80.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

By Bonnie S. Shim, office coordinator-accounting/financial planning department, Florida Hospital, Orlando.

God Is Love by Abdication

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 4:9, 19; Matt. 23:37

According to biblical scholars, the apostle John wrote his First Epistle between A.D. 96 and 110. When paganism and other religions sought to mislead early Christians about who Christ was, 1 John provided an accurate picture. Docetism, a form of gnosticism, existed contemporaneously with the first Johannine Epistle. Donald Guthrie, a New Testament lecturer in the 1970s, noted that docetism denied Christ's incarnation by building "a distinction between the human Jesus and the heavenly Christ, the latter only appearing to take a human form. The incarnation was not, therefore, a reality."

In contrast, John declared that the incarnation *was* a reality and that its reality explained how God is love. "In this the love of God was manifested toward us, that God has sent His only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through Him" (1 John 4:9, NKJV). Unlike those who advocated docetism, John had seen firsthand how Jesus resisted the urge to use His divine powers simply to gather His children home and put an end to Satan's devastating work on earth. John understood that Jesus wouldn't coerce love. Christ's incarnation proved that. Christ abdicated His throne, divested Himself of His powers to the point that He was able to resist temptation, suffered persecution, and even endured death. The First Epistle

The First Epistle of John underscores that the incarnation itself demonstrated God's love.

of John underscores that the incarnation itself demonstrated God's love.

In his book, *The Jesus I Never Knew*, Philip Yancey describes how God loves us such that He exercises His power toward us in an internal, noncoercive way.

Such power may seem at times like weakness. In its commitment to transform gently from the inside out and in its relentless dependence on human choice, God's power may resemble a kind of abdication. As every parent and every lover knows, love can be rendered powerless if the beloved chooses to spurn it. The Master of the universe would become its victim, powerless before a squad of soldiers in a garden.

God made Himself weak for one purpose: to let human beings choose freely for themselves what to do with Him.

The docetists, surrendering to the finite limitations of human thought, wouldn't believe that God's love is so great that it compelled Christ to give up His rightful throne and power to become both fully divine and fully human. John, however, knew that our Lord doesn't use His powers to coerce love. Rather, He gently inspires love from the inside. "We love [Him] because He first loved us" (1 John 4:19, NIV).

*Donald Guthrie, *New Testament Introduction* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1970), p. 884.

By Steve Kreitner, attorney for Adventist Health System Sunbelt, Winter Park, Florida.

Being Open to His Love

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 4:19

Everyone wants to be loved—whether single or married, it makes no difference. Unfortunately for some, no matter where we look for love, we just can't seem to grasp it. We want so much to be in a loving relationship that at times we are even willing to compromise and lower our standards in hopes that eventually something loving will develop.

What can we do, and where can we turn? I feel very blessed to have a wonderful mother, caring brother, and great friends to rely on. But, sometimes that doesn't even seem to help. Where to turn; what is wrong; why does pain keep coming to me? No one knows pain as our Saviour did. He *died* for our sins, but daily He lives through the pain *again* with us. Now, that is true love. Do you know anyone who exhibits that kind of love here on earth?

How can we receive and be open to the love our Saviour desires to give us?

1. Talk to our Father through prayer. Look up and discuss Philipians 4:6, 7 about prayer. Compare your daily prayer life to the text. What do you pray about?

2. Study the Scriptures. Go to the back of the Bible and pick out the stories

Have you ever noticed the small blades of grass growing through concrete?

showing God's love for His people. The Bible is filled with wonderful examples of His love, stories about David and Abraham and many, many more. Take a moment to pick out a story and compare it to your life.

3. Take a walk and enjoy nature. Look around at all the Lord has made. Have you ever noticed the small blades of grass growing through concrete? We should be as strong and as determined to push on, with our Lord's help, as this grass is to grow where it is almost an impossibility. Be open to the lessons nature can give us. Can you think of any now?

Be close enough to the Lord that you can hear His voice in others. Be open to the Lord to allow Him to work through you for His glory. As I look back at my life, I see areas that were very rough and difficult to deal with, but I also see the Lord carrying me though these troubled spots. Without His persistent love and care, I shudder to think about where I could be today. I owe my God my life. I'm not worthy of His love, but He still freely gives.

By Rita Hill, a master of science in administration-health care student at Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences at Orlando.

A Lover's Choice

OPINION

Key Text: John 3:16

Love is one of the most revealed aspects of God's character. Jesus dwells in our hearts as a landmark of God's love. God's love is revealed in much more than just His written Word. His love is a reality in all of our lives, too, but how often do we realize it? Have you ever browsed the crowd after church and heard a person complain about the sermon? It doesn't take long for another to join in, and the next one, and everyone ends up leaving the church full of frustration rather than blessings.

A small group is good to begin with for testing this hypothesis. At one time or another, we all find ourselves in a group, formal or informal, chatting about anything from inert gases to the Internet. Try to bring in a short comment on how God's love has affected your life. It doesn't have to be a dramatic miracle—most would be uncomfortable with this kind of testimony. How you found that jacket button you'd been looking for after a small prayer for God's help in finding it.

You'll find that there are "lost buttons" in everyone's life. It's the little blessings that become contagious. The stories of the simple love of God in the day-to-day lives of those in the group will snowball into an avalanche of miracles.

The truth is that God has a definite interest in even the minute details of our

You'll find that there are "lost buttons" in everyone's life.

lives. He loves us. Not in that lofty "I am the Creator" way, but in that "I love you, my children . . . I enjoy being with you . . . I crave your company . . . I like to see you happy" way. (If God didn't love us as real, individual children, why would He sacrifice His only deserving Son instead of obliterating unworthy humanity?)

We all know John 3:16. And we've heard many sermons about it. But take a little time to think about it. Did God have a choice? God created humanity, and humanity turned away from His love. Another created being, Satan, was making claims. God could have wiped us all out. But instead He chose to lose a part of Himself—Jesus bled and died so that we, the created, might live. What a choice! What a great lover we have!

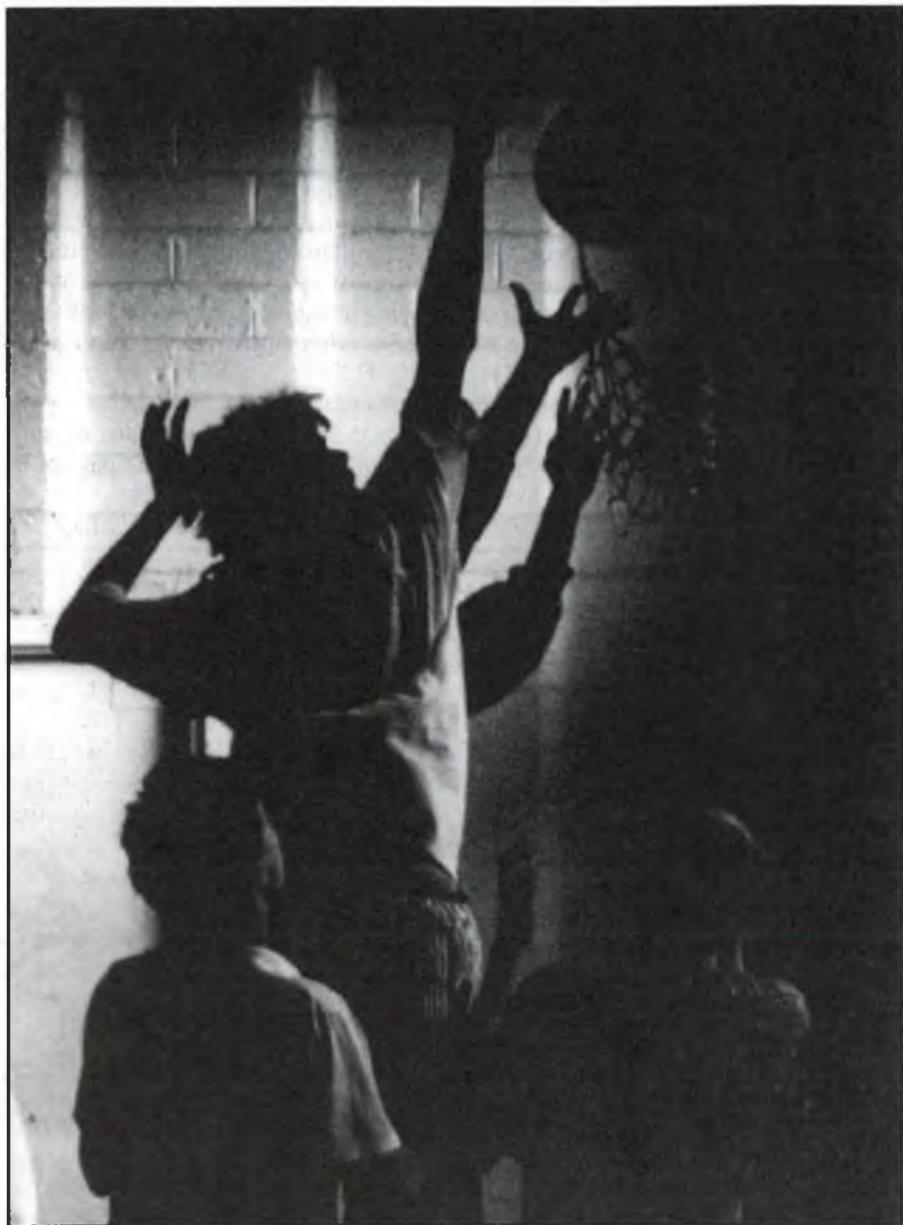
REACT

1. What are the different ways we can be reflectors of God's love other than just talking about it?

2. Why is it important to us and to our community as a whole that each one share his or her experience of God's love with others?

By Ajith Abraham, nursing student, and Angie Abraham, acting registrar, Florida Hospital College of Health Sciences, Orlando.

WE WIN!



“This is the victory that overcomes the world, our faith” (1 John 5:4, RSV).

Sorry About That, Pyrrhus

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 John 5:4

Pyrrhus, King of Epirus, turns to his commanders. "It's finished, men! We've won the battle! The field is ours! We have defeated the mighty armies of Rome!"

But his captains aren't celebrating. In fact, only a handful of them are there, and the few who are still alive cannot blot out from their minds the terrible images of the battlefield—the heaps of bloody, dying men and corpses—their own men, slaughtered in countless numbers to win this victory over Rome. Too many men had been lost. It wasn't worth it. Ever wonder why we don't talk about the glories of Ancient Epirus? Pyrrhus won battles, but lost so much in winning that he was finally defeated. And ever since his day, a victory won at excessively heavy cost has been called a Pyrrhic victory.

May 8, 1945. V-E Day—Victory in Europe. In the Allied countries, people danced in the streets, celebrating the fall of Nazi Germany. Soldiers kissed pretty girls; men tossed their hats in the air. But how many eyes in that crowd filled with tears at the thought of soldiers who would not be coming home? Meanwhile, in Germany there was no V-E day. For the German people, it was Defeat in Europe.

Three months later, the same Allied countries celebrated V-J day—Victory over

Where there's a winner, there must be a loser.

Japan. Victory at a cost so great that many people, 50 years later, still doubt that victory was worth an atomic bomb and the horror it unleashed.

Away from the battlefields of war, the losers are less bloodied, but no less real. An Olympic athlete runs past the finish line, arms raised in victory. Behind him, another stumbles across, his lifetime dream of a gold medal shattered. On graduation morning, a young girl in cap and gown comes forward, elated, to accept the award for valedictorian. In the pew behind her, a boy whose GPA was a fraction lower than hers swallows a sudden lump in his throat.

We're used to victories that mean losses for someone. Where there's a winner, there must be a loser. And sometimes, as with Pyrrhus, the cost is so high that winning is losing. But the Bible promises a victory we can all share. Our fight is not against our fellow, flesh-and-blood human beings (Eph. 6:12), so we don't need to defeat them in order to win. Everyone is offered the chance to be on the winning team, and all those who want to join that team are guaranteed eternal life.

When Jesus comes again, and we celebrate Victory on Earth Day, no one needs to be on the losing side. We can all share in His victory.

By Trudy J. Morgan-Cole, a teacher of English at St. John's (Newfoundland) Adventist Academy.

V for Victory?

LOGOS

1 John 5:1-12

“True or False: A Christian should never say that he or she has been saved.”

“Are you going to heaven?”

Question number one I wrote in my grade 11’s January Bible exam. Last week, I asked a group of children the second question during the children’s story. Even after two quarters of studying Romans my students were doubtful. But each preschooler eagerly waved both hands in the air. Of course they were going to heaven: who would miss out on that prize?

Love’s Response (1 John 5:1-5)

Verse 4 is confident (see Rom. 8:28-39). As Adventists, we know Jesus saved us, at least once. But having been saved by grace, do we then think we must earn that gift? John stresses that we are not sanctified by keeping the law, but because of a relationship.

“Do you know the sort of Christian who never does anything wrong?” I asked my students. “Super Christian is always reading the Bible, is the first to church in the morning and the last to leave, and is so good he is really miserable to be around.” They all nodded their heads in recognition. One Catholic boy volunteered that his grandmother said the rosary from dawn to dusk. The Adventists could all think of Super Christians whose Christianity was rigid and unappealing.

Then I explained to them the amazing truth: it’s not what you do, it’s whom you know. Using Morris Venden’s illustration, none of us can jump to the moon, not me, not even Magic Johnson. Of course, Magic can jump closer to the moon than I can, but he’s still not going to make it. We all need Jesus. Super Christian may try to make it to heaven on good works, but Super Christian is not going to get there without Jesus any more than I am. Imagine the day Super Christian discovers this wonderful gift that has been given her. She praises God from the bottom of her heart—before, no matter how good she was, she never felt good enough. Now she’s free.

“But,” I told my students, “here’s the tricky part. Super Christian’s behavior may be exactly the same. She still is not doing anything wrong. He may still be the first person to church in the morning and the last to leave, and she is still reading her Bible every morning.” The difference? 1 John 5:3. Keeping the commandments is not an action aimed at satisfying some unattainable standard; it is the response of love.

The Water and the Blood (verses 6-12)

This is complicated. Apparently, early translators found it complicated also. They changed “the Spirit, the water and the blood,” into a proof text for the Trinity. Compare the KJV, (based on the Latin Vulgate) with a modern version. The document was changed by Priscillian in the fourth century. Fortunately these breaches are few enough, but they do explain why we need theologians studying early Greek manuscripts. We are Spirit-blessed to have increasingly accurate and accessible Bibles.

So what does the water and the blood mean? For some the water describes Jesus’

baptism, an unusual act, dedicating the beginning of His public ministry. The blood describes Jesus' death. Christ ministered to us by example (Matt. 3:15) and by redemption (Heb.10:10).

One student doubted that Christians should ever feel confident about their salvation.

"Sheila," I asked her, "is Jesus going to get to heaven?"

She looked at me as though I'd forgotten my mother's name. "Du-hh!"

"O.K., Sheila," I continued, "so, if you are positive that Jesus is going to be in heaven, if He is your substitute, then it's obvious that you are going to get to heaven." Doubting that we will be in heaven is not humility: everyone knows we are all sinners (1 John 1:8-2:2). No, by doubting our salvation, we are questioning Jesus' perfect character; we are doubting whether Jesus was "good enough" to earn our place in heaven!

Once Saved Always Saved? (John 10:28)

Good question. Take some time to look up what John wrote about eternal life in his Gospel, noting the tenses. In Matthew 3:2 the kingdom was near, or at hand (KJV). It was in the future, near but not yet achieved. However, Jesus said the kingdom of God "is" within you (Luke 17:21). He described tax collectors and prosti-

"Super Christian is so good he is really miserable to be around."

tutes as "entering the kingdom of God," already (Matt. 21:31, NIV). John 6:54 and 17:2, 3, speak of eternal life in the present tense. Philippians 3:20 sums it up: "our citizenship is in heaven" (NIV). From the moment we accept Jesus' death on the cross, we are already citizens of heaven and eternal life begins that instant.

Does that mean that once we are saved we can never lose our salvation? Some Christians call this eternal assurance and believe that this doctrine is reassuring, but for me this belief removes our freedom of choice. We are always free to walk away from God's gift. However, once given, no one is going to take it away, least of all God.

Yet none of us is as innocent as those little children in the front pew of church last week. We sincerely wonder, *What if I am not saved? What if I have walked away from God?* Return to 1 John 5:2, 3. Are you keeping His commands? Are they burdensome or a joy? If your answers are negative, the solution is in the three witnesses: the Spirit, who "will guide you into all truth" (John 16:13); the water of Jesus' exemplary life; and the blood of His substitutionary life. "He who has the Son has life."

REACT

1. Is it possible to be overconfident of God's grace? Explain your answer.
2. Does freedom to reject God remove the right to claim victory?

By Jennifer Morgan, a teacher of Bible at St. John's (Newfoundland) Adventist Academy.

Sharing the Victory—Unity in Diversity

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 John 5:10

This week's study identifies some of the essential components of the gospel that form part of what Seventh-day Adventists refer to as the "testimony of Jesus Christ." "Anyone who believes in the Son of God has this testimony in his heart" (verse 10, NIV). The testimony of Jesus is a significant dimension of our doctrine, and proclaiming it is the mission of our church.

While sharing with others the good news of 1 John 5 may be one of our greatest privileges, it can also be challenging. How do we respond when asked what constitutes the testimony of Jesus? Do we include the significance of the Sabbath observance? Tithing? Vegetarianism? Consider the principles in the following selections from Ellen White:

"In matters of conscience the soul must be left untrammelled. No one is to control another's mind, to judge for another, or to prescribe his duty. God gives to every soul freedom to think, and to follow his own convictions."¹

"God designs that men shall use their minds and consciences for themselves. He never designed that one man should become the shadow of another, and utter only another's sentiments. But this error has been coming in among us, that a very

How do we respond when asked what constitutes the testimony of Jesus?

few are to be mind, conscience, and judgment for all God's workers. The foundation of Christianity is 'Christ our Righteousness.' Men are individually responsible to God and must act as God acts upon them, not as another human mind acts upon their mind; for if this method of indirect influence is kept up, souls cannot be impressed and directed by the great I AM. They will, on the other hand, have their experience blended with another, and will be kept under a moral restraint, which allows no freedom of action or of choice."²

"There is need for a variety of gifts in the Lord's work. Read carefully the fourth chapter of Ephesians. The entire chapter is a description of the Lord's manner of working. . . . Every gift is to be acknowledged as essential to the success of the work."³

REACT

1. What are the "essentials" of the gospel? the "nonessentials"?
2. Can there ever be too much diversity within the church? Explain your answer.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 550.

2. *The Paulson Collection of Ellen G. White Letters*, p. 404.

3. *Manuscript Releases*, vol. 11, p. 276.

By Darryl W. Fillier, principal of St. John's (Newfoundland) Adventist Elementary School.

Back to Basics

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 5:1

In fluid mechanics there is a set of intimidating-looking formulae known as the Navier-Stokes equations, named after the French mathematician L. M. H. Navier and the English machinist Sir G. G. Stokes. These nonlinear, second order, partial differential (in other words, difficult) equations in their nonsimplified forms are anything but user-friendly. I was introduced to the Navier-Stokes equations during my second course in fluid mechanics and struggled to fit them into my perception of fluid behavior.

It wasn't until a professor related the Navier-Stokes equations directly to Newton's second law of motion* that I and the rest of the class grasped what Navier and Stokes were trying to do. They were formulating equations of motion applicable to any type of fluid flow.

It took a basic concept for my classmates and me to understand a complex idea. But it also took the understanding that the basic concept works; in other words, it took faith. Without the faith that Newton's second law is valid, the Navier-Stokes equations are meaningless. Without the faith that Christ died for us, the Bible is just stories without meaning.

There seems to be more than enough evidence in the Bible, and in the lives of

Without the faith that Christ died for us, the entire Bible is just stories without meaning.

fellow Christians, to convince us of God's love and His ultimate sacrifice for us. Yet to others there may seem to be too little. It depends on our perceptions of the evidence provided. If we want to believe, we ask God for the faith and then the blinding truth of His love shines on us from His word and His children. If we choose to deny His love, we are free to do so, but we must then face the consequences.

When God created us, He made us with the power to choose, and now God leaves us room to exert that power. It takes faith for us to choose God's way, faith that comes from our love for God and His love for us. The final decision must be ours, or our faith does not come from love, but from fear.

REACT

1. List at least five things that help you believe Christ will come again for you (these could be events, people, or whatever you wish).

2. From your list, how many of these take faith?

3. Could you prove anything on your list to someone who does not believe that Christ died for them? Explain your answer.

* $F = ma$ (force equals mass times acceleration)

Victory by Faith

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 5:4

Victory is that seven-letter word that results from faith in God. By believing in and accepting Him and the sacrifice of His Son, we are able to experience this warm feeling of revival and self-worth.

Unfortunately in today's competitive world, victory's rival receives the most publicity. "Defeat" is that six-letter word that causes anxiety. The thought of it can render a feeling of hopelessness and unworthiness. No one wants to face defeat.

However, defeat seems to be lurking around every corner. No matter how hard you work, there is always something or someone to bring you down, like the pressure to achieve that A in French history, which only results in a low grade and discouragement. Or the temptation to unwind with others when refusing to do so would result in mockery and humiliation. The world seems to crash, and you begin to buckle under its weight. But there is light at the end of the tunnel: Jesus.

The feeling of defeat often arises because we have become too independent. We often forget that God is by our side, ready, willing, and able to help us. Instead we think that it is we against the world, so we try to be invincible. At the hint of trouble, we come out of the corner swinging, when we should be looking to the Lord for support and guidance. Everything appears to be a battle that we alone have to over-

In today's competitive world, victory's rival receives the most publicity.

come. So we spend our time preparing for the fight, bearing down to face things head on, trying to prove to ourselves and others that we are strong. Things are so much easier when we have faith in the Lord, letting Him help us fight our battles.

Victory is not something that is beyond our reach. First John 5:4 tells us that, since we are the children of God and have faith in Him, we have the power to overcome the world and its temptations. We have to remember that we're not alone in this world, that God is by our side and by focusing on Him and trusting in Him our victory is secure for eternity. In doing this, defeat becomes a word not found in our Christian vocabulary.

REACT

1. Read Hebrews 12:1, 2, Philippians 4:6, 7, and Isaiah 43:2. What are some more ways in which the Lord promotes our victory?

2. How do you face a situation that seems to pull you toward defeat and turn it into a victory?

3. In your own words, explain what it means to let God "fight our battles." Be specific.

By Kim Symonds, a third-year student of French at Memorial University of Newfoundland at St. John's.

How Can I Be Sure?

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 5:4

Some time ago my class was learning about Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego and the fiery furnace. I read the story and then told the students that they could make a fiery furnace with a pop-up Jesus and “real” flames just like the one from the story. Knowing that I had prepared the materials for the lesson two days in advance, I was horrified when I could not find them. My heart raced while I frantically searched the room for the missing lesson. Frustrated, I had to tell the class that I couldn’t find the furnaces and therefore we could not make them. I thought I was prepared for the lesson. I had made all the necessary arrangements, but when I needed them they were gone.

So many times this kind of situation occurs. Often the missing or forgotten element is not as important as the missing lesson, but it still leaves us wondering why we can’t take control of our circumstances. What if I had been supervised on the day the class was supposed to make the Babylonian furnaces? Perhaps the supervising teacher would have written down on my permanent record, “Is not organized; needs to be better prepared for class.” I would have been devastated.

I told the students that they could make a fiery furnace with “real” flames.

Often I feel the same way with my spiritual life. How can I keep all the facets together? I am bombarded on all sides with things I must do and know in order to be saved, but I forget about them after a while. Last fall I attended an evangelistic seminar and was amazed at how much I had forgotten about the last-day events. It was as if I was hearing about God’s judgment for the first time. The more I talk about Christianity, the more I realize that I have forgotten almost everything that I have learned. I study the Bible and pray for understanding, but just when I think that I am prepared for heaven and have victory in Jesus Christ, someone reminds me about God’s grace, or the minister will preach about the day of Pentecost and being filled with the Holy Spirit, and I think, *I don’t know anything about that.*

God shows me sometimes through embarrassing and awkward situations that only He can save me from the world. Ultimately my knowledge will not save me, nor will my actions. Only my faith in Jesus Christ will ensure victory.

REACT

1. How do you hold your spiritual life together to ensure victory?
2. Describe the characteristics of someone who you think is saved.
3. What essentials must you know about God to have eternal life?

By Carmen Fillier, a kindergarten teacher in St. John’s (Newfoundland) Adventist Elementary School.

TOTAL CONFIDENCE



“I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life. This is the assurance we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to his will, he hears us” (1 John 5:13, 14, NIV).

Twice Defeated in the Race of Life?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Phil. 4:13; Jer. 33:3

If you have no confidence in self
 You are twice defeated in the race of life.
 With confidence you have won even before
 You have started.

(Marcus Garvey, National Hero of Jamaica)

If you have no faith in God
 You are twice defeated in the race of life.
 Put your trust in God and you'll have
 Won even before you have started.

(Susanne Kirlew)

1. You have studied for an exam and prayed about it, too, but you are still in doubt. Do you: (a) shake off that cloud of doubt? (b) pray and hope that your results aren't too low? (c) find a way to cheat, or argue that God should reveal the exam questions to you?

2. The only money you have left is your tithe. This week's grocery shopping has

If you have no confidence in self you are twice defeated in the race of life.

yet to be done and your kitchen cupboards are empty. Do you: (a) step out in faith and pay that tithe? (b) divide the tithe in two, half for groceries and half for the tithe envelope? (c) spend it all on shopping and pray for forgiveness?

3. You are 31-years-old and have never had a boy/girl friend. Someone of the opposite sex, who is a devout Muslim, is interested in you. Do you: (a) resist temptation even though he or she is "super good looking"? (b) date him or her occasionally but make no commitment? (c) go out with him or her and begin your "romantic evangelism tactics"?

4. You have an opportunity to become a student missionary in Thailand but don't have enough money for the airfare. Do you: (a) begin fund-raising events and get a part-time job? (b) apply to go to Thailand, but only if you get the airfare from your local church? (c) pray that you win the *Reader's Digest* sweepstakes?

SCORE

Mostly A's: Congratulations! You are really leaning on the Lord. Keep up the good work and forever hold on to that God-given inner strength known as *confidence*.

Mostly B's: Well, either you have confidence in God, or you don't. Get off the fence and lean on the Lord.

Mostly C's: Ask everyone you know to remember you in their prayers.

By Susanne Kirlew, actress and university student at Middlesex University, London.

He Hears You!

LOGOS

1 John 5:13-21

On the rare occasions when I write to my friends abroad, I always conclude the letter with a Bible text, profound thought, or some humorous comment. I do this as a form of encouragement, support, and to make sure they finish reading my letters with a smile on their faces!

Likewise, and more significantly, John, as pastor, concludes with an assurance that his readers are, indeed, true Christians with the reward of eternal life. They are to ignore the heresy and false teaching espoused by their former friends and to realize that truth is the best answer to false teaching. They can have complete confidence in God, knowing that any problem they face can be dealt with by Him. All they have to do is to ask in prayer and God will hear them—guaranteed!

It's Good to Talk

"If we ask anything according to his will, he hears us" (1 John 5:14, NIV).

Recently on British television a series of advertisements by a well-known telephone company portrayed the advantages of talking over the telephone to family and friends. The slogan was "It's good to talk." It was supposed to convince you that your relationship would improve if you talked over the telephone.

As Christians we have a direct telephone line to God. It's called prayer. It's free, never engaged, and open 24 hours a day. The advertisement makes a valid point, for it is a commonly held belief that the more you communicate, the better your relationship with someone will be. Therefore, in order for us to be confident in our relationship with God, we need to spend a lot of time communicating with Him. John points out that we can approach the Son of God with confidence, safe in the knowledge that every sincere prayer is heard in heaven and will be answered. Psychologists will tell you how important it is to listen. Well, God is the best listener!

Along with this assurance, however, comes an important qualification. "According to his will" (verse 14) means that whatever we ask for must be something that our Lord would agree with. For He knows what is good for us and gives of His grace and power for the promotion of our happiness and salvation (1 Thess. 4:3).

How do we distinguish between our wants and our needs? How is the assurance of eternal life the key to answered prayer?

A Deadly Sin

"If anyone sees his brother commit a sin that does not lead to death, he should pray and God will give him life. I refer to these whose sin does not lead to death. There is a sin that leads to death. I am not saying that he should pray about that. All wrongdoing is sin, and there is sin that does not lead to death" (1 John 5:16, 17, NIV).

Here John speaks of concern for a fellow believer who has fallen into sin. He makes a distinction among different forms of sin. But the context must be kept in mind. In verses 14 and 15, he has given the assurance that the believer's prayers will be answered; here he is applying the promise to a specific kind of prayer—that on

behalf of others; and he is explaining under what circumstances it can be effective. In so doing, he discusses two classes of sins: (1) those in which there is hope for the sinner, and (2) those in which there is no hope. In the first kind, prayer may be an effective aid to redemption; in the second, as John later explains, there is no guarantee that prayer will be effective. It is generally believed that the “sin unto death” is the unpardonable sin (see Matt. 12:31, 32). Therefore, a “sin not unto death” is any other form of sin in which a church brother engages.

What is the unpardonable sin? How is the assurance of eternal life the key to deliverance from sin and evil?

My Hero

“Dear children, keep yourselves from idols” (1 John 5:21).

When I was younger, I would eat, drink, and sleep soccer. I would play the game any place, anywhere, and anytime. I remember once playing in three feet of snow. I just loved it! And every Thursday I would religiously purchase a soccer magazine called *Shoot!* I would then sit down and read it, cover to cover, in about five minutes. My soccer idol at the time was a player called Kevin Keegan, of Liverpool and England. I had a poster of him on my bedroom wall, and when I played, I tried

As Christians we have a direct telephone line to God.

to imitate all his moves. I admired him so much that I wanted to be the next Kevin Keegan. He was my hero.

Unfortunately all this hero-worship left very little time for anything else in my life, especially Jesus. Could it be today that there are idols in your life that are keeping you away from Jesus? Maybe it's sports, television, money, clothes, or even drugs. If you're putting anything before Jesus Christ in your life, then you are making an idol out of it. As Christians we should consider Jesus Christ our ultimate hero, for what He has done for us no one else can ever do. Do you have a picture of Jesus on your wall?

What idol of the world today tempts you away from steadily following Jesus? What can be done to keep away from such idols?

By Ashwin Somasundram, youth pastor, London, England.

Planes, Trains, and Automobiles?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Pet. 4:7

“Dear Prayer Diary:

“Right now I’m on the lower berth of a bunkbed on a second-class train from Butterworth, which is in Malaysia, back to the SDA language school in Bangkok to resume my student-missionary duties. In approximately 22 hours, it will all be over, finally—this, the worst trip of my life.

“The teaching duties of my friend and I were rudely interrupted a few days ago. Our working permits and visas had expired. We had to leave the country and fast. One of our language students, Kazu, from Japan was in a similar predicament. We set off on Monday on a trip that should have taken only 2 or 3 days. Instead it took the whole week!”

In *Steps to Christ* Sister White states that “unceasing prayer is the unbroken union of the soul with God,”¹ and, for the first time in my life, for the whole week of that nightmare of a journey, my prayers were unceasing.

First, we couldn’t get out of Thailand, because every form of transportation within our budget was booked, thanks to a national festival in Malaysia. The 22-hour trip was finally completed over a period of three days, in various contraptions with wheels and passing as buses. On arrival in Malaysia, we just missed by minutes

“In approximately 22 hours, it will all be over, finally—this, the worst trip of my life.”

getting to the embassy on time to submit our passports. We had nowhere to sleep, and ended up camping out on the beach in a thunderstorm. Finally, we found a dingy hotel with suspect nocturnal activity going on in the adjacent “health center.”

But out of the chaos of the week came a miracle. Every stage of the journey, every meal we ate, the roof over our heads, was a result of God’s divine intervention. Our friend Kazu—a self-proclaimed atheist—learned how to pray.

Under certain conditions, we may expect that God will hear and answer our prayers. One of the first of these is that we feel our need of His help. He has promised, “I will pour water upon him that is thirsty, and floods upon the dry ground” (Isa. 44:3). Until our very eventful trip to Malaysia, our friend Kazu had not felt a need for God. But when he opened up his heart to God, the blessings and answers to prayer came pouring down.

“Our heavenly Father waits to bestow upon us the fullness of His blessing. It is our privilege to drink largely at the fountain of boundless love. What a wonder it is that we pray so little!”² In Philippians 4:6, Paul says, “In every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God.”

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 98.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 94.

By Desaline Joseph, a second-year medical student at Leicester University, England.

Oh, What a Saviour!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 Cor. 6:20

Case 1

At the age of 5, Jamee Bowen had developed non-Hodgkins lymphoma together with acute lymphoblastic leukemia (ALL). "ALL is largely a disease affecting children and young people under 21. It is a fatal condition if untreated and requires aggressive chemotherapy and radiotherapy to try and kill the malignant cells and prevent complications of the disease. Most patients present with anaemia, bleeding, or infection."¹ Her lymphoma meant she had "a malignant proliferation of non-circulating lymph node cells. Complications include autoimmune hemolytic anaemia and thrombocytopenia."²

After several periods of treatment, Jamee, now 10 years old, was given eight weeks to live. Her doctors refused to have any more money spent on her, for they thought her case hopeless. She was going to die.

But an anonymous donor, after hearing about the row over funds, gave 75,000 pounds to treat Child B (whose identity was being kept from the public). He or she, as yet, did not even know her name, but still helped save her life.

After the experimental treatment took her into remission, Jamee boldly said in an interview, "Never give up. I'd rather have gone through more suffering to live

Her doctors refused to have any more money spent on her, for they thought her case hopeless.

than not to go through anything and die."

Case 2

Humankind was dying from the malignancy of sin. It had been diagnosed in Eden, the patients presenting with selfishness, lust, greed, and a disregard for their God. Sin is a disease that would prove eternally fatal if untreated. The required course of treatment had to be aggressive, but the cost was high. Who could afford to pay such a price?

Then a Donor stepped in. No matter the price, He was willing to pay.

"Jesus might have remained at the Father's side. He might have retained the glory of heaven, and the homage of the angels. But He chose to give back the scepter into the Father's hands, and to step down from the throne of the universe, that He might bring light to the benighted, and life to the perishing."³

Jamee's life was saved by a person she never met. Our lives have been saved by a Man named Jesus. Do you know Him? Have you met Him?

1. Helen Chapel and Mansel Haeney, *Essentials of Clinical Immunology* (Oxford: Blackwell Scientific Publications, 1988), pp. 112, 113.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 22, 23.

By Desaline Joseph, a second-year medical student at Leicester University, England.

The Power of Prayer

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 141:1, 7

“Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as a friend.”¹ “In order to commune with God, we must have something to say to Him concerning our actual life.”²

It would be absurd to be friends with someone if we never told him or her about ourselves, how we felt and what was going on in our lives. A series of British Telecom advertisements, in encouraging the public to use the telephone as a means of communication, always ended with the caption “It’s good to talk!” Indeed it’s good to talk with your heavenly Father. Tell Him about your academic failures, about being dumped by your girlfriend, and even about your concern over how you’re going to pay your car insurance!

Prayer does not need to be a painful ritual that we are expected to perform to be considered a good Christian. So how can our prayer be more meaningful and real to us?

1. Keep it simple. Pray from the heart and talk to God as though you were talking to your best friend on the phone. He would rather hear a sincere prayer than one laden with long declarations and spiritual cliches that mean nothing personally.

2. Experiment with unscheduled prayer. Your prayer life does not need to be

Tell Him about your academic failures, about being dumped by your girl friend.

confined to set times in the morning and evening (although these are important). Try striking up a conversation with God in the library, in the shops, and even on the bus.

3. Keep a prayer diary. Record events as they happen on a daily basis and note how requests have been answered.

4. Be specific and unambiguous. Do not be afraid to ask God for direct answers to prayer. Each week pray for a particular problem either you or a friend is going through. Challenge God to provide the divine solution.

Prayer is as simple as ABC: A-Ask (Matt. 7:7); B-Believe (Mark 11:24); C-Claim (1 John 5:41).

There is no problem too small, no burden too great. If we learn how to communicate with God, not as an abstract deity who is out of touch, but as a personal Father who cares for us far more than anyone else, we will truly know the power of prayer.

REACT

How do your conversations with God compare to those with your friends?

1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 93.

2. *Ibid.*

Like Riding a Bike!

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 9:27-30

Cycling is something everyone can do, but when I was a little girl, learning to do it petrified me. When my mother used to walk behind me, holding the back wheel rack, I could peddle quite smoothly and loved the new experience. But as soon as she said, "O.K., you've got it now. Try again without me," I could hardly move another inch forward for fear, but instead wobbled precariously from side to side, trying to keep my balance.

Every day Mom took me to the park, and every day the same thing happened. Until one day we were moving along steadily (as usual) for a while and I asked to stop. The wind was blowing and Mom didn't hear. When I turned round to repeat the question, I was shocked to see her still standing near the middle of the field where we started. I instantly realized that it had only been my lack of confidence that prevented me from riding a bike unaided. After that it was all my mother could do to stop me from racing off out of sight!

Total confidence in God is paramount. In our church and in our own individual lives, too many opportunities are wasted. Our lack of assurance in God limits the greatness of our achievement. We have no reason to doubt God. He is Power: He created humanity and miraculously sustains life; He created earth and the whole

I was shocked to see her still standing near the middle of the field where we started.

astounding universe, so there is nothing He doesn't know and nothing that He cannot do. We have *no* reason to doubt God—He is love. He didn't provide the Bible, which took 2,000 years to produce, for nothing. Jesus didn't leave His perfect heavenly home to come to His earth, to constantly teach and heal, and yet be despised, mocked, and crucified, all for nothing. The Holy Spirit hasn't been working 24-hour shifts every day globally to get through to us for nothing. Isn't it plain to see that God loves us infinitely and desperately wants us back with Him, where we belong, forever? Therefore, there is nothing God won't or can't do for our good.

Wouldn't it be ridiculous if I never learned to ride simply because I didn't believe I could! God needs to be our confidence.

REACT

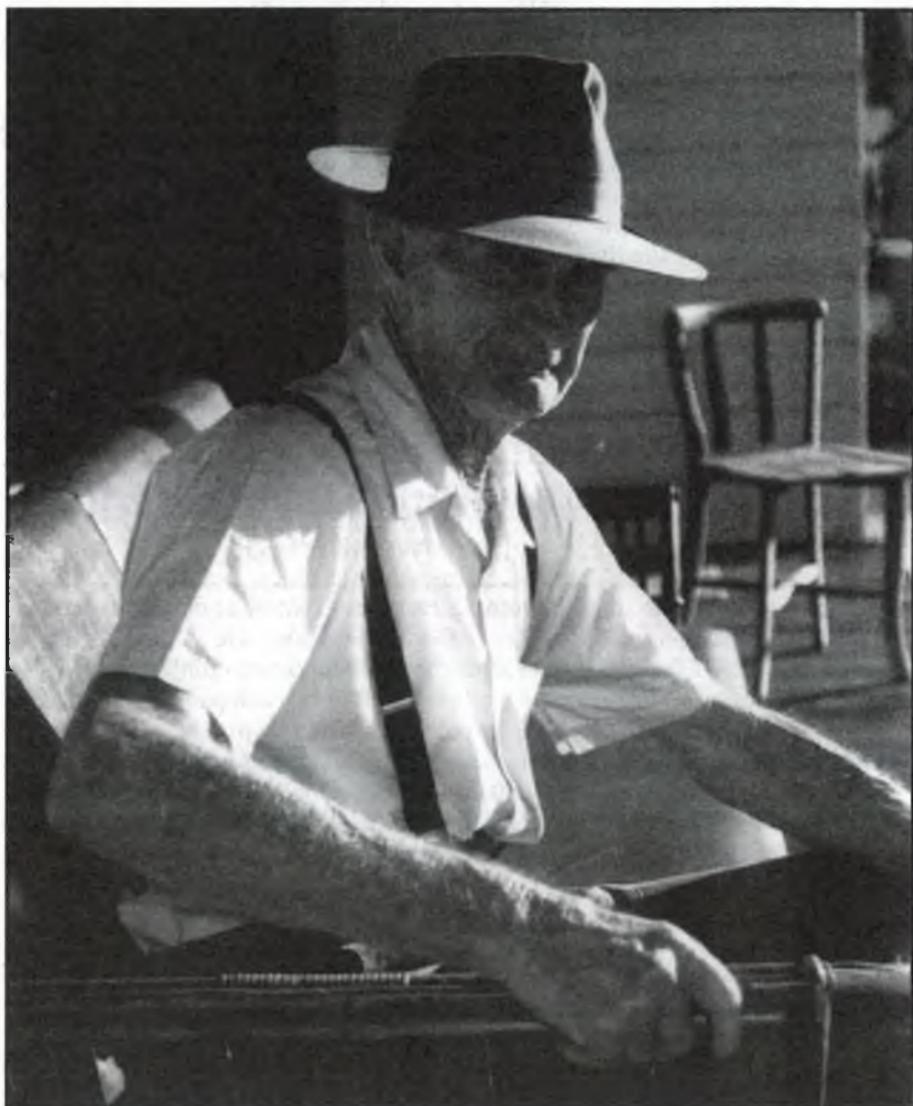
1. When faced with trying circumstances in our lives, how can we still have total confidence in God?

2. When can we be sure we are saved?

3. How does total confidence in God affect our characters and, therefore, our vital witness?

By Inacia Armartey, who attends Stanborough Park School, Watford, Hertfordshire, England.

DON'T LOSE OUT!



“Watch out that you do not lose what you have worked for” (2 John 8, NIV).

Giving Up or Giving In

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 John

The phrase “Don’t give up” sounds so absurd when you are hurting—I *mean hurting*. I have felt anguish so deep and pain so sharp that giving up seemed inevitable and even welcome. No longer could the world keep my interest—nothing mattered anymore. I wasn’t living. I was just existing. What I didn’t realize at the time was that I was at *my* time of choosing—choosing between life and death.

Realizing the world has nothing to offer, where would I go? To what or to whom would I turn—a relationship, a friend, family? No. I had already tried those places and knew they didn’t satisfy. I was at my moment of truth—choose Christ or choose death. But who was Christ? I knew the name from growing up in a Seventh-day Adventist church—but that was the problem; it was just a name.

Now this is the amazing thing. It is only when you are broken and your world has shattered and you need something more—it is only then that Christ makes Himself known. He is no longer a name—He is a *Saviour*.

The battle of good and evil exists in the simplest of things. We have become

The battle of good and evil exists in the simplest of things.

desensitized and calloused and blind to the evil one’s traps of subtlety. And so, as the waves of this world’s frivolities continue to swell and fall, I will rely on the One who is constant, One who is larger than any pain I’ve felt. And as thoughts and questions still linger, He too lingers. He will make the difference. He is making a difference.

It is the trap of the enemy to lure us into realizing the brutal weight of our sorrows. But should we keep our eyes ever looking to Jesus, we would go straight to the One who asks us to “come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, NIV).

Letting Christ inside, I find new strength in Him. I can move forward with new confidence in promoting the kingdom of God. I now understand the words of God when He promises, “Those who hope in the Lord will renew their strength. They will soar . . . like eagles; they will run and not grow weary, they will walk and not be faint” (Isa. 40:31, NIV).

I have finally learned to say, “Lord, take my life, do with it what You will. For I have given up on the world and given in to You.”

By Patty Cabrera, a recording artist for Curb Records and graduate student in religion at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Making Love Central

LOGOS

2 John

Christian tradition affirms that the apostle John called Christian believers repeatedly to love one another. Whether 2 John comes directly from his pen or not—it certainly gives pride of place to love. Love appropriately serves as the organizing center of an analysis of this small letter.

First of all, 2 John was written—and, we may assume, read—in a *context* of love. Personal warmth and regard unite author and readers and inspire the writing of the letter (see verses 1, 12). And the letter is written in the love of God (verse 3). Though the “elect lady” (verse 1, KJV) is probably a particular Christian congregation, rather than an individual person, a sense of personal connection exists between its author and readers.

Second, we can note with interest the conjunction in 2 John of truth and love (verses 1, 3). Love works only if it is adequate to the beloved—and thus truthful. Not to know the truth is to be unable to love properly. So it is clear that, without disparaging truth in general, “the elder” (verse 1) is concerned especially with the truth about God; that God is love, and that this love is embodied in the presence and activity of Jesus. The focus here is thus on *the* truth, the most central truth of all. But it is important to emphasize that this truth is still related to love. The truth that vulnerable, suffering love is at the heart of the universe helps to validate our own loves.

Third, we can point out an implicit connection between love and the Epistle’s condemnation of heresy. Those who deceive, says the Epistle, are those who deny that “Jesus Christ has come in the flesh.” Probably those in view were docetists—Christians who seem to have asserted that Jesus only *seemed* to be human, that the apparent humanity of God incarnate was illusory. This is a destructive heresy. According to this view, God is invulnerable, preserved from the unpredictability, the loss of control, the vulnerability, the terror that go along with being a creature. How can an apostle of love accept as gospel, *as good news*, the message of a God who is not prepared truly to love? Vulnerability is the essence of love. An invulnerable person may dispense charity, may offer disinterested benevolence, but such a person never truly loves, because she or he never truly gives her or himself. To say, then, that the best God can or will do in the face of the world’s pain is to drift through like a tourist without really becoming immersed in it is to deny that God is truly love.

It may be that the condemnation of “the elder” (2 John 1) focuses not just on the denial that God’s Word has become flesh in Jesus, but on any view that calls into question God’s presence in and as Jesus. If this interpretation is correct, it will not necessarily be as easy to make the connection between love and the affirmation of whatever it is that the heretics of the book deny. But love is still in view insofar as the purpose of the elder is to defend the view that Jesus is God’s self-gift to humanity, and insofar as we must understand that self-gift as the expression of divine love.

Fourth, 2 John stresses that there is no love where there are no loving actions (verse 6). Love is more than just activity: it is a basic orientation of oneself toward

another; it is a gift of oneself to another; it is truly being present for another. But when someone *can* perform loving actions but *does* not, we may wonder whether she or he truly loves. People may feel passion or even affection for those whom they consistently hurt (think of the obsessed fan or the maniacal ex-lover). And, less dramatically, the spouse who says, “I love you,” but who refuses to share, to be intimate, to build a deep friendship that aims at total union with the other, makes clear how cheap talk of love (as opposed to genuinely loving communication) can really be. Lovers must be doers.

Fifth, however, it must be stressed that love is not swallowed up by grim moralism in 2 John. “I would rather not use paper and ink, but I hope to come to see you and talk with you face to face, so that our joy may be complete” (verse 12, RSV). We can be personally present to each other in many ways, but fully embodied, face-to-face communication is always the best. If one were simply interested in inspiring good behavior, such intimacy would be unnecessary. But the Epistle ends by giving voice to a hope for joy. Joy may not come from simply doing one’s duty, but it is the natural concomitant of love. The elder does not lose sight of the importance of joy even as he exhorts, but looks forward to it in hope.

It is impossible to love while rejecting people. We may sometimes have to protect ourselves from them—we may need to flee violence, report theft, end hurtful

We should still be willing to be seen in bad company.

relationships, etc.—but we cannot deny others our love simply because of their beliefs or their bad habits, as if loving them rendered or constituted a necessary endorsement of their behaviors. So it is difficult to know how to understand verses 10 and 11. In interpreting and applying these verses, the following considerations are worth keeping in mind. First, the belief that Jesus was a phantom—and similar beliefs that deny God’s real immersion in human suffering today—is dangerous and deserves to be opposed. But, second, like the Jesus whose love we celebrate, we should still be willing to be seen in bad company.

By Gary Chartier, managing editor of Adventist Heritage magazine at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Why Do People Give Up on God?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 John 8

Our lesson this week focuses on endurance, persistence, resilience in the face of temptation, disillusionment, or discouragement. Today's key text calls us to "look to yourselves, that you may not lose what you have worked for, but may win a full reward" (RSV).

Paul reminds us that no Christian is invulnerable to backsliding (1 Cor. 9:27). And Jesus Himself emphasizes the importance of endurance by describing the varied challenges His followers would face, concluding, "He who endures to the end will be saved" (Matt. 10:22).

Ellen White also had a deep interest in the subject of endurance, probably because this attribute played such an important role in her life. Here was a woman who endured difficulty nearly her entire life, from the time her face was deformed by a childhood accident until her death. As the prophetess of the Adventist Church, Ellen White was continually subjected to attacks of ridicule, scorn, or criticism that never seemed to end. She saw many of her most vocal supporters turn against her, and some of her closest friends leave the church, but through it all she endured.

She was a survivor, and her counsel to one couple given to backsliding reveals the three traits that she linked with endurance. "Brother and sister, . . . you have

It takes a lot of courage to endure as a follower of Christ.

not had power of endurance, because you have not cherished a patient, hopeful, courageous spirit."

1. Patience. How many people do you know who have left God or the church—or both—because they have become impatient with how slow the church is to change or to adapt to the needs of a changing world?

2. Hopefulness. Another leading reason that people turn their backs on God or the church is that they are let down by a professed Christian and become discouraged. As a result they lose hope. The author of 2 John has a solution for this problem as well: Keep your eyes *only* on Christ.

3. Courage. It takes a lot of courage to endure as a follower of Christ because Jesus was a risk-taker and risk-takers draw a lot of criticism. Endurance is most difficult when we are constantly being attacked by the spirit of criticism, but ultimately it is most rewarding when we hang in under these circumstances, as well.

REACT

Rate yourself on a scale of 1 to 10 in terms of your ability to endure.

**Testimonies for the Church, vol. 4, p. 341.*

By Steve Daily, chaplain of La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

When Progress Is Loss

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 2 John 9

Progress is usually thought of as a positive thing. The word is typically used to mean improvement or movement toward a goal. When we think of loss, we think of giving up on something, or having something taken away from us. But John, in his second letter, warns about a kind of progress that is at the same time a kind of loss, a kind of growth that is really not growth at all, but is actually loss of what is really important.

In verses 8 and 9, John says, “Be on your guard, then, so that you will not lose what we have worked for, but will receive your reward in full. Anyone who does not stay with the teaching of Christ, but goes beyond it, does not have God” (TEV). His concern is not with those who would give up on the teaching of Christ, but would rather go beyond it. Commentators suggest that false teachers, the “deceivers” of verse 7, were touting a supposedly superior spiritual knowledge that was reputed to enable the believers to advance beyond the usual teachings.

So in this passage, we find John urging the believers to hold fast to the message of Christ and not to be tempted to advance beyond this, thus losing the proper focus for a Christian. This kind of deception, the act of adding on to belief, is dangerous precisely because it does not require an initial rejection of the true belief, but only

John warns about a kind of progress that is at the same time a kind of loss.

an acceptance of the addition of the false belief. After the false belief is accepted, it eventually comes to obscure the true belief. The true belief is rejected, but only at the end of the process, and only after it has been obscured by falsehood.

There is a variation on this pattern of loss of belief which may be even more insidious than the problem John was addressing. This is the situation in which a true belief comes to obscure the Christian’s proper focus, which is Christ. Whereas many Christians today are in little danger of accepting false teachings, we are all in danger of accepting true teachings (which is not bad in itself), and then following them to obscure our true focus. Whether it be the Bible interpretations of a spiritual writer, an Adventist version of the Bible, seven pillars of faith, or twenty-seven fundamental beliefs—valuable as all these things may be—if we allow them to draw our focus away from Christ and His commandment of love, we are no better off than the early Christians who allowed false teachers to divert them.

By Craig R. Kinzer, an English and communication faculty member, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

If at First You Don't Succeed . . .

HOW-TO

Key Text: 2 John

This week's lesson poses an issue that will plague Christians until the very end. How can I walk in love and maintain the Christian attitude that I work for in the face of so many adversaries and so much adversity? How many of us have not experienced situations in which the pressure from the outside world that does not express our Christianity has overwhelmed us?

I'll give an example of this. How many times have you been eating with non-Christians, or even Christians, and thought about praying but in the end just left it out? I am in no way suggesting that salvation is based on remembering to bless your food, but I am suggesting that the things John was worried about our losing in 2 John 8 were those that we have worked toward that identify us as followers of Christ. It seems so trivial to bless your food; however, it really does identify your need for God to be a constant part of your life. People recognize those actions and are either strengthened by them or made curious.

The second part of this is trying to live out our desire to be better Christians in the face of those who do not care about our struggle. I have often heard my pastors quote texts about loving your enemies. These things, I have found, are far easier said than done, and it's time that we stop feeling guilty for our failures in doing them.

These things, I have found, are far easier said than done.

1. Don't beat yourself up for what you don't do. Realize in your failures that you are human and that you need Christ's help just to get through a day, let alone trying to reach out to someone during it.

2. Don't try and go out there like Mother Theresa all the time. It's great if you're excited and you've got energy, but realize that energy has limits and so do people. If you make your relationship with Christ your primary focus, you'll find that your most basic habits will be an aid in sharing the love that you have with others.

3. Be natural. There is no one right way to walk in love. Christ shapes lives and personalities in diverse ways. Tap into the tools that Christ has given you and let them flow out like a river from your soul.

4. Live, don't sell. The beauty of Christianity is that it's not a sales pitch; it's a way of life. The love that you share and the things that you work toward are based on how you walk the walk. In that walk you may fall, but that is where you and others around you find the heart of Christianity, Christ is always there to pick you back up, and that is the good news that you really need to share.

By Cristian Miley, a senior religious studies and clinical psychology major at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Keeping the Focus and Enjoying the Process

OPINION

Key Text: 2 John 8

It is so easy to become caught up in something new. If it is flashy and attractive, we are drawn to it. That is a natural result of our curiosity. This happens especially when we allow a crack of doubt to enter into our thoughts. How often does this happen in our Christian lives! We begin to wonder about what we believe and without truly examining alternatives, we grab something new. And then we often begin to lose our focus.

Our focus should always be on Jesus and His example of Christian living. If we maintain that focus and bask in the light of His love, we will always know what agrees with Him and what does not. Knowing Christ and growing more like Him, we embrace what reflects His presence and shun what distracts us from Him. Having the correct focus, we cannot be led astray; we do not lose what we have worked for.

Second John 8 begins, "Look to yourselves . . ." (RSV). Christian communion is so important. If we live the life of Christ, we will see Him in others. In this way, we continually remind one another what the Christian life is. In a Christian community, we build one another up, forever working toward our eternal goal.

Leading a Christian life takes work, as John mentions. It is much like life when

If it is flashy and attractive, we are drawn to it.

we are working toward a goal yet not quite there. Without being careful, we can let in doubt, which eventually leads to giving up. All that work done up to that point has then been lost. On top of that, the goal is not achieved.

Many times I have begun to practice a musical instrument, only to give up before I enjoy the beauty of playing it. But as I look back, I see that there were times when I really enjoyed playing. My only problem was that I dreamed of being a virtuoso at the time. I then ruined my experience of the moment by frustrating myself with desires to be greater immediately.

The Christian walk is a process with many joys along the way. We have an ultimate goal, but we must realize that we are progressing and finding fulfillment as we travel. The final reward should not be a measuring stick, telling us how far off we are; rather it should be an encouragement, knowing that we will soon be there. Disillusionment and frustration will then not enter our thoughts, and we will not lose what we have worked for.

By Reuben Sutter, a religious studies major at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

MIMES FOR GOD



**“Beloved, do not imitate what is evil, but what is good”
(3 John 11, NKJV).**

Watching Every Move

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 3 John 11

Every move she made, he made; every step she took, he took; she walked, he walked. As she made her way through the crowd, her shadow followed her. A trace of a glower appeared on her face. As she reached the edge of the crowd, she stopped and turned to face him. He stared back with a sad mime face. Would she yell at him? Instead, she gave her broadest smile, curtsied, and waved to the crowd.

In 1994 I had the opportunity to travel to Russia with a Christian drama group. As part of our ministry in Kharbarovsk, we performed street mime. We had a repertoire of sketches depicting Christian themes and the life of Christ, along with the typical solo mime antics. Sometimes people laughed and sometimes people heckled. Wherever we were, people stopped to see what we were doing.

Learning to be a mime artist is not easy. You spend hours face to face with an experienced mime artist, mirroring his every movement. His arm moves, your arm moves; his eyebrow moves, your eyebrow moves; his leg moves, your leg moves.

Sometimes people laughed and sometimes people heckled.

You feel awkward and stupid at first, but the more you practice the better you become. Your imitation of him is no longer an imitation, but a reflection of what you have become.

As you look at the Third Epistle of John this week, think about the word *imitate*. The dictionary gives us two definitions. One is to model oneself after behavior or actions or someone or something; the other is to copy the appearance, mannerisms, or speech of someone or something. Beyond the dictionary definitions there is something that becomes natural within you. By beholding you become changed. Third John 11 says, "Do not imitate what is evil but what is good" (NIV). Peterson's *The Message*, paraphrases it, "Don't go along with evil. Model the good."

John uses the Greek word *mimesis*, meaning "to mime." This is one of the few places that the word *mimesis* appears in the Bible. If we were to replace the word *imitate* with the word *mime* in this text, it would read, "Do not mime what is evil but what is good." Stand across from God and mime His every action. God shows kindness, you show kindness; God shows mercy, you show mercy, God shows love, you show love. Through prayer and study we can become true mimes of God.

By Marklynn Bazzy, a freelance writer from Gresham, Oregon.

Loan Sharks and Butterflies

LOGOS

3 John

When I first saw Clarence, he was very happy to announce to me that he was the personification of evil. "I'm the devil himself," he said. "Don't even try to get me into church; it's a lost cause." A few weeks and a few visits later, I noticed him playing a game of chess. He wondered whether I played. "Not very well," I told him, "but checkers I do play, and play that very well." I saw a gleam in his eye. This was obviously not a person who liked to pass up an opportunity to compete.

"I tell you what," he bluffed. "I'll play you in checkers. If you can beat me two games out of three, I'll come to church and hear you preach." Of course I'm a person who doesn't like to pass an opportunity to compete either, especially a competition that could involve someone's spiritual well being. So the date was set.

As you can imagine, I prayed like everything before I went to play the checker match of a lifetime. When I arrived at Clarence's house, he greeted me with the words "O.K., come in, but no praying to win. That would be cheating."

"Too late for that," I told him. Although Clarence was a very good checker player, he was certainly no match for God and me. I won the first two games; Clarence came to church; within a few months he was a baptized believer. As most evangelistic stories go, this would be the end. With Clarence's story, this was not. You see, Clarence had lived a very worldly life and had very secular ways deeply ingrained in his lifestyle. He knew that his habits were no longer acceptable in the eyes of his Saviour, even less perhaps in the eyes of his fellow believers. He could see the

He was very happy to announce to me that he was the personification of evil.

gap, but he didn't know how to bridge the gap. He came to me, and I will never forget what he said.

"In the life that I came out of, I was very good at being bad. If I knew someone who wanted to learn how to be a loan shark, I would teach him how to become a loan shark. If he wanted to be a thug, I would show him how to be a thug. Now I want to be a Christian. I've been given these books and taught these beliefs, but I want someone to show me how to be a Christian. Why won't anyone show me how to be a Christian?"

What Clarence needed was a mentor of Christianity, a living, breathing model of what God wants us to be. The books are there, but nothing demonstrates what a life lived in Christ really means better than someone who can help us imitate goodness.

Jesus' life demonstrated the importance of doing so much more than just telling someone about the gospel. He showed the world and specifically His disciples what the gospel looks like when it lives and breathes and walks. It's radical, and it is not standoffish. It demands involvement in the lives of believers.

Being Transformed (Rom. 12:2)

In this passage Paul challenges us. The call is not so much to enter the process

of transformation. He assumes that this is something that occurs naturally. You are perpetually being transformed into something. Making sure that what you are becoming is in sync with God's pattern and not that of the world's should be the determination of a disciple of Christ.

Think for a moment about how transformation really takes place. For a caterpillar, transformation occurs according to some genetically predisposed course mapped out by God and explainable only by an entomologist. Spiritual transformation happens also in accordance with Divine planning, but it can occur only as a result of our choice. The caterpillar becomes the butterfly that has been placed within her. The Christian becomes the pattern that he chooses to place before his eyes.

Imitate . . . What Is Good? (3 John 11)

Too often there is a distinction between those who are leading God's work and those who are actually God-led. In this passage John is writing to his good friend and fellow believer Gaius, admonishing him to sift carefully the images and actions of those who are in the vantage point of leadership through the colander of God's Word. It is good advice for us to keep in mind as we choose whom we admire, emulate, or even hang around.

REACT

1. How do we find the safety zone between being careful whom we give access to our avenues of influence and those who need our influence?
2. How can we emulate the good qualities in someone without picking up on some of his or her bad qualities as well?

By Garrett Caldwell, associate pastor of the Beaverton (Oregon) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Good Imitation or Imitating Good?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 3 John 11

The real-looking, artificial leather piece of luggage looks like a good buy. It is a brown carry-on. It has shiny brasslike zippers on every side and room for lots of stuff. And, more important, I need one. I pay for it and tell myself that it is a good buy. Until I start packing it for the first time. The inside compartments do not expand like real leather. The plastic dividers split, and the cheap zippers catch. They cannot take in the amount of clothes I am packing. So now the carry-on sits in my closet. It still looks good. A good imitation. Still too good to throw out.

Are we as Christians like the cheap carry-on? A good imitation, doing good only when it suits us? Do we find ourselves hiding from church responsibilities? Or from someone in trouble? “The true man is one who is willing to sacrifice his own interest for the good of others, and who exercises himself in binding up the brokenhearted.”¹

John wrote to Gaius, “Dear friend, do not imitate what is evil but what is good. Anyone who does what is good is from God” (3 John 11, NIV). “All power to do good is God-given.”²

In imitating good, God wants us “to build up the work and cause of God, not to

I pay for it and tell myself that it is a good buy.

please . . . [ourselves] but to glorify God. The Majesty of heaven, the King of glory, made the infinite sacrifice in coming to our world in order that He might elevate and ennoble humanity.”³ We read in the Bible that Christ went about doing good.

“He has a vineyard in which everyone can perform good work. Suffering humanity needs help everywhere. . . . [Christians] may win their way to hearts by speaking words in season, by doing favors for those who need even physical labor. This will not degrade any of you, but it will bring a consciousness of the approval of God.”⁴ “To God belongs all the glory for the wise and good deeds of human agents.”⁵

Imitating good must come from God. If our hearts are entrusted with God, we glorify God and find ourselves *better* Christians. If we are imitating evil, we are like the cheap carry-on, a good imitation gathering dust and of no use to anyone.

REACT

Who are some Bible characters who imitated good and/or evil? And why?

1. *My Life Today*, p. 118.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*

5. *Ibid.*

By Brad S. Ellis, an employee of the Oregon State Department of Fish and Wildlife, Portland, Oregon.

Help, I'm an Adult!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Eph. 5:1

"Be imitators of God, therefore, as dearly loved children . . ." (Eph. 5:1, NIV).

Imitation is a critical behavior in children. They learn how to smile, talk, walk, and eat by imitating those who already know how. Imitation is not just a spectator behavior. It works best when both actor and imitator are in tune to what outcome is desired. First, there must be good behavior to imitate; second, an attempt must be made to mimic that behavior.

Studies on imitation find that "when the model opens and closes its mouth, the infant does the same. There are no cross-confusions. The infant does not open its mouth when the model opens its hand. In other words, what the infant picks up from the behavior of the model is not just opening but opening of a particular body part that the infant mimics with the corresponding body part."¹

Researchers then opened and closed a matchbox, but the children didn't imitate the action. "Imitation appears, then, to be specific to humans and can only be elicited by humans. It surely indicates that the infant is aware that it is human. By imitating, the infant is showing us that it knows it has eyes, mouth, tongue, hands

Children learn how to smile, talk, walk, and eat by imitating those who already know how.

and that these parts of itself correspond to the same parts of us. . . . The infant will imitate the adult but also shows rapt attention and an increased frequency of behavior if an adult imitates it. At the most basic level, two persons are interacting if the behavior of each influences the behavior of the other."²

As Christians, we must claim Philippians 2:13 as our genetic response to imitating God's goodness: "For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (NIV). We have tried to be good and failed. Unless our spiritual genes can be changed, we can't be good, so Philippians 2:13 shows us the way. Trying to be good does not work unless the Holy Spirit is working in us to desire and act on God's good plan.

Jesus Christ said, "I tell you the truth, unless you change and become like little children, you will never enter the kingdom of heaven" (Matt. 18:3). We need the Holy Spirit to grow us into little children so that we can imitate the goodness of God. "Help, I'm an adult, but in God I can be a child!"

1. T. G. R. Bower, *Development in Infancy*, second edition (San Francisco: W. H. Freeman and Company, 1982), p. 258.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 259.

Imitation Christians?

HOW-TO

Key Text: 1 John 5:20

It was unfair!

Everyone thought Fred was such a great guy, a great Christian. Whenever he got up in front of the youth group, he'd look so sincere as he spoke earnestly about our relationship with Christ and the church. But afterwards—when he wasn't on stage—you'd hear the off-color jokes, the sneering at pastors and teachers alike.

It made me angry to watch people flock around him, especially the other kids, absorbing his mixed messages until many eventually developed the same disdain for the organized church. In public, Fred was the perfect Christian—but he was an imitation Christian. Just like Diotrephes (3 John 9, 10).

Imitation is a great way to develop the right habits—whether you're trying to become a better writer or a better Christian—but is it enough? At some point imitation must become the reality. At some point the words have to become our own, the stories culled from personal experience. And our imitation Christianity must become the true nature of Christ. Imitation Christianity won't see us through the tough times. In 3 John 11, the disciple isn't just talking about imitating the actions of a good church member. He's referring to our need to imitate the real

It made me angry to watch people flock around him.

thing—Christ. So how can we make sure *we're* on the right track when it comes to imitating good?

1. Know your source. Only God deserves our imitation. He doesn't just talk about goodness. He *is* good (Nah. 1:7). In John 1:1, 2 Christ's antecedents and credentials are laid out: Christ was with God from the beginning; He is God. We can't always count on other people to show us what to do or how to behave. The only way to play it safe is to keep our eyes on Christ.

2. Don't imitate what is bad. Too obvious? Think about the times you've gone along with the crowd, even though you weren't very comfortable with what they were doing. Check out No. 1 again. Always verify credentials before you choose a "behavior mentor."

3. Ask yourself, What would Jesus do? In your day-to-day activities, or when faced with a difficult choice, ask yourself what Jesus would do in your situation. His response is never phony, because He never changes sides (Heb. 13:8).

The more we look to Christ as an example for our behavior, the less we will be merely *imitating* good; we will actually *become* like Him (2 Cor. 3:18). That's a promise!

By Luan Miller, a freelance writer from Beaverton, Oregon.

Habits and Razor-Wire Fences

OPINION

Key Text: 3 John 11

In today's key text, John encourages us not to "imitate what is evil but what is good" (3 John 11, NIV). Although I agree that imitating evil will only create problems, I have a hard time accepting that my imitating good is still just imitation, bogus, and outright worthless (see Isa. 64:6).

When I first read this text, I didn't want to admit that even my imitation of good was worthless, based on the definition of *imitation* being "something artificial," but it is. We need to remember that God does not love us because of what we do, but He loves us because of who we are. (See Gal. 3:26-29.) We are His children.

A friend of mine who works with people trying to stop smoking tells me that a smoker who wants to quit must imitate the habits of a nonsmoker. Rather than lingering at the dinner table after a meal and lighting up, they ought to get up from the table and do something a nonsmoker would do, such as clear the table, and then go for a walk.

As in any habit, change doesn't happen immediately. Smokers wanting to quit must focus on the benefits of quitting smoking and not focus on what they miss about smoking. By looking forward to the extra money they'll have by not purchas-

A person can't be a smoker and a nonsmoker at the same time.

ing cigarettes, to the heightened flavor of food and having clothes that smell fresher, smokers will have a better chance of success in breaking the habit of smoking. Rarely, however, are smokers able to stop smoking by themselves. They need the help of a mentor or someone to whom to be responsible.

Since the fall of humankind in Eden, sin has become a nasty habit of human nature. Our only hope of breaking the habit of sin is to focus on Christ. We need the help and saving power of Jesus, and as we imitate Him, He will make us into *former* sinners because of our choice to follow Him.

Sometimes we sit on the proverbial fence, not wanting to make a full commitment. Soon the fence will turn from a nice brick wall into a fence of razor wire, impossible to sit on.

Either we are on Christ's side of the fence or we're on the devil's, just as a person can't be a smoker and a nonsmoker at the same time. The devil is clever (see 1 Pet. 5:8) and wants to distract us by getting us hung up on temporary pleasures. We then procrastinate in making a commitment to God. Choose each day, however many times it takes for you to follow Jesus. Soon, following Jesus will become a habit and turn into infinite, eternal benefits.

By Jerry Davis, media-services coordinator at Portland (Oregon) Adventist Medical Center.

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Lesson 2: Claiming the Treasure

Scripture: Matt. 13:44-46; Luke 7:36-50; 12:13-34; 14:25-35.

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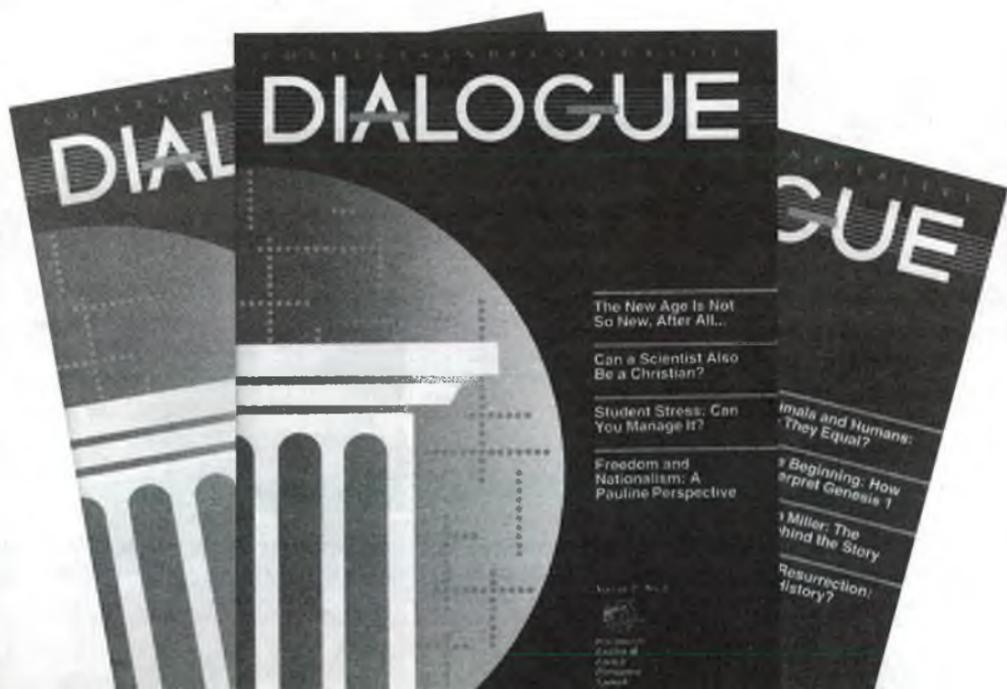
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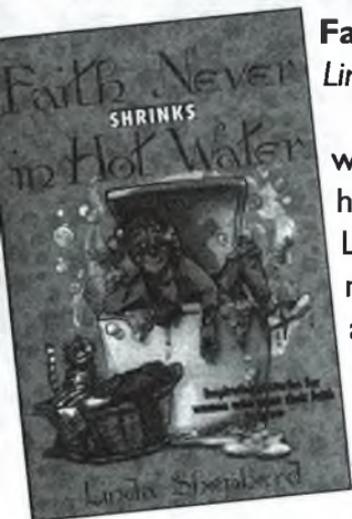


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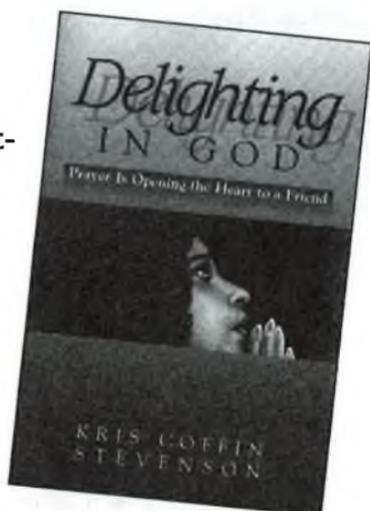
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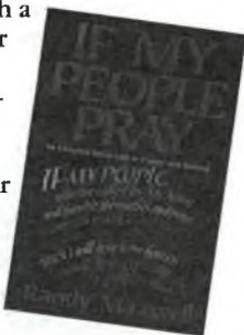
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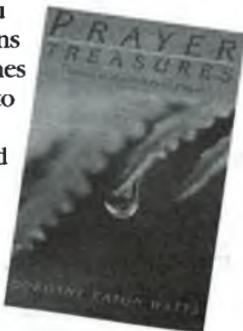
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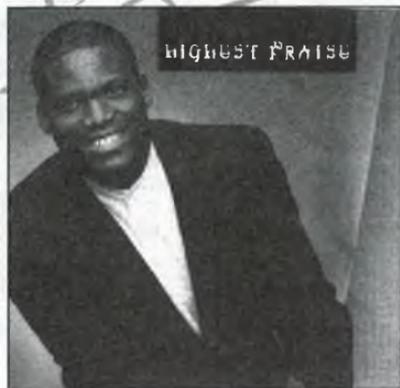
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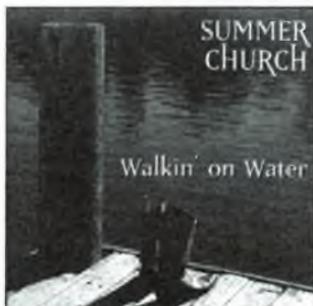
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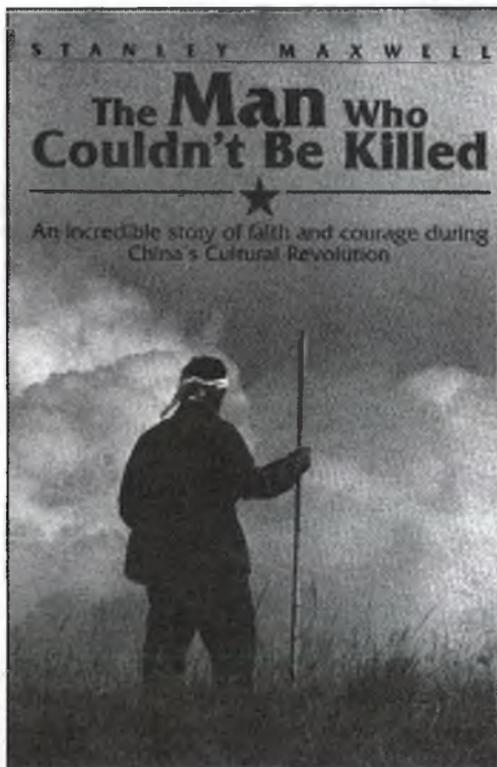


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