



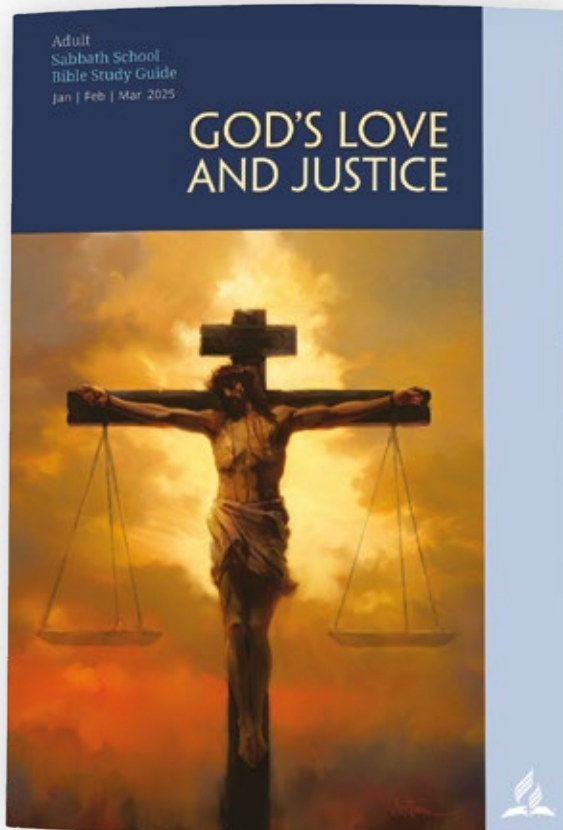
The Best Gift

God revealing Himself to us ¹⁸

AAS celebrates 60 years of serving PNG ⁶

Sabbath School

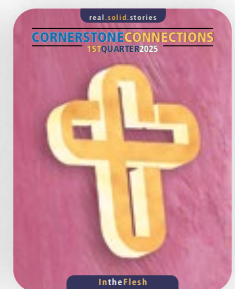
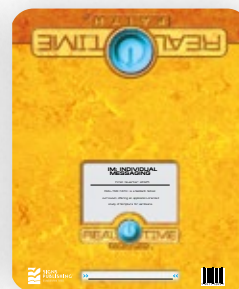
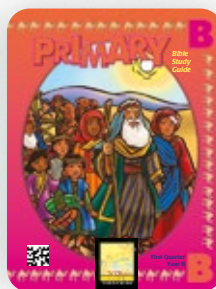
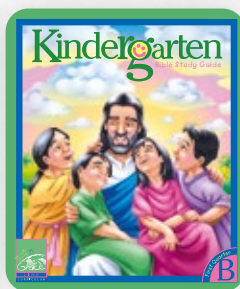
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EDITOR'S NOTE:

A time to reflect

Jarrod Stackelroth
Editor

“

What has God done for you throughout your life, to bring you to where you are today?

It's hard to believe 2024 is almost finished. I've heard people say that the older you get, the more time speeds up. I'm not sure whether this is true or not, but I have certainly noticed the pace of my life speeding up. Especially at the end of the year, there seems to be an event, a birthday, a farewell, an end of year celebration or Christmas party on every weekend. The past month or so has also been filled with church carols programs. It can be an exhausting time of year, this "most wonderful time of the year".

Yet one important practice, that we shouldn't forget in the hustle and muscle of life, is gratitude.

In my wife's culture, church members will often gather on New Year's Eve for an evening of prayer and thanksgiving, sharing with each other some of the things they are thankful for. I've been to a couple of these programs at church, but also with family at home—wherever they are, they make it an emphasis to reflect and respond with thanks and praise.

Often we're seeking to make resolutions, to start fresh in the New Year and do something more than we've done before. In essence a New Year's resolution is an effort to be better than we were before. We're adding something to our already busy lives, reassessing and trying to climb higher, move faster, achieve more.

There is something to be gained from slowing down and allowing ourselves to feel grateful for the blessings we've already received.

Researchers from the University of Indiana got a group of 300 students who were seeking mental health support from counselling services into a study on gratitude. Participants were divided into three groups: one group who were tasked with writing a letter of gratitude each week for three weeks; the second group was to write down their deep thoughts and feelings about negative experiences; the final group didn't write anything. The group who wrote the letters of gratitude experienced significantly better mental health than the other two groups. The letter writers weren't even required to send them to those they had written to. Only 23 per cent did, but those who didn't still experienced the positive benefits.

As we farewell 2024, some of us will celebrate Christmas, others of us will not. Many of us will seek out opportunities to spend time with family and friends. We will hopefully have a little bit of time off from our daily work and spend time unwinding and taking a deep breath before plunging into 2025.

As we do so, in that window of time before we start up again in earnest, let's take time to look for and reflect on things to be grateful for. Maybe you'd like some questions to prompt your thinking?

What has God done for you throughout your life, to bring you to where you are today? The miracles, the consistent work, the opportunities given and the disasters averted. Thank Him for the big things.

What has God done for you in 2024 specifically? How did you start the year and where did you finish it? If you've suffered loss and struggle during the year, did you feel God or others close by? Search for hope and you'll find it. For me, 2024 has been a year of being equipped, stretched and grown, and I am thankful for how God has never given up on me.

Perhaps you've had challenges and stress this year. Can you find a way to be thankful for the downs as well as the ups? Have you learned lessons or been stretched in a way that you can be thankful for as you look back?

What about all the everyday blessings in your life? Have a go at listing them. Family, church, friends, somewhere to live, food . . . there are things that we take for granted every day.

Finally, let me express my gratitude to you: our readers. Thank you for reading, commenting, sharing, writing letters and articles and being faithful members of your local churches. Without you, *Adventist Record* wouldn't exist, so thank you from the bottom of my heart and from all the team at *Record*, have a happy and safe holiday and Christmas season.



INSIGHT:

Going home

Glenn Townend
South Pacific Division president

This year my fellow officers and I have spent more time away from home than we usually do. We enjoy meeting the various people in the places in which we travel all over the Pacific and the world, and rejoice at the amazing harvest God is bringing. This year we grew as a Division the most we have every grown—there are hundreds of thousands who have given their lives to Jesus. The ratio for Adventists per head of population in the 46 million people of the South Pacific Division went from 1:82 to 1:55. We thank God for what He has done. Much of this growth has occurred in Papua New Guinea and we thank God for the generous and faithful disciples of Jesus there who prayed and worked to make PNG for Christ and what has followed a blessing to many people. Our Church has brought people back home to be with God—but have clothed and fed people, trained and developed them with trade and gardening skills and given people a new family—the church.

PNG was only one of the places I visited several times this year and although it is like a second home because of the five years of childhood I spent there and the great visits I have, the saying is true “there is no place like home”. Home is where you can relax from the pressures of work and life and just be.

At this time of year many of us want to go home and be with family and friends. We also remember that Jesus, God’s Son, came to this earth as a baby and spent about 33 years away from home—that is a long time and an incredible sacrifice.

Four weeks in one stint was the longest period away from home this year and I was dreaming about my garden, bed, bike riding, favourite chair, my wife, the places where I pray . . . But Jesus stayed away from home until His purpose was complete. While on earth He had no home. Jesus’ purpose was to make it possible that all humans could choose to go to His home where there is complete peace, justice and holiness eternally. Please take time to remember this year-end that because of Jesus, we have a better home awaiting (John 1:12, 14:1-3) if we choose.



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Two people were baptised as a direct result of the historic outreach program.

Historic outreach to remote tribe in PNG leads to first baptisms

📍 Pomio District, PNG | Paul Bopalo/Juliana Muniz

The Adventist Church in New Britain New Ireland Mission, Papua New Guinea, has achieved a historic milestone.

Church members from the Pomio district have successfully reached the remote Bush Mengen tribe, conducting a week-long program that led to the tribe's first two baptisms. Led by Elder Ben Uva Tagaliurea, the mission team visited from November 4 to 10, offering Bible teaching and skills training.

Previous outreach attempts in 1983 had failed due to cultural confrontations and fears of headhunting and local sorcery, which forced the mission team to withdraw. More recently, Elder Tagaliurea took on the challenge with his family, working in the area since graduating from the Rarokos Layman Training School in 2023.

The mission group's journey to the tribe involved travel by boat, truck, river crossings and several kilometres on foot. Upon arrival, the locals were

intrigued by the Adventist presence and expressed curiosity, especially when the team used technology like projectors and slides for presentations.

In addition to preaching, the team offered training in tailoring, coconut oil extraction, adult literacy, financial literacy and cooking techniques.

An Adventist nursing professional delivered health talks on lifestyle diseases and held a free clinic. Hundreds came in for medical consultations and treatment.

As a result of the program, two members of the Bush Mengen tribe chose to be baptised—the first baptisms in the tribe. Other attendees showed interest in learning more, with tribal leaders noting that the Adventist Church was unique in addressing both spiritual and practical needs.

Elder Tagaliurea and the Pomio district team are asking for ongoing prayers and support as they continue working with the Bush Mengen tribe.



Retired pastor Benny Soga (left) and Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission president Pastor Joanis Fezamo opening the new building.

EHSM dedicates new office

📍 Goroka, PNG | Jacqueline Wari

A new office complex for the Eastern Highlands Simbu Mission (EHSM), Papua New Guinea, was opened on November 10. The two-level building, located just a few metres away from the former office, houses the administration, departmental directors and Adventist Book Centre. Facilities include two conference rooms, a kitchen and spacious car parks.

Among the hundreds who gathered to celebrate the event were retired pastors who had worked towards ensuring this dream came true.

Former EHSM president Pastor Benny Soga and retired pastors Jessley Farugaso, John Hamura, Steven Kamae and Wai To said they were thrilled and praised God for seeing them through.

According to Pastor Soga, building a new office for the local mission was one of the goals of a development plan launched in 2010.

Leaders and workers from the Madang Manus, Morobe and Western

Highlands missions and the PNG Union Mission joined the celebrations.

The opening ceremony included worship songs, words of encouragement from lay members, a sermonette and speeches from the administrators of local missions and Union, a ribbon-cutting, a tour of the new office and a celebration meal.

ESHM secretary Pastor James Kiangua thanked God for His providence: "To God be the glory. We need to celebrate His goodness all the time. We thank God because through Him we have it all."

The former office—the third one for the local mission—was decommissioned earlier in the day before the new facilities were opened. The retired pastors led the decommissioning of the building which was opened in 1993.

The first office for the local mission was set up in 1949 in the president's home. The second office was built in 1953 and used until 1992.



Believed to be the first Australian adult devotional author, Nathan Brown with *Do Not Be Afraid* devotional.

Australian author for adult devotional in 2025

📍 Warburton, Victoria | Lauren Webb

Pacific Press has released its suite of 2025 devotional books, headed by the adult daily devotional *Do Not Be Afraid*, written by Australian author and Signs Publishing book editor Nathan Brown.

According to Pastor Dale Galusha, president of the Pacific Press Publishing Association, the Adventist Church has a rich tradition of publishing devotional books, with the first released in 1868. "Beginning in 1945, the Review and Herald Publishing Association consistently released a yearly adult devotional, and Pacific Press assumed this role in 2016," said Pastor Galusha. "Over the years, devotionals for various groups and ages have been added to the lineup and these have proved popular."

However, Mr Brown might be the first Australian—certainly, the first in recent memory—to author the main adult daily devotional.

Do Not Be Afraid is Nathan Brown's twenty-first book and his most extensive work to date. According to Mr Brown, the 365 daily readings explore the most repeated command in the Bible, providing assurance that although fear is an inevitable part of our lives in this world, God wants us to know that it need not control our lives.

Do Not Be Afraid is available from Adventist bookshops or online, standalone or as part of a boxed set, with Ellen White's *Conflict and Courage*—a book with complementary themes.



PNG Union Mission secretary Pastor Leonard Sumatau, AAS chief executive officer Captain Mark Neah and PNG Union Mission president Pastor Malachi Yani cutting the 60th anniversary cake.

AAS celebrates 60 years of serving PNG

📍 Goroka, PNG | Jacqueline Wari

Adventist Aviation Services (AAS) celebrated its 60th year of serving Papua New Guinea on October 30 in Goroka, Eastern Highlands, with various activities.

The celebration began with students, aviation workers, friends and families spending time at the AAS hangar to learn more about the company's operation.

They were informed about services provided by the maintenance and engineering, pilot and dispatch teams.

Eight children had the honour of riding on a plane around Goroka town when their names were drawn from a raffle.

The anniversary dinner in the evening brought together families, church leadership and other stakeholders to reflect on the company's achievements and celebrate with a meal.

Papua New Guinea Union Mission secretary Pastor Leonard Sumatau while congratulating AAS, explained the Union's vision for 2021-2025 and challenged the company to grow its operations.

"AAS has a vision. We want you to grow in those areas. Let us be leaders in the space that we are in. Depend on God and He will take you there," Pastor Sumatau said.

AAS board chairman Dr Ken Boone paid homage to workers who had served

across 60 years.

Dr Boone said the company's operation was affected by COVID-19 but he was thankful that many workers stood firm and continued their duties.

"AAS has done tremendously in moving people," Dr Boone said.

AAS chief executive officer Captain Mark Neah thanked staff, families, aviation partners and the Church for celebrating the airline's 60th year of operation in PNG.

He also urged staff to continue their service to the country.

"Let's take up the challenge and keep moving forward. AAS has faced challenges and was on the brink of suspending operations.

"We had external challenges such as fuel and buying parts from overseas due to the foreign exchange rates.

"We will be able to come out stronger next year and the years after that," Captain Neah said.

AAS began operating in PNG on June 30, 1964, when a Cessna 180 was bought in America, shipped to Sydney, Australia and flown to PNG. It supports the Church in serving the people of PNG by providing emergency medical needs, health and education services and commercial charters among others.



L-R: Dr Lalen Simeon, Pastor Glenn Townend, Dr Lohi Matainaho and Francois Keet break ground on the construction site.

Pacific Adventist University breaks ground for 2000-seat auditorium

📍 Port Moresby, PNG | Kym Piez

Pacific Adventist University (PAU) celebrated a significant milestone with the groundbreaking ceremony for a new 2000-seat auditorium on November 20.

After five years of planning, the project will address the university's need for larger lecture spaces to accommodate its increasing student body.

"This auditorium will be a major boost to ensure that the university can deliver lectures to classes exceeding 200 students," PAU vice-chancellor Professor Lohi Matainaho said.

"This is just the beginning of the project, made possible by the support of the PNG government through the Department of Higher Education."

Professor Matainaho emphasised the spiritual significance of the occasion, dedicating the project to God.

"We give God the glory for this amazing project that will help us deliver our mandate of providing the best Christian, Adventist education to the Pacific islands," he said.

The groundbreaking ceremony was attended by prominent figures, including the president of the South Pacific Division (SPD) and chancellor of PAU, Pastor Glenn Townend, SPD CFO Francois Keet and PNG prime minister's office representative Ray Paul. The PAU vice-chancellor and deputy vice-chancellors were also in attendance alongside PAU staff and students.

On the day, Pastor Townend delivered a spiritually uplifting message, drawing inspiration from Ephesians 2:19-22. He reminded attendees that PAU's mission is not only to build physical infrastructure but, most importantly, to build God's kingdom through its people.

"Paul's interest was that any building should be used to build God's kingdom," Pastor Townend said.

"I believe this auditorium will foster academic discipline, sports, health and good habits. Ultimately, as an Adventist university, PAU will use this space to build the kingdom of God in the Pacific."

The auditorium will feature a 2000-seat main hall, three conference rooms which will accommodate 150 attendees each, office spaces, a canteen and a 100-space car park.

With a total projected cost of K25.85 million, the facility is expected to transform the campus's academic and social landscape.

making headlines

Pathfinder's big statement

Pathfinders in South America broke a record with the largest Pathfinder scarf ever produced measuring 60 by 30 metres, displayed using two cranes at a camporee in Brazil. Created in just one week by volunteers, the scarf aimed to spotlight the Pathfinder identity, inspire curiosity and invite more people to join the global movement of 1.5 million members spreading its message worldwide.—SAD



Faith in the river

A crocodile surfaced just metres away from Pastor Daniel Matanga during a baptism in Namibia's Linyanti River, but neither he nor the 57 baptismal candidates noticed as they prayed. Captured on video, the crocodile silently watched before slipping away, with Pastor Matanga later comparing it to Daniel's deliverance in the lions' den.—AR

A church every 3 hours

In 2023, a new Adventist church was established every 2.97 hours, marking the first time the rate has fallen below three hours. This rapid growth, highlighted by the General Conference, means eight new churches were planted daily, a leap from the six-per-day rate recorded in 2000.—ANN

Homelessness's toll

A decade-long study revealed that people experiencing homelessness have a mortality rate nearly double that of the general population, with injury and poisoning the leading causes of death. Tragically more than 12,500 people died within a year of seeking homelessness support, and more than 10 per cent of deaths among young women aged 25-34 were linked to homelessness.—Australian Institute of Health and Welfare



Sanitation boost

ADRA has successfully handed over fully completed sanitation facilities to four schools owned and operated by the United Church Education Authority in Western Province, Solomon Islands. The facilities, including separate toilets and showers for boys and girls, were funded by ADRA and implemented through the Turn on the Tap (TOTT) project. During the handover, Western Provincial Government health minister Kenneth George emphasised the importance of sanitation in schools. All principals said these facilities meant that students no longer need to use beaches or bushes for open defecation. They highlighted the new facilities will reduce absenteeism, prevent sanitation-related illnesses and improve students' overall wellbeing.—**Denver Newter**



Global health

Sydney Adventist Hospital administrator Savannah Jamora recently served as the director-general at the first in-person Global Model World Health Organisation Conference in Geneva, Switzerland. At the conference, Miss Jamora was able to spend time discussing global health with Dr Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, World Health Organisation (WHO) director-general and the principal global health advisor to the United Nations. She shared and discussed with him the important mission of Sydney Adventist Hospital and its commitment to wholistic healthcare for its patients and community. The conference consisted of an authentic simulation of the World Health Assembly, led by more than 350 students from over 50 countries where they were able to partake in the drafting of resolutions addressing some of the most important and pressing health issues that the world faces today.—**Kiera Bridcutt**



“PNG is in chaos”

Graduates of the Omaura Adventist School of Ministry in Eastern Highlands, Papua New Guinea, were challenged to bring positivity into the country's chaotic state. Chimbu Governor Noah Kool told the 88 graduates on Sunday, November 17, at the school's 28th graduation ceremony that “PNG is in chaos and Satan is starting to take control of PNG”. He urged the graduates to be steadfast and to help bring changes in the lives of people. Omaura trains ministers, especially for remote and rural ministry in Papua New Guinea.—**Jacqueline Wari**



Baptisms in Qld

Twelve people were baptised at the end of a recent two-week evangelism program held at Logan City Samoan Seventh-day Adventist Church in Berrinba, Queensland. The series was presented by the church pastor Samuelu Afamasaga, with visitors attending every evening. The baptisms were held on the last Sabbath, followed by a feast to celebrate the occasion.—**Giorgina Paletaoga**



Record-breaking grad

Pacific Adventist University (PAU) celebrated its largest-ever graduation ceremony on November 24, marking another milestone in its 40th year. A total of 319 students graduated, the highest number in the university's history.

The event was attended by Papua New Guinea Prime Minister James Marape, who delivered the keynote address, encouraging graduates to use their education to make a positive impact. Also in attendance were South Pacific Division president and PAU chancellor Pastor Glenn Townend, and newly appointed SPD education director Dr Elisapesi Manson, a former PAU dean of education.

Notable achievements included the graduation of Beiabue Teraakau Tiaon, reportedly the first Pacific Islander to earn a bachelor's degree in Midwifery, a significant milestone for healthcare education in the region. Additionally, Kenny Wantip (History) and Dulcie Motamota (Education) became the first PAU Graduate Teaching Assistants to earn Master of Philosophy degrees, graduating with distinction.

The university also conferred its first Master's degree in partnership with Fulton Adventist University College in Fiji, highlighting PAU's growing regional collaboration. Merit awards were presented to graduates with exceptional academic performance, recognising their dedication throughout their studies.—**Kym Piez**

have news to share?

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Pastor Vincent ordained

Pastor Morgan Vincent was ordained to ministry on October 5 at Avondale University Church in Cooranbong (NSW). Pastor Vincent has served in various roles across the North New South Wales Conference (NNSW), including as a teacher and chaplain at Port Macquarie Adventist School and as a pastor at Blue Haven and Forresters Beach churches. He currently serves as associate pastor at Avondale University church. Leading out the ordination service were South NSW Conference president Pastor Justin Lawman, NNSW president Pastor Cristian Copaceanu and secretary Pastor Abel Iorgulescu. "The affirmation from colleagues, mentors and the worldwide Church is incredibly encouraging," said Pastor Vincent. "I look forward to continuing this journey and contributing to the mission."—**Henrique Felix**



End of an era

Production of Sanitarium Peanut Butter has ended due to increases in production costs and reduced consumer demand. A spokesperson for Sanitarium Health Food Company said, "We remain committed to producing healthy, quality foods, however ongoing increases in manufacturing costs and a wider range of choice available to shoppers has over time seen reduced demand for our Peanut Butter products. After careful consideration, the difficult decision has been made to cease production of our Peanut Butter range. We understand that this is very sad news, and we sincerely apologise for any disappointment caused. We would like to take this opportunity to thank you for your support and loyalty for our Peanut Butter range over the years." Sanitarium has offered a range of peanut butters for more than 125 years.—**Record staff**

Waiting for my *wishlist*

Every child in the weeks leading up to Christmas will agree with me on one thing . . . waiting is the worst! Between the time a child writes out their Christmas wishlist and Christmas morning when they can finally open their presents, it feels like an eternity has passed! Though time seemingly passes slower for children than it does for adults, I believe that some of us, even as adults, still struggle to be patient.

There are many things in this life which we wait for. Some of us may be waiting to hear back from a job application, or waiting for the holidays to finally come around, waiting on results from an exam, waiting for their whirlwind Hallmark romance or waiting on news from our doctor. All of us are waiting for something. This time of waiting can often be filled with a sense of dread, anxiety or concern and it can even feel like a heavy weight is weighing us down . . . perhaps that is why it is called 'waiting' ("weight-ing").

When I was young, I remember writing out a list of things I wanted for my birthday (but being a Christmas article, let's just pretend it was a Christmas wishlist instead). It was a very detailed list! I had written down the description of each item, the stores where each item could be bought, links to each item

online, photos of the exact style and colour of each item I wanted, and the price value next to it. I was very thorough! I knew exactly what I wanted and I was determined to get it! As a disclaimer, I was not normally this exacting with my wishlists, but in previous years I'd asked for things which were unrealistic and never received the things I'd asked for, so this year I was determined to get everything.

Finally, the day came around. I was filled with blissful excitement as my eyes pored over the brightly wrapped gifts laid out before me. Glimmering bows, bright colours, shiny paper. . . As I slowly gazed at each gift, I started to recognise the shapes of items I had put on my wishlist. As I picked up each gift to unwrap the paper, I guessed what the gift would be before opening it and began mentally checking off items. To my great astonishment, I managed to correctly guess every single gift I received before opening them!

As exhilarating as it was to guess each item correctly, I came away from that experience surprisingly disappointed and deflated. I couldn't quite put my finger on the reason why—after all, I had received

everything I'd asked for! I should be overjoyed! Yet a lingering flatness remained.

For a few days I pondered over this strange experience, and slowly it began to dawn on me what had happened to leave me so underwhelmed: in guessing every present before I opened it, I had taken away my own wonder and joy in being surprised. I realised that a big proportion of the joy of giving and receiving gifts is actually in the suspense and anticipation of the unknown.

This got me thinking about waiting in an entirely different way.

For a long time, I hated the suspense of the unknown. I hated not knowing what God had in mind for my future. Being a naturally anxious person, I wanted some kind of assurance that things would turn out okay, or that the difficult experiences I was going through would come to an end: Loneliness. Depression. Anxiety. Back injury. Low self-esteem. Isolation. Neglect. Trust Issues. Trauma. Church politics. Unreciprocated love. Heartbreaks. Chronic stress. Burnout.

For someone only 25 years old, I feel



like I've lived through too much, while also feeling like my life has not yet really begun.

After years of trying experiences, Bible verses like Jeremiah 29:11 were starting to ring hollow for me. Did God really have a hope and a future for me or was this hope and future only to be found at Jesus' second coming? I wanted to know for certain that there would be a rainbow after my storms, not just more rain. Waiting became a chore and a burden instead of a source of excitement and hope.

But recently, I heard something which made me shift my mindset towards waiting. Someone asked, "If you knew that whatever you were waiting on God for would be resolved in a week, a month or a year, would you wait differently?" When we wait for things, whether known or unknown, the attitude with which we wait makes all the difference. HOW we wait matters. We can choose to wait for things with an attitude of frustration and impatience, or with excitement and hope.

I realised that my anxiety and worry over the future was unwarranted if I understood that God was the expert gift giver. He knows the burdens and desires of our hearts and seeks to give good gifts to His children. And perhaps the best gifts are those which carry a degree of uncertainty, being wrapped in the element of surprise.

God strikes a very delicate balance between providing us with something to look forward to and not spoiling our joy and anticipation in the period of waiting. God gives us many promises in His Word which we can cling to for assurance that we do indeed have a bright future, but God will not tell us what is inside every wrapped gift. Instead of giving us a detailed list of what to expect in the future, God gives us the gift of hope. Romans 15:13 says, "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit."

The wonderful thing about God's gift of hope is that it has a firm

foundation. Christmas is evidence of this secure hope, guaranteed through the descension of Christ from the throne of heaven to the manger in a stable, becoming a human marred and blighted by the curse of sin and dying the death we deserved so we might live the life He deserved. Jesus entered into our humanity, brokenness and hopelessness in order to give us true hope for our future, in this life and in the life to come.

Whatever you are waiting on this season, whether it be a heavy burden or a heart's desire, may you take this positive attitude towards waiting and rest in the hope which God gives. This hope is the true gift in our times of waiting. Trust that God does have a plan and a future for your life, but don't try to unwrap every gift before its time. . . Choose to wait differently, being filled with joy and peace through the power of the Holy Spirit, understanding that God's gifts are worth the wait.

Olivia Fairfax
assistant editor, *Adventist Record*.





The 10

Ellen White perspectives on Christmas

Ellen White's writings on Christmas in *The Adventist Home* suggest we should turn away from worldly traditions and focus on the birth of Christ and gratitude. However, she encourages churches to place trees for offerings inside and give meaningful gifts to one another that will bring us closer to God. The 10 points below summarise her thoughts on the subject.

1. Christmas as a holiday

The widely celebrated date of Christ's birth, December 25, is uncertain, as neither history nor Scripture confirms the date. God concealed this detail to ensure the honour belongs to Christ as Saviour, not the day itself.

2. The day not to be ignored

On December 25, guide the youth to honour Christ's birth by redirecting their focus from amusements to God's work and selfless giving, reflecting His example of sacrifice.

3. The interchange of gifts as tokens of affection

As the holiday season approaches, many consider gifts for loved ones as tokens of affection. Such gestures strengthen bonds and remind us we are remembered. It is right to give gifts if we don't forget God. Choose gifts that truly benefit others, like books that deepen understanding of God's Word.

4. Books for children are recommended

Money should be invested into books on present truth. Instead of spending money on novelty items such as candy or toys, consider providing meaningful reading materials.

5. Jesus not to be forgotten

As you plan gifts for one another, remember Jesus. Do not forget the sacrifice He made for our salvation. He should also receive tokens of our love and gratitude during this season through offerings and praise.

6. Christmas – a time to honour God

Rather than indulging in excess, let the holidays honour God. Teach children to focus on Christ, who left heaven to save us, and to prioritise their duty to God over gift-giving.

7. Turn thoughts of the children into a new channel

Choose thoughtful, less costly gifts and use the opportunity to teach your children about prioritising God's glory over worldly customs. Explain that giving to God's work, like the wise men, honours His gift of Jesus and fosters unselfishness.

8. "Shall we have a Christmas tree?"

God would be happy if a Christmas tree was in each church. On it should be offerings for the church. There is no sin in placing a tree in the church, however the sin lies in the motive behind the action and the use of the gifts placed on it.

9. A tree laden with offerings is not sinful

Parents shouldn't see an evergreen tree in church for Sabbath school as sinful as it can inspire charity and growth. While some may misuse such gatherings, others find them enriching.

10. Provide innocent enjoyment for the day

Rise to the occasion, ensuring Christmas is both joyful and marked by heaven's approval. Let all, rich and poor, contribute generously to God's work, making this a season of giving unlike any other.

ADRA SouperVan ministering to those most in need

The ADRA Community Connect Wauchope “SouperVan” has been serving hot soup and buns to the local community for almost three years. What began as a soup and bun outreach ministry of the Wauchope Seventh-day Adventist Church has evolved to also provide the most vulnerable with access to fresh produce, hygiene items, blankets, pet food, and crucially, a safe space and a listening ear.

“Over the course of this year, our vibrant team has worked tirelessly to share the love of Jesus with our community,” says Troy Eggleton, ADRA Community Connect Wauchope activity manager.

Amy’s experience with the SouperVan is one story that has stuck with Mr Eggleton and shows how crucial their ministry is in being the hands and feet of Jesus and meeting people where they’re at.

When Amy, who is in her 80s, first started coming to SouperVan, she was feeling desperate and depressed. Life had become extremely difficult financially and, due to her living circumstances, she was lonely and wondered how she could possibly keep going.

“Amy quickly became a regular,” says Mr Eggleton. “She started to stay back with us for our prayer at the end of our service evenings and expressed that she loved our prayers and being around happy and kind people. Amy then joined us for our church’s Depression and Anxiety Recovery Program and followed that up with our social evenings and Forgive to Live programs. Now, Amy regularly comes to church, stays for our lunches, and is eagerly awaiting the commencement of her Bible studies to prepare for baptism, expressing that she now sees our church family as her family.”

The SouperVan team provides 80–120 meals every Wednesday night. With Christmas around the corner, SouperVan has made plans to ensure their volunteers have a much-needed break without leaving their regulars in a tough spot.

“Our team is currently working

diligently in a commercial kitchen to prepare 250 meals which will be distributed during our final week of service before our break,” says Mr Eggleton. The meals, which will be cryopacked, consist of plant-based chicken and roast vegetables.

While a meal helps to meet physical needs, the team recognises the importance of bringing joy at Christmas time.

“In addition to this meal, our local IGA have generously donated toys for our younger children that attend SouperVan, while members of our local council have offered to provide some special fruit including mangoes to add to the meal,” Mr Eggleton says. “Our local Wauchope church have also put together some non-perishable hampers to be distributed. Hopefully, all of these provisions will help make our two-week absence a little easier to bear for those doing it so tough.”

Mr Eggleton expressed that, in every moment in SouperVan’s ministry where they identified a need, God provided.

“We are so blessed to serve a God who understands our needs and desires and is willing to provide for us as we serve our local community,” he says. “Consequently, our local community is gaining a better understanding of who Seventh-day Adventists are, who Jesus is and what ADRA does in our communities.”

Thank you to the partners without whom the work of ADRA Community Connect Wauchope “SouperVan” would not be possible: ADRA Community Centre Macquarie Fields, Aussie Battlers, \$5 Coffee Charity, Forgive to Live, FRRR, “Give Hope Today” Op Shop, Hastings Co-op SUPA IGA Wauchope, Nedley’s Depression and Anxiety Recovery Program, OzHarvest, Slade Refrigerated Transport, Wauchope Rotary Club, and all the regular local businesses and community members who support this ministry.

Tony Eggleton/ADRA Australia



Christmas in Gaza

Who will you bring to the table?

It was 4am, December 24, 1997. With mounting excitement I drove through the deserted back streets of Beit Lahia, heading to the northern border crossing at Beit Hanoun to collect my parents and brother. We were spending Christmas together, and they had made the effort to travel all the way to Palestine. Like my father said, “When else would we have an opportunity to visit Gaza?” Working at the Middle East Union, my father was a seasoned traveller, missionary and pastor. He had been to most countries in the Middle East and Northern Africa, but the Gaza Strip had been off limits.

I was halfway through a six-month work assignment in Gaza, training paediatric nurses. I had been welcomed with open arms and treated with dignity and respect by my Palestinian colleagues and students, and made to feel part of their community. The hospitality of the Arabs is second to none. When I was interviewed for my role, I made it no secret that I was a Seventh-day Adventist, and that I would not work Sabbaths. I was told this was not an issue, however, under no circumstances was I to discuss religion and my faith. I accepted this but reasoned silently that if I was asked, I would share as much as God allowed.

My colleagues worked six days a week and had Sundays off. After some time, my students noticed that I was conspicuously missing every Saturday. A few weeks before Christmas, three of my students cornered me at college. Little Atta, with his round jovial face and welcoming attitude, approached me with two others in tow. Little Atta got straight to the point. “We understand that you have Saturdays off because of your religion,” he said, as three pairs of eyes stared at me intensely. “Are you Jewish?”

I was taken aback. I knew that the next thing I said would be the difference between me staying in Gaza or having to leave. Praying silently, I smiled, appearing calm despite my racing heart.

“No, I am not Jewish,” I chuckled. “But I do keep the Sabbath. I am a Christian. You do know that Jesus was a Jew and that all Christians kept Sabbath until it was changed to the Sunday?”

They looked surprised. Words from my interview echoed in my head: *Do not discuss religion*. I realised that this was a God moment, and He would give me the words to say.

“Christians are not all like the Hollywood movies,” I carried on. “The church I belong to has very similar values to Islam.”

Over the next few minutes, we discussed what I believed in, and I carefully pointed out the visible similarities between the Adventist Church and Islam. While I prayed silently, they went off in a huddle to discuss what I had said.

Finally, little Atta returned with a smile. “We have decided that you are OK. (Phew!) You are a Christian Muslim,” he said with the biggest smile on his face. And just like that I was fully accepted.

My family and I had the pleasure of spending Christmas with my Palestinian friends and “sitting at their table” for Christmas lunch. As we sat on cushions, surrounding the meal spread on a plastic tablecloth on the floor, I reflected that this was how Jesus and His disciples might have shared a meal. In the very land where Jesus was born, and had become a refugee as evil forces tried to destroy the only hope our planet had for survival, my family and friends were fed and served by people who also were refugees. The fact that they celebrated



a Christian holiday with us, out of respect, showed what calibre of humans we were with. There was no them and us, just a group of friends celebrating the birth of our Saviour, with a meal.

I strongly believe God puts people in our lives at certain times for specific reasons. Roll on 27 years and I have lost touch with all of my friends and colleagues, bar one. A student nurse in one of the wards was one of the few who could read and write English fluently, and we managed to stay in touch over the years.

I have often wondered why I stayed in touch with him. Over the past year God has revealed why. After the October 7 attacks by Hamas and the brutal retaliation by Israel, life in Gaza changed dramatically. We have all seen the news and followed the war, and we all have strong opinions on who should be held accountable for what actions.

Jesus did not ask us to argue over which political view was right. He asked us to love our neighbour as ourselves, to feed the hungry, and to look after the widows and the orphans. All of them! Israeli and Palestinian.

While I have friends on both sides of this conflict, my Palestinian friends are the ones starving, trapped and in need of food. My friend is currently in a senior nursing role based in the north. When many were told to evacuate to the south, he and his family stayed behind. He and his colleagues stayed to serve their people and to ensure medical services remained in the north. With no income and minimal access to expensive food, there was no guarantee of survival.

Just before last Christmas, they ran out of food and money, and we felt impressed that we needed to act. So, we started a

fundraiser to feed them. What was meant to be a one-off donation has become a year-long project. As my friend and his family "sit at our table", he shares stories and updates, and we share God's love. It has not been just about sending money, it has been as much about sending hope and encouragement, sharing Bible promises, praying over his family and neighbours. And when our funds have dried up, we have prayed for God to provide, and every time someone has donated just the right amount to keep this family fed. Not only has his family survived but he has fed the most vulnerable in his community with the funds.

As our year-long "Christmas meal" enters its second year, I am not concerned about ending this meal, as God provides. My only concern is, have we shared God's love to the point that my friend sees Jesus in us?

I encourage you to consider who will "sit at your table" this Christmas, and would you consider embracing them and loving them for as long as God places them in your life? There are so many hungry souls around us, and Jesus died to save them all. Let us not allow prejudice and politics to get in the way of serving our neighbours, even those we are not drawn to. This Christmas, it is my prayer, that we ask God to place people in our lives who we can bring to the table and let us actively disciple them into the arms of Jesus.

Nicola Bender

attends Gosford church, NSW.

If you were stuck on a desert island for the rest of your life and could choose only one book of the Bible to read forever, which one would you choose? Perhaps you'd choose Psalms. It's the longest, so you'd have the most reading material. Or maybe you'd choose one of the gospels, with all the stories of Jesus. This question was asked by an interviewer on a podcast I heard recently. The answer? Isaiah. That's the book I would choose, as Isaiah has been my favourite book of the Bible for several years now, but the answer that the podcaster gave intrigued me: because there's Christmas in Isaiah.

When we think of the Christmas story, our minds probably turn to Matthew, Luke, or another Gospel. Most are familiar with the story of the angel Gabriel appearing to the young virgin Mary, followed by the trek to Bethlehem and the harrowing birth in a stable. Don't forget the manger, or the shepherds and wise men, the beautiful, neatly wrapped nativity story played out in figures displayed on mantlepieces and in front gardens. It really is the greatest story this world has ever heard. However, we don't often look to the Old Testament to tell us this narrative. Christmas is the season of the New Testament, a time when we pretend the difficult chapters of Judges and the prophets don't exist. You wouldn't be alone if you struggled with some of the heavier chapters of the OT, but what's exciting is that if you look closely, everything in the first testament points to the second. As Jesus proclaims in John 5:39, "the Scriptures point to me!"

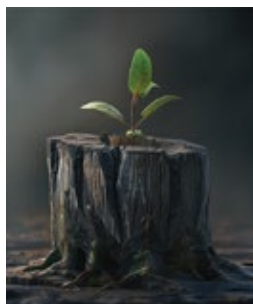
So let's take a close look at the book of Isaiah. Every time I read this book some new promise jumps out at me. I have to admit, however, I sometimes just read the second half. See, for those of you unfamiliar with Isaiah, chapters 1-39 are filled with the typical "woe to Israel, judgement upon God's people", type of prophecy which can seem really disheartening. From chapter 39 to the end, however, the tone changes to the beautiful theme of redemption. But the first part of Isaiah is important, the book as a whole giving us the most complete picture of Jesus in the whole Old Testament, as well as being a metaphor itself for Jesus' birth, death and resurrection. The name Isaiah even means the salvation of the Lord. So if you want the big picture, you can't just skip the difficult parts. In fact, it's in the midst of all those difficult parts that the nativity story first shows up.

Let's set the scene. Isaiah chapter 7. Israel is caught up in the panic of the threat of war. God's chosen people have turned away from Him yet again. Ahaz was king, a man of incredible evil who turned to foreign alliances instead of relying on the Lord. It's among this fear and darkness that Isaiah prophesies, "The virgin will conceive and give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (verse 14). Chapter 9 has a similar theme. This chapter begins in hope—the promise of a great light shining "on those living in the land of deep darkness" (verse 2), and a child born, a son, called "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (verse 6), who "will reign on David's throne . . . with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever" (verse 7). Chapter 9 concludes with the wickedness and hypocrisy of the Israelites and the suffering they will endure as a result, so we see that even as God is condemning the actions of His people, He gives us hope, stark against this backdrop of darkness.

Finding Christmas

Isaiah has this beautiful promise of something out of nothing. Chapter 11 says, "A shoot will come up from the stump of Jesse" (verse 1). What is a stump? The remains of a dead tree. But a shoot coming from a stump indicates life! Life, coming from death. Also sprinkled throughout this book are water metaphors: "Water will gush forth in the wilderness" (35:6), "I will make rivers flow on bar ren heights" (41:18), and "I will pour water on the thirsty land, and streams on the dry ground" (44:3). The people in Israel knew what it was like to live in the desert. They knew that water equalled life. Here, God is promising over and over again to make water flow in those dry places. Something from nothing, life from death. It's not just water, either: "Junipers in the wasteland" (41:19), "Grass in a meadow" (44:4), and my personal favourite, "a crown of beauty instead of ashes" (61:3). All of these beautiful promises, written around 700 years before the birth of Jesus, who calls Himself the Living Water in the New Testament.

That's what Christmas is all about. Water from the desert. Beauty from nothing. A child born into darkness, the hope of ages. Now, another Christmas is rolling around, 2000 years after these prophecies came true, and nearly 3000 years since Isaiah penned these words. It seems that the years go by so quickly for us, houses and stores decorated once more, some of you probably with kids already begging to know what presents they're going to get. Here's a thought: Sabbath comes around once a week, and while we rest and recuperate, we also are reminded that it is a day in which we remember God's promises. And while the Christmas celebrated today sometimes seems very far from the concepts I'm talking about here, why not let this season be a sort of Sabbath: a time of rest and recuperation (buy all the presents beforehand so that it's actually true), a time of joy, to spend with loved ones, a time to go Christmas light driving and sing Silent Night. And also a time to remember the story that Isaiah outlines for us. We still live in deep darkness, but the promise has come true, and we can look at this beautiful prophetic book with the understanding of what Christ has done for us and the hope of a future in which He returns. The hope that in darkness and condemnation, we have an everlasting promise of redemption.



Ashley Jankiewicz
assistant editor, *Adventist Record*.

in Isaiah





It was a silent night, a starry night, all was calm, all was bright. The gifts had been eased into their bejewelled bag and carefully placed onto the beasts of burden that would carry them across the landscape. The only sounds were the soft footfalls across the vast plains towards the west. All at once there was a soft rustling followed by the clearing of a voice.

"Huh, Hmmm, well I would just like to say what a privilege it is to be travelling with such auspicious companions," said a rich, deep voice from a vermilion box. "Although we have all been treated with the utmost of care, I feel I need to make a statement regarding our present situation, to, a-hem, make sure we all know our place in this little venture. My name is Gold and I think I should just let you know right from the outset that wherever we are headed must be a place most worthy of me. You see I am extremely valuable. Indeed, I am very difficult to find deep underground, but when I have been

unearthed, I am the most precious of metals. I am pure—I don't tarnish or rust and, I might add, I have two magnificent words to describe me . . . malleable and ductile!"

There was stunned silence from the other gifts, so Gold, realising how much he had enthralled his audience, went on.

"Meaning of course that I can be moulded into any shape, and I can be stretched out long and thin—just 1 gram of me can produce 2 kilometres of wire! I really am remarkable. That is why I am so valuable and why kings and queens love me—I can be shaped into the most beautiful of crowns. I guess that wherever we are going it must be to honour some noble king in an exquisite castle. I really do feel honoured. Consequently, I must state categorically that I am the BEST gift."

"Well, well," piped up a sweet, well-modulated voice, emanating from an alabaster bottle, couched within an ermine box. "Very fine words indeed, however I think you miss the mark. I am Frankincense and quite frankly I feel I have a claim

the BEST GIFT

to the honour of the BEST gift. You see, Gold, you may be flexible and difficult to dig up, however you have no idea how extreme it is to extract me. To procure me, one must go to specific limestone deserts and there find a particular ever-green tree. A 12cm gash is placed in the tree and then left for three months. After this time white tear drops will have formed from the gash. They are carefully spliced from the tree and then prepared in many ways involving heat to extract my delectable perfume. Furthermore, you may be a desired gift for kings, but I, dear Gold, am a gift for God as I am used to represent the prayers of the people to God, by the priests, and so my scent ascends to heaven—way above anything on this earth! Therefore, I can only imagine that we must be traveling to a magnificent temple where the high priest awaits my precious scent to pray to God. That would make me the BEST gift!”

“Now wait just one moment!” bristled a shrill, bitter voice from a bottle deep within a box of carved oak. “It’s Myrrh here and I’ve been listening to all of this and quite frankly (begging your pardon, Frankincense), you both should be ashamed of yourselves boasting about being the best. Now Frankincense, I am every bit as difficult to extract from a tree as you are, and consequently just as expensive. I’ll admit that when harvested I look like lumps of dirt rather than milky, white tear drops, and I am also ready to admit that I am bitter, not at all sweet smelling as you, Frankincense, or as malleable as you, Gold. But I am good for something—I heal. Now if you have a sore throat or rotting teeth, swill me around in your mouth and bingo, you will be healed. If you have sores on your body, make a paste out of me and rub it in well. Then, snap, you will be healed. And, I might add, I can also do something amazing when people die—I can preserve their skin and slow down the decaying process! Pretty good if I do say so myself. You know what? The people will love me more than you two as I can restore their health. To be honest, if you haven’t got your health, what have you got? So, I must be the BEST gift for all humanity. I think we must be heading to some grand hospital or maybe one of those beautiful Roman Baths where I will be given to some great emperor who needs healing.”

The gifts discussed their attributes loud and long for the duration of their journey. Then they fell silent as each pondered their worth and destination.

They felt they had equal claim to being the best gift but also agreed that each had something of worth to give. The question was who were they being given to: a king, a priest or a healer?

The starlight shone brighter, then the beasts of burden halted. Hands pulled down the jewel-encrusted bag and slowly each gift was drawn out. The gifts blinked and looked around. They saw a very crude dwelling—certainly no marbled halls or golden candlesticks or velvet curtains befitting their station as the best gifts. Then they saw who they were to be bestowed upon. A baby—not very old either—being held by a mother with adoration in her eyes. They were shocked. Certainly, he was a lovely baby, but really, a baby?

The first gift giver placed the gift of gold onto the dusty floor in front of the Babe and bowed low. “I bring You gold, as befits a king, for You are the King of Kings.”

The second gift giver placed the gift of frankincense onto the dusty floor in front of the Babe and bowed low. “I bring You frankincense, as befits a high priest for the people. The scent will ascend as prayers to God in heaven to cover the pride and sinful lives of people here on earth.”

The third gift giver placed the gift of myrrh onto the dusty floor in front of the Babe, he too bowed low. “I bring You myrrh. You will not only be a great healer, but You will also be a great sacrifice—One who will bring healing and who will save us all from our sins.”

All three gift givers remained prostrate on the floor as the gifts gazed up to the Babe in wonder and awe. It was then they realised that they were in the presence of truly the best gift: Jesus.

Samantha Ibbott

Primary teacher and writing coordinator, Central Coast, NSW.

Hello Kids!

God gave
Himself to us!



GOD IN THE CENTRE

In Mary's response to God's call we sense Mary's humility and her understanding that all we accomplish here on the earth is by God's power and to His glory. She talks about the great things God has done for her (Luke 1:49), His mighty deeds (verses 51-53), and His mercy to His people (verses 50, 54). She is willing to let Jesus be her reason for living. He fills us with the power to do great things for Him.

Memory Verse Activity

CROSS OUT ALL THE LETTER 'Q's. Write down all the leftover letters. Start from 1 (the inside circle) and then on to 2 & 3.



Start Here

(PSALM 25:4, 5).

How to host the ultimate

vegetarian BBQ

The iconic backyard BBQ has long been the domain of the meat-lovers, but the rise of vegetarianism and plant-based eating has seen veggies become the star of the show.

The key to a good BBQ is finding the balance between protein, plenty of veggies, and substantial grain and carbohydrate dishes. Tick all the boxes with a well-planned menu filled with extra flavour from herbs, spices, pickles, sauces and condiments. Here are some top tips to host a very veggie BBQ:

Mix and match

Just like any dinner party, make sure you provide plenty of flavours and options. Yes, it's a BBQ, but that doesn't mean you're only serving grilled veggies. Consider other cold dishes that will support the grill—this is where you can get your grains and legumes in too.

Why not try: A fresh Caprese salad, borlotti bean salad, Moroccan chickpea salad or a peanut hummus.

Involve your guests

The best part of entertaining is spending time with your family and friends, so get them involved. Plan a menu with dishes that encourage guests to make it their own way, so they can comfortably cater for their own needs.

Why not try: Veggie skewers, jackfruit tacos or plant-based burgers.



Classic swap

The best thing about a vegetarian BBQ is that you can still enjoy burgers and sausages, but just look for plant-based alternatives.

Why not try: Lentil patties, corn and coriander fritters or vegan carrot dogs.

Go for meat alternatives

If you don't want to make your own, don't stress. There are plenty of ready-made meat-free alternatives stocking supermarket shelves.

Why not try: Some options from Veggie Delights that will satisfy any BBQ guest, from koftas to patties, sausages and fillets.

More than veggies

Throwing some fruit on the BBQ may seem foreign, but the char-grilling process brings out a delicious caramelisation that'll take your dessert to the next level.

Why not try: Grilled fruit kebabs/ cinnamon sprinkled pineapple rings or apple slices drizzled with maple syrup.

For more delicious plant-based recipe ideas go to www.sanitarium.com.



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