

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publications • October-December 1991



Proverbs

Where death is often preferred to life.

Humberto Noble Alexander stood naked and freezing before his captors in the stark, slab-gray interrogation room. Fairness and justice meant nothing here.

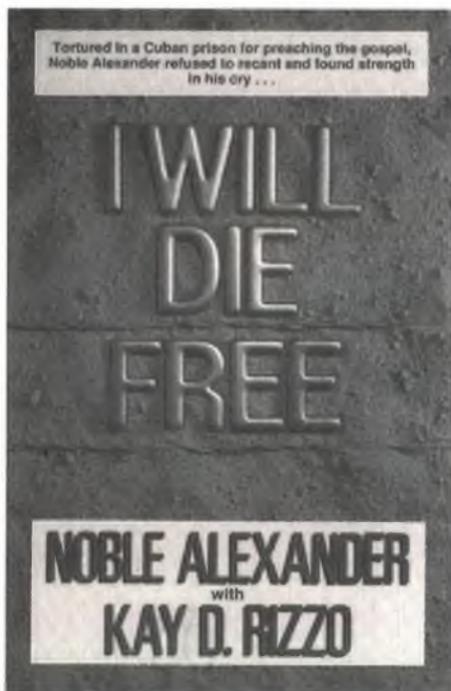
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Editorial office

Department of
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Silver Spring, MD 20904

Place orders with

Pacific Press Pub. Assn.
P.O. Box 7000
Boise, ID 83707

Staff

Editorial Director: Erwin R. Gane
Editor: Gary B. Swanson
Managing Editor: Laurell Peterson
Editorial Assistant: Shirlee J. Ingram

Reading Committee

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Frank Holbrook	Ted Wick
Israel Leito	LuAnn Wolfe
Nina Martinez	

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Send editorial inquiries to COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A.

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This Quarter's Artist



Pat Wick was over 20 before she attempted to do any artwork. She was over 30 before her first child was born and didn't graduate from college until she was over 40. She's over 50 now and doing graduate work in clinical psychology. She believes that if you are over 60 and using this quarterly, there is indeed hope for renewal in the world.

Communication is her forte, no matter whether it is in person, on her weekly radio program, in books she's authored, or in attempting to limit her comments with clients to "mmmhmmm." She hopes these simple drawings speak to you.

Contributor Profile

Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan

Lesson 2

Campus Editor: P. B. Morrison

Contributors:

Bruce Closser

Maybell Laluna

David Smith

Lynn Davies

Lisa Parry

Melissa Spencer

Michelle Dodge

Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts

Lesson 3

Campus Editor: Richard Trott

Contributors:

Loay Aziz

Donna Dietz

Joe Kilburn

Bonnie J. Becraft

Patricia Guzak

Pauline Phillips

Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland

Lesson 4

Campus Editor: George Gainer

Contributors:

Eddie Braga

Kathy Hecht

Ivan Omana, Jr.

Leslie Headley

Chester N. Hitchcock

Gnanamuthu S. Wilson

Loma Linda University Riverside, California

Lesson 5

Campus Editor: Steve Daily

Contributors:

Peter Cress

Michael Kinnen

Kent Rogers

Steve Daily

K. Elaine Pascual

Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama

Lesson 6

Campus Editor: Bernard Benn

Contributors:

Derek C. Bowe

Sammy R. Browne

Karen I. Tucker

Allen A. Brown

James H. Melancon

Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas

Lesson 8

Campus Editor: Victor Brown

Contributors:

Victor Brown

Terry Johnson

Jea Hyun Lee

Kandi Dye

Jim Landelius

Roy Lowe

Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska

Lesson 11

Campus Editor: Rich Carlson

Contributors:

Rich Carlson

L. Eric Galvez

Tammy Huntsman

Jonathan Dale

Shelly Gonzales

Jodi McKellip

Special Contributors

Lincoln E. Steed, editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press Publishing Association, Nampa, Idaho, wrote Lesson 1.

Peter Chiomenti, author of Lesson 10 and portions of Lesson 7, is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

John Stark, general manager of Howell Mountain Enterprises (the business arm of Pacific Union College), wrote a portion of Lesson 7.

William Cleveland, Jr., copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, wrote a portion of Lesson 9.

Norma Sahlin, director of development for Home Study International, wrote a portion of Lesson 9.

Gerald Wheeler, an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland, is the author of Lessons 12 and 13 and a part of Lesson 3.

Getting the Most Out of the Collegiate Quarterly

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young-adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

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

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

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

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention 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. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

How-To (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

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

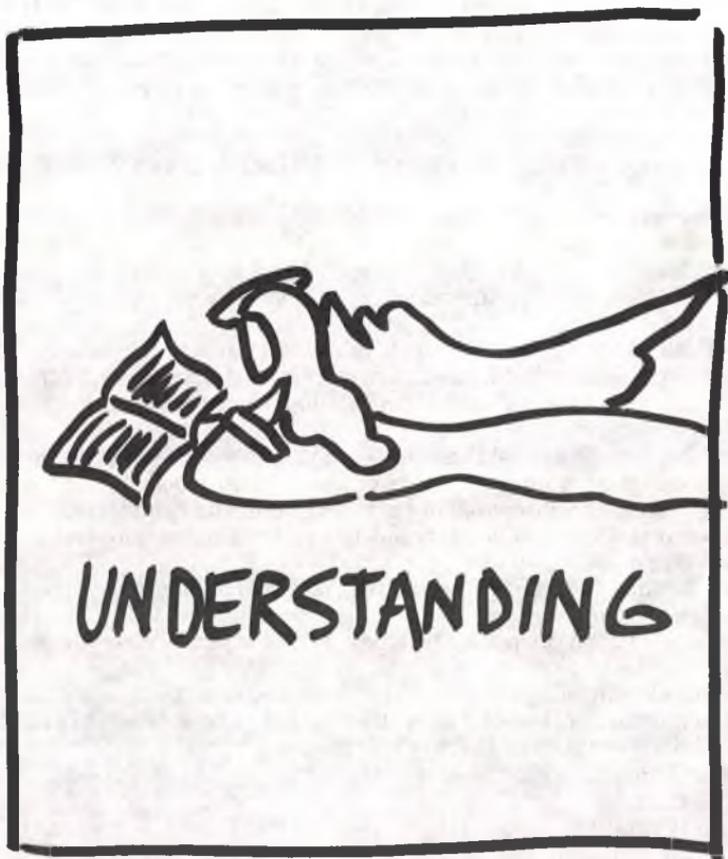
5. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY 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.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions, are expressed.

Lesson 1, September 29–October 5

Your Choice; Your Destiny



“Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course” (Prov. 15:21, NIV).

Sunday, September 29

The Path to God

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 1:2-6

Blind John Milton dictated the last lines of his epic poem *Paradise Lost* in 1667. Even today it stands as one of the greatest utterances in the English language.

At times the style is obscure and the language archaic, but never have the words of his opening premise seemed less than titanic. His purpose, he avowed, was "that to the height of this great argument I may assert eternal Providence, and justify the ways of God to men" (*Paradise Lost*, bk. 1, line 22).

Proverbs takes up an even more profound task—to explain in a most practical way to men the path to knowing God and His ways. Proverbs does not seek to justify God at all. If any book of the Bible tackles that task, it is Job—written long before Solomon's time and well accepted as a literary treatise on the justice and sovereignty of the Creator.

Proverbs is a book of instruction—a set of study notes for the student of practical godly living.

And the subject, although broken down into dozens of practical examples, is consistently wisdom.

If we simply accepted the dictionary definition of *wisdom*, "following the soundest course of action," we might allow for a few competitors to Proverbs. To mention one, Benjamin Franklin amused and educated many of his countrymen through the sayings he wrote in *Poor Richard's Almanac*. Even today some confuse his proverbs with biblical ones. Alexander Pope also set down many quotable proverbs, such as "a little learning is a dangerous thing." And of course there are others. But only Proverbs consistently equates wisdom with knowing God and obeying His commands.

The early New Testament church had much trouble with the gnostics—a group that espoused Eastern mysticism and claimed that knowledge of God was secret, hidden, and obscure. They ignored the concept of knowledge presented in Proverbs—wisdom and knowledge come from obeying God and seeking after Him. Our generation prides itself on being practical and down-to-earth. Proverbs should speak directly to us today.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Monday, September 30

The Counsel to “Wise Up”

LOGOS

Prov. 1:1-7; 2:1-11; 4:5-7; 21:3;
James 1:5

A Need Established

“Wisdom cries aloud in the street; in the markets she raises her voice; on the top of the walls she cries out; at the entrance of the city gates, she speaks: How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? Give heed to my reproof; behold I will pour out my thoughts to you; I will make my words known to you” (Prov. 1:20-23, RSV).

This strident section of Proverbs 1 must have flown in the face of the secret pagan religions. Most held that wisdom or intimate knowledge of the deity was reserved for a select few and obtained in secret. Here the wisdom that God encourages is personified into a pure and noble woman standing in public places and calling all to heed her admonition.

In terms similar to those used by Peter in his epistle, wisdom personified rebukes the scoffers for refusing to “wise up” and acknowledge their course and consequently predicts “panic” and “calamity” for them. In fact, she says that those who “hated knowledge” will not find God in their moment of trial. Why? Perhaps their understanding of God becomes so unclear that they do not know how to find Him!

The wise “choose the fear of the Lord,” “accept His counsel,” and take note of “reproofs” (verses 29, 30). They “will dwell secure and will be at ease, without dread of evil” (verse 33), a concept that is echoed in Isaiah: “Thou dost keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on thee” (26:3). If not a description of wisdom, this could well be that of the truly wise man.

How serious am I in my search for wisdom?

What am I doing to become more wise?

The Getting of Wisdom

“For the Lord gives wisdom; from his mouth come knowledge and understanding; he stores up sound wisdom for the upright; he is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice and preserving the way of his saints. Then you will understand righteousness and justice and equity, every good path” (Prov. 2:6-9).

God is the source of all wisdom. We are told elsewhere in Proverbs that the “fear” of God is the initial point of wisdom. Godly fear has more to do with acknowledgment of God’s sovereign power, reverence for His attributes, and an obedient respect than it has to do with terror. Terror is ultimately reserved for those who do not become wise in the ways of God.

“The wisdom so highly exalted

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

in the book of Proverbs is practical sagacity such as reveals itself in the ideal moral and religious character. The various aspects of wisdom describe the characteristics of one who has met the standards of God. The wisdom described by Solomon is comprehensive in that it enters into all phases of practical life. . . . In the experience of one who has true wisdom, every thought and act has reference to the requirements of life.”*

The Bible is replete with promises of God that are guaranteed by His very character. When God says He stands ready to grant this all-embracing wisdom, we should open our hearts to believe and receive.

Solomon was not inherently wise. Without God he was despotic, suicidal, and licentious. We must never forget, as he did for so long, that his wisdom was the direct answer to his prayer for wisdom to discern between good and evil (see 1 Kings 3:9). God still longs to hear such prayers, of that we may be sure.

The practical wisdom of Proverbs may, in a sense, be equated with the terms *righteousness* (practical, not legal) and *holiness*. True wisdom comes only when the searcher turns actively toward God and opens the heart to the enabling power of God’s Holy Spirit.

How do we know wisdom is really attainable?

Is my life dedicated to searching out the wisdom of God?

What can I do to learn more of God?

This One Thing I Do

“If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives to all men generously and without reproaching, and it will be given him. But let him ask in faith, with no doubting, for he who doubts is like a

wave of the sea that is driven and tossed by the wind. For that person must not suppose that a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways, will receive anything from the Lord” (James 1:5-8).

We are almost right back at the scene of wisdom personified here. Again we have the warning to those who try halfheartedly for wisdom. God wants us to be serious about Him. He expects us to cherish the idea of wisdom. Halfhearted endeavors seldom succeed in any field. The spiritual battle demands our all.

Proverbs 1-4 keeps hammering away at the necessity for true wisdom. The rewards of wisdom are repeatedly described: long life, honor, security, God’s favor—practical daily rewards. The results of a lack of wisdom are also portrayed graphically. On the evidence of Proverbs, wisdom is most desirable.

But Proverbs goes a little further. It shows a God many readers reserve in their minds exclusively for New Testament sensitivity—a God reproving those whom He loves, delighting in us as His sons and daughters. Of course this picture of God is eternal, but it is well to see it here in Proverbs. We need to hunger and thirst after wisdom—after righteousness. We need to follow the light of God’s character that shines along the path of the righteous (see Prov. 4:18). We need to persevere in our search for wisdom. For we have the promise that the wise shall shine as the stars.

Why do many people see a distinction between the wisdom outlined in Proverbs and that encouraged in the New Testament?

How will being “wise” affect my daily life?

*The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 2, p. 948.

Tuesday, October 1

Is Proverbs Too Simplistic?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 3:5-7

Perhaps Proverbs is too practical a book for most people. Its plain utterances can seem quaint and simplistic. Yet a close reading shows the depth of spirituality in the instructions toward wisdom and a true search for righteousness.

Ellen White speaks of the tendency of the human mind to think that "a mere assent to the truth constitutes righteousness. In all human experience a theoretical knowledge of the truth has been proved to be insufficient for the saving of the soul. It does not bring forth the fruits of righteousness.

"The righteousness which Christ taught is conformity of heart and life to the revealed will of God. Sinful men can become righteous only as they have faith in God and maintain a vital connection with Him. Then true godliness will elevate the thoughts and ennoble the life."¹

"One reason why many theologians have no closer understanding of God's word is, they close their eyes to truths which they do not wish to practice. An understanding of Bible truth depends not so much on the power of intellect brought to the search

as on the singleness of purpose, the earnest longing after righteousness."²

By ourselves we can never find absolute knowledge, absolute insight. The human mind is too limited. But there is a way. It lies in the direction of the Source of all wisdom. "There is only one way in which this knowledge can be obtained. We can attain to an understanding of God's word only through the illumination of that Spirit by which the word was given. . . .

"We shall advance in true spiritual knowledge only as we realize our own littleness and our entire dependence upon God; but all who come to the Bible with a teachable and prayerful spirit; to study its utterances as the word of God, will receive divine enlightenment. . . .

"When we are truly seeking to do God's will, the Holy Spirit takes the precepts of His word and makes them the principles of the life, writing them on the tablets of the soul."³

REACT

What is the difference between theoretical and practical righteousness?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 309, 310.

2. *The Great Controversy*, p. 599.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 703-705.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Hard to Ignore

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 2:3-5

"The proverbs of Solomon are invaluable because they most clearly teach the importance of correct and immovable principles in the heart; conduct full of nobleness and integrity in every walk of life; the necessity and usefulness of self-discipline; and the importance of bringing every purpose as well as every act to the test of God's holy Word."¹

Proverbs is far more than a collection of wise, pithy sayings from another age. Proverbs is relevant to us today.

"Anyone who reads Proverbs is impressed with the high ethical standard of its teachings. . . . A belief in the one true and living God who rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked permeates the book from cover to cover."²

Wisdom and *knowledge* are key words in Proverbs. They cannot be understood apart from God. Proverbs 1:7 says, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (RSV).

"The fear of the Lord is the foundation, knowledge is the imposed superstructure. He who does not reverentially trust in God knows nothing yet as he ought to know. His knowledge is partial and distorted. The knowledge of God—His character and plans, His

hatred of sin, His law of holiness, His way of mercy—is more excellent than all that an unbelieving philosopher has attained. It is a knowledge more deeply laid, more difficult of attainment, more fruitful, and more comprehensive, than all that philosophers know. Men speak of the stupendous effects which knowledge, in the department of mechanical philosophy, has produced on the face of the world, and in the economy of human life; but the permanence of these acquisitions depends on the authority of moral laws in the consciences of men. The moral encircles and controls the economic in the affairs of men. The knowledge of God is the root of knowledge."³

Our world today is arguably a place of much learning but of little knowledge. Too many have lost sight of the Source of knowledge presented in Proverbs.

REACT

1. As I look around, what evidences do I see of a world wise in technical knowledge but lacking in true spiritual knowledge?

2. Christian ethics should be based on absolutes. Where do I find my absolutes?

1. Joseph S. Exell, *The Biblical Illustrator* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House), vol. 5, p. 2.

2. *The Interpreter's Bible* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1955), vol. 4, p. 777.

3. *The Biblical Illustrator*, *ibid.*, p. 7.

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Thursday, October 3

The Wisdom Walk

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 3:7

This is the age of knowledge. We are surrounded by a sea of information. Yesterday's facts are now outmoded—superseded by new discoveries. It has become impossible to keep up with all the advances in learning. Even within select fields of endeavor, experts, of necessity, must focus their learning. In some ways experts know more about less.

Is this the case with the Bible, the facts about God?

On one level it might seem so. God's revelation *is* progressive. We know that not until Jesus came to the earth did the types and symbols of the Old Testament find true meaning. Although the diligent of all ages saw in them reflections of the God they served, they could not comprehend the reality of the Son of God incarnate. And God dealt gently with those early generations—revealing Himself progressively, point by point, promise by promise.

But we must never make the mistake of thinking that yesterday's developing truth, yesterday's revelation from God, is today's error. God never changes. His self-revelation is constant—the degree of knowledge about God must change, but not its essential character.

Some see in Proverbs a mecha-

nistic concept of obedience and faith. They have fallen for the twentieth-century trap of presuming that everything now is truth and all before, error. God in Proverbs matches exactly God as revealed in Jesus Christ. But to us today, Proverbs should be even richer in meaning. We understand more fully just how the mind of God, the "wisdom walk" of Proverbs, is to be created in us.

We need to beware of modern gnosticism: an elitist idea that saving knowledge is obscure, that truth hinges on fine translations of original Greek and Hebrew or is guaranteed by certain degrees or comes to light only through superior intelligence.

The promise of Proverbs is plain and encouraging. "Yes, if you cry out for insight and raise your voice for understanding, if you seek it like silver and search for it as for hidden treasures; then you will understand the fear of the Lord and find the knowledge of God" (Prov. 2:3-5, RSV).

REACT

1. How can I make sure that the search for wisdom has priority in my life?
2. What characteristics of wisdom do Christians need today?
3. If wisdom can be equated with godliness, what are some attributes of God's character that we can learn?

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

The Fortunate Fall?

OPINION

Key Texts: 1 Cor. 1:26, 27; 1 Pet. 2:21, 22.

Some years ago theologians presented the concept of what some call “the fortunate fall.” Simply stated, this rather convenient idea suggests that Adam and Eve will ultimately be better off as a result of their sin. Though they betrayed God, they learned firsthand the results of sin and were better able to appreciate God’s love.

A dangerous theory. Few subscribe to it. Of course, many of us nontheologians are more than a little titillated by others’ tales of terrible deeds committed before conversion. How often have we listened open-eyed and slack-jawed to a youth rally presentation from some young evangelist lately delivered from the drug culture. Praise God, he escaped, but could our enthusiasm for the story relate more to the forbidden pleasures he experienced?

Solomon began his reign well. God blessed him with wealth, power, and spiritual discernment. Many of the proverbs we study this quarter come from those early years.

But something went wrong. He had been wise in the knowledge of God. Now he said, “I will be wise”—self-conceit. “I turned my mind,” said old King Solomon, looking back, “. . . to know the wickedness of folly and the foolish-

ness which is madness” (Eccles. 7:23-25, RSV).

Thank God, he came back from the edge of such madness. He came back muttering, “Vanity, all is vanity.” He summed it up thus: “The end of the matter. . . . Fear God, and keep his commandments” (Eccles. 12:13). No talk of the great experiences along the way—only “vanity.”

Wisdom appears in Proverbs as a process of applying the principles of God’s character to every aspect of life. Detours to sin dissolve that process; wisdom itself leaves us. There is no such thing as a fortunate fall. All sin is a risk to the soul. Praise God that many are not so dull in their sins that they cannot respond to wisdom’s call back from God. But the best course for all men is to cherish wisdom and forsake sin.

Solomon sums the situation up well in his admonition to the young. “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come, and the years draw nigh, when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (Eccles. 12:1, RSV).

REACT

1. In what ways has my own life taught me the dangers of disobedience?

2. How do I react when I see a friend slipping into habits of disobedience?

3. How would I relate Philippians 4:8, 9 to the concept of wisdom?

by Lincoln E. Steed

Lincoln E. Steed is editor of *Listen* magazine at Pacific Press, Nampa, Idaho.

Lesson 2, October 6-12

A Star to Guide the Humble



“Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight” (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).

The Door Will Be Opened

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 3:5, 6

The hardwood door reverberated as the frustrated man pounded on it. He stood there a while, waiting for a response; when none came, he began to kick the door.

"I'm out of a job and need someone to help me," explained the man. "I have nowhere else to turn. I once read that if I knocked here at this door, I would be helped. Nothing has happened."

A woman reached into her pocket and pulled out a small book; she read, "Ask, and you will receive; seek and you will find; knock, and the door will be opened to you."

"Does that sound familiar?" asked the woman.

"Yes," replied the man. "Why didn't it work?"

"You have knocked at the door, but you have relied on your own strength to open it," answered the woman. "You must be patient; your answer will come. Stop following your own opinions and have complete trust in the One who is behind the door."

How many times do we find ourselves going after our own answers or seeking our own results when we have asked God to help us with a particular problem? It seems that we rely more easily on what we know than on the One who knows all. We must

trust God completely. Even though it may seem that we know better, God is the ultimate decision maker because He holds our life events in the palm of His hand.

When He promises to "make our paths straight," He doesn't mean that He is going to draw a huge map in the sky, showing us our entire route; but He will take us by the hand and gently lead us in the direction that He wants us to go. The choice is always there; all we have to do is accept it and trust in it.

The SDA Bible Commentary says, "Entire trust in God is the only logical position for the Christian to take. God has all knowledge and all power and foresees and prepares against all the troubles that come upon man as sudden emergencies. For anyone to rely on his own understanding is foolish indeed" (vol. 3, p. 956).

Those who trust God are assured an answer to the closed door. "We put our hope in the Lord; he is our protector and our help. We are glad because of him; we trust in his holy name. May your constant love be with us, Lord, as we put our hope in you" (Ps. 33:20-22, TEV).

REACT

1. How do we develop such complete trust in God?

2. How do we know what to do for ourselves and what to trust God to do?

by Melissa Spencer

Melissa Spencer is a freshman journalism major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, October 7

Waiting on the Lord

LOGOS

Prov. 22:17-19

What Trust Is and Is Not

"Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, for it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips. So that your trust may be in the Lord, I teach you today, even you" (Prov. 22:17-19, NIV).

A biblical catalog of positive and negative examples of trust would certainly include such notables as Samson, Abraham, Noah, Rahab, Moses, Saul, Peter, and any number of individuals who benefited from Christ's miracles because they trusted in Christ's power to do as He said He would.

We can examine what trust is and is not, however, by looking at the characters in two of Christ's parables—the wise and foolish virgins, and the ten talents. In the first instance, ten women, lamps lighted, await the arrival of the bridegroom on his wedding night. As he is delayed, they all sleep; but when he arrives unexpectedly, they rouse themselves, trim their lamps, and go out to meet him—those, at least, who are prepared.

In the second instance, the master entrusts three of his servants with varying sums of money, which he instructs them to invest wisely for his sake. He returns to find that two of them

have followed his directions and returned to him more than he left. The third ignored his directions and returned merely the sum of money he originally received.

Traditionally these two parables illustrate other important spiritual lessons, but they also illustrate that those who receive Christ's approval have followed His directions carefully. The five wise virgins may have slept, but they were ready as they had been instructed to be. They came with extra oil in the event of the bridegroom's delay. The servants who invested as they had been instructed received an appropriate reward.

Both parables clearly illustrate the principles of Proverbs 22:17-19: Christ praises and blesses those who keep the directions of the wise in their hearts. They trust the Lord.

Is Our Trust Misplaced?

"He who trusts in himself is a fool, but he who walks in wisdom is kept safe" (Prov. 28:26, NIV).

The examples of Samson and Peter will remind us that, as Proverbs 28:26 says, one who trusts in his own strength often looks ridiculous at best, or may sacrifice everything at worst.

Samson's instructions had been clear from the beginning: live a healthful life, never cut his hair, and never reveal to anyone the source of his strength. But after such striking examples of

by Bruce Closser and Michelle Dodge

Bruce Closser and Michelle Dodge are teacher and student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

his awesome power, perhaps he came to believe that he no longer had to follow that advice. Perhaps he came to believe that the source of his power was strictly internal. Whatever the case, the moment he broke his trust in the instructions he had received, he became as weak as other men.

Similarly, Peter's attempt to walk on water illustrates that as long as he focused his attention on Christ, that is, trusted in Him, he was safe. Not until both men finally returned their trust to God were they able to recover—Samson his earlier strength, and Peter his safety from the storm.

The lessons are so familiar we often ignore them. Quite simply, we are, as Christians, most happy when we trust the Lord's instructions.

A Star to Guide the Humble

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Prov. 3:5, NIV).

The story of Abram demonstrates that our only real source of trust is in Christ (see Gen. 12:1-9). "The Lord said to Abram, 'Leave your country, your people and your father's household and go to the land I will show you'" (verse 1, NIV). Putting his trust in the Lord, Abram gathered his wife, Sarai, and their belongings, and prepared to go on a special journey. "So Abram left, as the Lord had told him; and Lot went with him" (verse 4, NIV). They set out from Haran and headed toward the land of Canaan.

When Abram and his family reached Canaan, he built an altar to the Lord. With the altar completed and the sacrifice offered, the Lord still had not told them they

had reached their destination.

Abram, Lot, and their families trusted the Lord every step of the way, traveling far before the Lord revealed they had finally reached their destination. Abram settled in the land of Canaan. Lot settled in the land of Jordan, near Sodom.

After Lot parted from Abram, the Lord appeared to Abram (see Gen. 13) and told him to look at the land surrounding him. That land would be given to his offspring forever as a reward for the trust Abram placed in the Lord.

Similarly David put his trust completely in the Lord for deliverance. When the Lord delivered David from the hand of Saul, he sang a song to the Lord (see 2 Sam. 22:1-4). David writes: "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy, because thou defendest them: let them also that love thy name be joyful in thee" (Ps. 5:11). David put his trust in God because he knew God was the only one who could save him.

One thing we need to remember when we trust the Lord. "For therefore we both labour and suffer reproach, because we trust in the living God, who is the Saviour of all men, specially of those that believe" (1 Tim. 4:10, KJV). When we trust in the Lord as Abram and David did, we will face many trials. But clearly these stories remind us that our trust will be rewarded in a way that we will find satisfying.

REACT

1. In what ways does God's apparent delay in revealing His will to Abraham seem unfair?

2. What is to be gained by "waiting on the Lord"?

Tuesday, October 8

Can God Be Trusted?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 2:1-5

Ever been at the end of your rope? Best friend just turned you in? Boyfriend broke up with you? Parents yelling at you? You really don't know what to do?

In this world where everyone is imperfect, it's very hard to imagine someone as perfect and completely trustworthy as God. It must have been hard for Noah to trust. God gave him an unprecedented assignment: to build an ark, a huge job that brought him much ridicule. But Noah took God at His word and became one of the few people to survive the worldwide flood.

God told Elijah to walk into the palace unannounced (a crime punishable by death), give the king an unpleasant message, and then go hide by a brook. Elijah must have wondered why God would ask him to do such strange things, but he didn't question. God was with him through it all, sending ravens to feed him, appointing a woman to look after him when the brook was dry, and even taking him to heaven when his work on earth was done.

God asks for unconditional trust, which is hard to give, but He has never let anyone down who has given Him complete trust. And when we trust God with everything, we have great potential for success. Ellen White

states, "No one ever trusted God in vain. He will never disappoint those who put their trust in Him."¹

"Not until Elijah had learned to trust wholly in God could he complete his work for those who had been seduced into Baal worship. . . . The man of God must be made to understand the weakness of his present position as compared with the vantage ground the Lord would have him occupy."²

Trusting God takes some of the stress out of your life because it gives you Someone to lean on during rough times and hard decisions. "God will do great things for those who trust in Him. The reason why His professed people have no greater strength is that they trust so much to their own wisdom, and do not give the Lord an opportunity to reveal His power on their behalf. He will help His believing children in every emergency if they will place their entire confidence in Him and faithfully obey Him."³

REACT

1. In what ways do people who trust in God really have a significant advantage in life?

2. In what areas of our lives is it most important to let God lead? Are some areas more important than others?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 213.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 167.

3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 493.

by Lisa Parry

Lisa Parry is a math/computer science major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

My Eternal Friend

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 3:5, 6

The year 1990 marked the tenth anniversary of my friendship with Paula. We went to the same elementary school and lived in the same neighborhood. The year I turned 14 I moved away to California. Now here I am a college freshman, reunited and rooming with my best friend, Paula.

In a world where people are fickle, jumping from friend to friend, Paula and I still manage to remain tight. Our friendship isn't always perfect. We still have our ups and downs, but we always seem to forgive and forget each other's imperfections.

What makes my friendship with Paula successful? What makes any lasting relationship successful? Robert Fadeley, an associate professor of psychology at Andrews University, concluded that the key element is mutual shared trust and respect. Of course, love is equally intertwined with this idea because trust is a loving act.

Trusting is the riskiest element in any relationship. Those we trust may disappoint or fail us. Even if our friends do falter, we need to be determined to iron out the differences if we want the relationship to work. We must also remember to view the problem from both sides and not always from our own inclinations. Trust isn't only unidirectional. It involves being trustworthy. "Do

unto others as you would have done unto you."

The act of humans trusting each other parallels in many ways with that of humans trusting God. God has proven Himself to be trustworthy to humanity. Unlike humans, God never fails us. As humans we often assume God has neglected us when He doesn't answer prayers the way we want.

But God's love is unconditional. He knows what is right for us. We need to wait patiently and see where God is guiding us—to have faith in Him to lead our lives. Faith in Him or in humans doesn't come only from within us. God will give us the courage to trust and to be trustworthy. "Ask and it will be given to you. . . . For everyone who asks receives" (Matt. 7:7, 8, NIV).

Every day my friendship with and trust in Paula increases; so it is with my relationship with Christ. It grows because I daily make a commitment to have my friendship work. Even though Paula and I have remained best friends for ten years, there is no guarantee we will remain friends for the next ten years. But we can always be assured our friendship with God will be eternal.

REACT

1. How can we develop the faith that leads to a solid relationship with Christ?

2. To what extent does our own faith depend upon our being trustworthy to other people?

by Maybell Laluna

Maybell Laluna is a freshmen architecture major at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Thursday, October 10

A Trinity of Faith

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV

Trust. To some, it may mean nothing. To others, it is their life. The very word holds much meaning. If understood and used properly, the wonderful quality of trust can help relieve burdens on our hearts and minds and enrich our lives.

Trust involves three elements: confidence, reliance, and faith. These qualities are important in our relationship with God, for with them we can develop an enduring and lasting faith.

1. *We must have complete confidence in God, for He will never fail us.* "Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need" (Heb. 4:16, RSV). When we put our confidence in Him, we are putting our trust in Him. He will never fail us, for He loves us too much.

2. *Learn to rely on Him always, day by day.* That is something that may seem hard to do, for we are all human and cannot always rely on each other. After all, sometimes, without meaning to, we let

each other down. But God will never let us down. If we depend and rely on Him, He will always be there for us and see us through.

3. *Faith is an essential part of our trust in Him.* Faith is a gift from God; we must choose whether or not we want to use it. And God will always remain faithful to us, "For great is his steadfast love toward us; and the faithfulness of the Lord endures forever" (Ps. 117:2, RSV). "When we trust in God fully, when we rely upon the merits of Jesus as a sin-pardoning Saviour, we shall receive all the help that we can desire."*

We need the faith, reliance, and confidence that the spirit of Jesus brings to our lives. In our time of need and doubt, we can look to our Saviour, who is always waiting to listen and help. He will guide us through in the best way possible, for our Lord is all-knowing and ever-loving.

REACT

1. Why is it so significant to think of faith as a gift from God?

2. What does it mean, in practical terms, to rely on God day by day?

* *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 431.

by Lynn Davies

Lynn Davies is a freshman at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Trusting Honestly

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 22:17-19

My dad has taught me one thing I will never forget—honesty with myself, honesty with others, and honesty with God. When I was younger, I remember Dad tucking me into bed and praying with me. Afterward, he would say, “Being honest is very important, and more than anything else, I want you to grow up to be an honest man. I don’t know of anything that would make me happier.”

He would almost always quote Ellen White’s statement about honest men (see *Education*, p. 57). Even today he reminds me every so often that being honest is very important to reinforce my commitment to honesty. After all, values constantly reinforced are not easily forgotten.

Earning my dad’s trust took a long time. As I faithfully performed the small tasks he had assigned to me, his trust in me increased. The same plan holds true for earning God’s trust and learning to rely on Him. When I have demonstrated my trustworthiness in little things, God will entrust me with larger responsibilities. And as I experience God’s care for

me in the smallest matters of life, my trust in Him increases.

For example, if I’m really tired, I won’t hear my alarm. I ask God to help me hear it because I need to study for a test in the morning. When the alarm wakes me, I realize that God has answered my prayer, and now I must do my part. If, instead of getting up, I push the snooze button and fall back asleep, I have failed to fulfill my part of the agreement. On the other hand, when I make myself get up, my relationship with God is strengthened; then God and I can work on tasks that involve a closer relationship, such as witnessing to others. As I become more like Him, I put more effort into doing His will; I know I can trust Him because He has proven Himself to me.

Sometimes we may ask God to help us with larger things before we let Him prove Himself capable of helping us in little things. Since we aren’t ready for the larger things, we fail to exert the needed effort to be successful. The best place to start is small.

REACT

In what ways can I improve my faith by being honest with myself? What must I be honest about?

by David Smith

David Smith is majoring in economics and premed at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 3, October 13-19

The Real Me



“A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold” (Prov. 22:1, NIV).

Sunday, October 13

Have You Heard?

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Prov. 22:1; Matt. 1:18, 19

She was everything any man could hope for in his bride. Born to God-fearing parents who had placed great emphasis on religious training, she was deeply religious and enjoyed studying the Scriptures in the weekly Sabbath services.

She was every mother's dream of the ideal daughter. Women wished silently, Oh, for a daughter like her. Some said to their offspring, "Why can't you be more like her?"

And how the young men envied the groom-to-be! How had he succeeded in catching her attention when they had failed so miserably? Many a young man had secretly cherished the hope that she would take a serious look in his direction. These hopes were dashed when the engagement was announced and both families busied themselves with wedding preparations.

Hers was not merely a flawless reputation. She was everything she was reputed to be and more. Even the envious young ladies could find no fault with her.

The wedding was all a girl's heart could desire—flowers, food,

relatives, friends, and well-wishers. It was a perfect occasion for a perfect couple.

Then everything suddenly changed.

Poor Joseph. How could she do this to him and her poor parents? How will they live this down? Who is the father? She actually had the nerve to tell a story like that? Who would believe anyone could be that brazen and sacrilegious? What Mary possessed was infinitely more important than the good name others had given her. She had character—a sterling character forged through a vibrant relationship with God. God now needed a handmaid, and even in the face of all the implications, serving God mattered most to her.

She must have known all it could cost her. But she also trusted God. In time He would vindicate her. Surely the priests would recall the words of the prophet Esaias that a virgin would conceive and bear Immanuel. Then they would all believe her. The whispers would cease. She would have friends again. In time.

Until then, what did it really matter what people thought? She hadn't changed. Only what they thought of her had changed!

by Pauline Phillips

Pauline Phillips is associate dean of women at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Monday, October 14

What's in a Name?

LOGOS

Prov. 22:1

1. "A good name is to be chosen rather than great riches, loving favor rather than silver and gold" (Prov. 22:1, NKJV).

In our Christian walk, choosing what is right does not necessarily grant us a good reputation. As a matter of history, Christians, real Christians, have sometimes been viewed with a certain disdain. All we need to do is recall Jeremiah, Paul, Stephen, John the Baptist, and, of course, Jesus Christ—all persecuted for doing the right thing.

Did this persecution force them to change the belief they held in God? Of course not. The slander, lies, and mistreatment they suffered made their character even stronger. Our character in Jesus determines what kind of people and what kind of Christians we are. We are not dependent on the world to maintain our character.

Our reputation in the world may be tarnished because we choose loving favor (the love of God) over silver and gold (the short-term adoration of the world). Those who do not know the Lord view this with skepticism. Since they do not have a personal relationship with Christ, they sometimes mistrust and fear us. That which people do not possess or understand, they often must discredit or destroy. As Christians, we do not need, nor

should we desire, worldly praise or admiration.

If we deny the world, why should it matter what kind of face we present to it?

2. "They profess that they know God; but in works they deny him, being abominable, and disobedient, and unto every good work reprobate" (Titus 1:16).

Are we presenting our true face in our daily relationships? Is the good name we have chosen that of *hypocrite*?

With the pressures we face, it sometimes seems easier to deny what and who we are. Most often we can simply deny it passively. It is usually easier to say nothing, not to commit ourselves or to make known our Christian beliefs.

We can present one face to the world in which we have to live and keep our Christian face locked away to bring out on Sabbath for our Christian family to see. How many times have we simply avoided the subject of religion, knowing that we might be asked about our stand on it?

We don't have to wear signs or force people to listen to our religious views. Opportunities will present themselves for us to testify.

One of the saddest comments is, "Oh, really, I didn't know you were a Christian." How can we be a Christian, work with people on a daily basis, go to the same sandwich shop every day for lunch, or

by Joe Kilburn

Joe Kilburn is a theology major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

park in the same lot every day and not have people notice we are Christians?

Carrying the Christian torch is not always easy; no one ever said it would be. But it is not some heavy, exhausting burden that we need to be ashamed of or that we need to hide from the world. It is not possible to be all things to all people; we are not politicians! We are Christians! We must live what we are. What we are and what we cause people to think we are should be the same.

When questioned about my faith, what is a good response?

Consider: To whom am I talking? Where are we? Who is listening? Do these circumstances make a difference? Why or why not?

3. *"Wherefore God also hath highly exalted him, and given him a name which is above every name: That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of things in heaven, and things in earth, and things under the earth" (Phil. 2:9, 10).*

The glory and adoration of mankind is a fleeting thing. Anything bestowed by one human being on another can be taken away and destroyed—honors, riches, reputation. But that which is bestowed on us by God no person can touch. If we rest our "good name" on the sands of humanity, we shall surely sink and no doubt wonder why. However, when we rest our "Christian character" on the rock of Jesus, it

will stand the test of time.

We often get ourselves into trouble when we depend on our good name—our reputation—to serve us in our spiritual life. Christian character is wholly dependent upon Jesus.

The world can grant us titles, fortune, and fame, and it can take them away. The world can cause us to cry. We can cry tears of bitterness at what others do to us, especially when we have done nothing to deserve their hatred. They can take our name and curse it and cause others to hate it and perhaps laugh at it. The world did these things to Jesus. They took His life and ruined His reputation. But did they really destroy His good name?

Jesus' good name is His character, and He has the character of God. The Pharisees, Sadducees, and the Romans took His life and smeared His reputation, but they could not touch His name. The name—the character—of God is love, and for us that means Jesus. And therein rests *our* good name.

It's not so much "What's in a name?" as it is "What's behind that name?" When we choose to become Christians, we choose the name of Jesus Christ. We choose to put away the care of the world and our reputation in it, and we take up the name of God.

REACT

1. What's the difference between reputation and character?
2. Are efforts to improve one's character an improper form of works? Explain your answer.

Tuesday, October 15

The Name Game

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Mic. 4:5

“For all peoples walk each in the name of its god, but we will walk in the name of the Lord our God for ever and ever” (Mic. 4:5, RSV).

A name is a label that identifies an individual. With a name come thoughts and memories. Whenever we bring to mind someone’s name, we cannot separate it from his character.

If we are Christians, our lives should tell of the infinite and merciful love of God. “By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer.”¹

We are all a part of the larger scope—the great controversy—as well as the smaller, more personal picture. “For we are made a spectacle unto the world, and to angels, and to men” (1 Cor. 4:9). Our lives should testify daily to God’s existence. “You are My witnesses,” says the Lord, “that I am God” (Isa. 43:12, NKJV).

Let our character tell of Christ’s character. Even when our name is slandered, our Christlike character will vindicate our Lord’s name, and we are vindicated in Christ. Jesus is our defense. “He is my defense; I shall not be moved” (Ps. 62:6, NKJV). We need not concern ourselves with the insults of others but rather

with the influence we have when our name is spoken. “No one can injure our character as much as ourselves.”² “It is our own character . . . that determine[s] our influence upon others.”³ “Character is power.”⁴

As “a good name is more desirable than great riches” (Prov. 22:1, NIV), so “a good character is more precious in God’s sight than the gold of Ophir.”⁵ “A good character is more precious than worldly possessions, and the work of forming it is the noblest in which men can engage.”⁶ “The choicest productions of human skill possess no beauty that can bear comparison with . . . beauty of character.”⁷ “My good name . . . is of far more value to me than gold or silver. Let me preserve it untarnished. If men assail that name, it shall not be because I have given them occasion to do so, but for the same reason that they spoke evil of Christ—because they hated the purity and holiness of His character.”⁸

REACT

To what degree does my name bring to mind the goodness of Christ?

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1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470.
 2. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1161.
 3. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 469.
 4. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 340.
 5. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 607.
 6. *Ibid.*, p. 657.
 7. *Education*, p. 249.
 8. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 595.

by Patricia Guzak

Patricia Guzak is a theology and personal-ministries major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

What I Am Versus What You Think I Am

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 22:1

In the Middle East a name is of priceless value. A name represents a person's character; his wealth does not.

A name follows a person wherever he or she goes. It can bring the family's reputation down in shame or elevate it above the clouds. Time does not change this. A name has always had, and will always have, the same value in the Middle East.

Throughout a great part of Proverbs, Solomon is stating and restating an idea. In Proverbs 22:1 he is contrasting a person's respectability to material wealth. The first, a good name (to be esteemed), is something that should be earned; a person cannot simply decide he wants a good name and steal it. The other item, riches, is often acquired by dishonest dealings. Even a thief can become rich.

There is, however, something even more important than your good reputation among people. Your true character is more important than what others see.

"Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart" (1 Sam. 16:7, NIV). Today's lesson objective is to focus on the "good name" and its value, remembering that what we are on the outside often (but not always) parallels what is on the inside.

Consider God as an example. His character is in question because of Satan's slander. Although His name is being doubted, His character has in no way changed. His eternal love and perfection will never end, regardless of what may be said about Him.

Consider also Judas. Although he had a fine reputation, his true character was not Christlike. So, although the ideal situation is that a good name follows every good character, this is not always so. It is more important to do what is right than to have a good reputation.

REACT

1. When would you have to sacrifice a good reputation to do what is right?

2. When does God consider a person upright? Does this change with time and culture?

by Loay Aziz and Donna Dietz

Loay Aziz is a computer-science major, and Donna Dietz is a biology major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Thursday, October 17

What PR Can't Buy

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 22:1

From the biblical perspective, one cannot hire a public-relations firm to create a good name. Rather, Scripture equates a good name with a person's character. To gain and keep a good name, then, one must become a good person.

Such goodness is not an abstract quality, nor is it simply refraining from evil. Righteousness, whether we are speaking of human beings or God Himself, always consists of relationships. We see this, for example, in the curious story of Tamar in Genesis 38.

After discovering who had fathered Tamar's unborn child, Judah makes the strange comment, "She is more righteous* than I, inasmuch as I did not give her to my son Shelah" (Gen. 38:26, RSV). Tamar had attempted to raise up a child and thus a name to her dead first husband according to custom. The righteousness, or rightness, centered on preserving what her culture considered as right relationships. Because of that, she had a good name (see Prov. 22:1) and would be remembered throughout succeeding generations (see Ruth 4:12; Matt. 1:3).

The Psalms often employ references to God's righteousness that parallel statements about His relationships to human beings, a fact that opened up Martin Luther's understanding of righteousness by faith (see, for example, Ps.

98:2, 3; 103:17; 111:3). The Lord even defines His glory as what He does for others (see Exod. 33:17-34:7). His name comes not so much from His power as from His dealings with His creation.

To have the kind of good name that Proverbs 22:1 speaks of, we must:

1. *Study the character of God as portrayed both in Jesus' life on earth, and in God's relationships with people in the Old Testament.* We must see what God does when He is "gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love" (Neh. 9:17, RSV). How did God relate to others, even to the wicked and rebellious?

2. *Ask the Holy Spirit to show us how to put the fundamental principles of God's character into action in modern relationships today.* If Jesus were in your shoes, how would He treat others?

God is not primarily waiting for people just to overcome temptation. That is only a byproduct of His real goal: people so busy being in right relationship with Him and fellow human beings that they don't have time for temptations.

A good name in God's sight is not who we are, but what we do for others. It cannot be bought but only recognized when people see how we relate to them.

*Although Today's English Version and other versions translate "in the right," the phrase means more than just that. It is the same word as used in Psalm 19:9.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Friday, October 18

The Me Nobody Knows

OPINION

Key Text: Eccles. 7:25

“I really don’t care what people think.”

At times that is exactly how I feel. If I want to watch a particular movie or go to church in July without stockings, I really don’t care what other people think.

But what am I saying when I willfully disregard other people’s ideas and do as I please? There are at least two interpretations to this statement.

One way of looking at it is, “I am so proud of my uniqueness that I don’t care about other people’s opinions of me.” This can be construed as a haughty, defiant attitude, or it can signal healthy self-esteem.

Another way of interpreting the I-don’t-care statement is, “I am so confident in the correctness of what I am doing that outside opinions are irrelevant.” In other words, I have studied and prayed

about this issue, and it is settled in my own mind. To me, this latter interpretation is what establishing a “good name” is all about.

People who do not know me and who are quick to judge on insufficient evidence may not like the things I do and may not like me. But if they will make an effort to get to know me, if they will talk with me, they may find a surprisingly different person from the me they thought they knew.

It is far more important for me to have confidence in my beliefs, actions, and personhood than it is to live my life externally just to please others—whoever those vague others may be.

I know what God is doing in my life; I talk with Him about it several times a day. That is what I really care about—God in me.

REACT

When does a Christian’s right to “live his own life” have to give way to his consideration of others (see 1 Cor. 8:9-12)?

by Bonnie J. Becraft

Bonnie J. Becraft, a returned missionary from Japan, is a student at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 4, October 20-26

Spiritual Preventive Medicine



“The highway of the upright avoids evil; he who guards his way guards his soul” (Prov. 16:17, NIV).

Don't Learn the Hard Way

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 16:20, 25

"Incoming! Incoming! On your right! Watch your right! Steady. Pull up! Pull up! Blackbird, can you hear me? Do you copy? Come in, Blackbird."

"I copy, Tomcat. I think I've been hit. No, it's OK. I'm OK."

"Blackbird, return to base, now!"

The two T-birds cut off maneuvers and slice through the clouds veiling Alpha Base. The descent is robotic for Blackbird, still numb from the encounter. What had gone wrong? Maneuvers had never escalated to this point before. How had he let the enemy get so close? He knew they were out there. He had had months of in-depth training on how to spot them, what to watch for. But he just couldn't keep his distance. He was intrigued by what he hadn't been told. Their cunning, their use of diversion, their advanced technology, were all too fascinating. He could feel himself being drawn for a closer look. Anyway, why should he believe Command Central? Wasn't he at the top of his class? He just had to see for himself. Well, now he had seen.

The sun reflected off the tower

at Alpha Base, clearly seen even at this altitude. The heaving in Blackbird's chest had slowed, but the rest of his body remained tense.

So he had gotten "that" close. So what? Had it really been worth the possible consequences? Who would have taken care of Beth and the twins? Maybe he would have survived only to burden his family with the crippling results. Command would have to issue him a dishonorable discharge. That would kill his dad. He shook his head in his helmet, hoping to knock out the dark thoughts. He had survived. He'd live to fly another day, but somehow it would be different.

Taxiing toward the tower, Blackbird glimpsed a red-faced Tomcat striding into the hangar. A few minutes later Blackbird followed sheepishly. Tomcat was already lecturing him before he was within earshot.

"I can't believe you're so foolhardy! What did you expect, Flyboy? You've got to play it safe! You've got to go by the book!" Tomcat pounded the palm of his upturned hand for emphasis, but Blackbird had already said it all to himself. Just now his gaze was fixed a few feet away on the incandescent work light and the fragile moth that wouldn't fly away.

by Kathy Hecht

Kathy Hecht is circulation supervisor at Weis Library, Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Monday, October 21

Spiritual Preventive Medicine

LOGOS

Prov. 15:30

People today are more health-oriented. Body-building courses are no longer restricted to Charles Atlas, Joe Wieder, or Arnold Schwarzenegger. Jane Fonda is only one of many producers of aerobic exercise tapes. Protein drinks and diet supplements abound.

The reasons for exercising vary. As Christians, we should be concerned about our physical condition, not only because physical health assures good blood circulation and improves our mental and spiritual capacity but also because our bodies are the temples of God. When people participate in physical exercise while neglecting mental and spiritual exercise, the result is often a great physique with a weakened mind and a self-centered spirit.

The exercise emphasis in modern society enables people to be more physically attractive. But our need for spiritual exercise is as crucial as our pursuit of physical development. "The light of the eyes rejoices the heart, and a good report makes the bones healthy" (Prov. 15:30, NKJV).

Accepting Reproof (read Prov. 15:5, 10, 22, 31, 32)

Those who try to do right sometimes dislike reproof because they feel it indicates failure. Those who do not care what is right or wrong

do not like reproof because it separates the right from wrong, and this they do not wish to hear. Yet Scripture is quite clear that reproof is necessary for instruction and understanding (see Prov. 15:5, 32).

Instruction and reproof are what make a great athlete. No athlete has ever made it to the Olympics without a coach or trainer. The Bible has often been referred to as man's "owner's manual." Since Christ is our Creator, or "manufacturer," He alone knows what best maintains our physical, mental, and spiritual health.

Healthful Attitude (read Prov. 15:1, 13, 15, 17-20; 16:5, 6, 18, 19, 32)

Another vital part of total health is attitude. What good is an attractive, healthy body if no one can stand your personality? Spiritual exercise prevents vanity and pride by turning our hearts toward the sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. In beholding Christ upon the cross, we are brought face to face with both our worth and our unworthiness (see John 3:16; Isa. 64:6). Even the good things we do for God and for others do not make us worthy of such great love.

True spiritual exercise must always bring us to the foot of the cross. There our hearts are both broken and uplifted. At this point our attitude toward others becomes more gentle, tolerant, and

by Chester N. Hitchcock

Chester N. Hitchcock is a senior theology student at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Christlike. We become more forgiving, our hearts rejoice, and our faces reflect the love of Christ to all we meet. This type of attitude reduces stress and lessens our chances of high blood pressure and heart disease.

Remaining Faithful to Wisdom (read Prov. 1:20-22; 2:4-6; 3:7, 8)

Beginning at Proverbs 1:20, the term *wisdom* assumes a personified role. The use of the personal pronouns *she* and *her* becomes quite frequent. Likewise, the turning from wisdom into sin is referred to as embracing an "immoral woman." By using a woman to symbolize wisdom, Solomon demonstrates the beauty, gentleness, and safety of wisdom, as well as the sanctity of marriage and the danger of adultery. "Let your fountain be blessed, and rejoice with the wife of your youth. As a loving deer and a graceful doe, let her breasts satisfy you at all times; and always be enraptured with her love" (Prov. 5:18, 19, NKJV).

Temptation to Sexual Lusts (read Proverbs 4:5-9; 5:1-6, 15-20)

Increased wisdom is attractive; it lures the attention of others just as it did with Solomon. "And the whole earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put into his mind" (1 Kings 10:24, RSV). Satan will use every opportunity to make us feel self-sufficient and proud. He knows that if we are proud of our physical, mental, or spiritual achievements, it will be hard to resist the temptation of flattery. Therefore, as our wisdom and understanding increase, we are advised to "trust in the Lord with all your heart, and lean not on your own understanding." "Do not be wise in your own eyes;

fear the Lord and depart from evil" (Prov. 3:5, 7, NKJV).

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge" (1:7, NKJV) and to depart from it is likened to the man who departs from the "wife of . . . [his] youth" (5:18, NKJV) or the woman "who forsakes the companion of her youth, and forgets the covenant of her God" (2:17, NKJV).

"All, indeed, was vanity, as Solomon drew near his end. Polygamy always carries a curse, and despotism has a rottenness at its core. . . . His wisdom, as well as his carnality, played him false. It was dynastically expedient, he reasoned shrewdly, to link foreign thrones with his own by marriage. Spiritually it was disastrous. . . . The insincerities and servile flattery of an artificial court ringed him round and walled him from the truth."*

We, like Solomon, can and will be tempted to use our God-given gifts and talents to our own glory. As we strive for physical, mental, and spiritual health, many will flatter us and seek our presence just as with Solomon, but a great deal of responsibility accompanies our talents and gifts. If we continue to strive to do His will, God is always ready to forgive us when we fall short of His goal for our lives, but if we turn toward seeking our own desires and glory, leaving the wisdom of our youth, then we need to be reminded that "the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge."

REACT

1. How do I respond to reproof?
2. Do I seek wisdom with the same amount of fervor as I do material wealth or human companionship?

*E. M. Blaiklock, *Today's Handbook of Bible Characters* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1979), p. 197.

Tuesday, October 22

Eight Powers

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 15:24, NIV

Because of our lifestyle, we provoke most of the illnesses we have. Ellen White talks about eight marvelous powers that enable us to avoid sickness.

1. *Physical exercise.* "A walk, even in winter, would be more beneficial to the health than all the medicine the doctors may prescribe."¹

2. *Fresh air.* We do not take enough time to see that we are breathing the correct way or that the air we breathe is pure and refreshing. Mrs. White makes very clear remarks that fresh air will prove far more beneficial to sick persons than medicine.²

3. *Sunlight.* Research has proved that we can receive vitamin D in the morning sunlight; there are also dangers in overexposure to sunlight, so we have to be careful in the use of this power.

4. *Simple food.* "You should use the most simple food, prepared in the most simple manner, that the fine nerves of the brain be not weakened, benumbed, or paralyzed, making it impossible for you to discern sacred things. . . ."³

5. *Temperance.* We all know that the use of tobacco is bad; we

also know what the use of alcohol and other drugs does to our body. We should abstain from harmful things and use judiciously those things that are good for us.

6. *Water.* Mrs. White refers to both external and internal use of water. She talks about the excellent feeling of a good bath and the cleansing power of the water inside and outside our bodies.⁴

7. *Rest.* "Since the work of building up the body takes place during the hours of rest, it is essential, especially in youth, that sleep should be regular and abundant."⁵

8. *Trust in God.* Jesus made it clear: "Do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? . . . But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:25-33, NIV).

REACT

1. Why should a Christian want to be healthy?

2. What is the connection between physical and spiritual health?

1. *Counsels on Health*, p. 52.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 63.

4. See pp. 101-104.

5. *Education*, p. 205.

by Ivan Omana, Jr.

Ivan Omana, Jr., is an assistant pastor in the West Venezuelan Conference in Venezuela, South America.

If It Feels Good . . .

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 5:22, 23

Modern society can be reduced to six single-syllable words: "If it feels good, do it." This sentiment, openly or subliminally, has been promoted by those who author books, compose music, design clothing, create advertisements and commercials, publish magazines, direct films, and write plays.¹ It stems from existential philosophy, which states that "man is nothing else but that which he makes of himself, for there is no God and no preventient design."²

How does one find meaning in life? The answer may be in "self-control," considered one of the chief virtues by Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, Philo, the Essenes, the Hermetica, and others. It comes from a Greek word group *egkrateia*, which originally meant "mastery or power over oneself or something"; eventually it came to mean "control over oneself," especially one's desires and actions.

Self-control does not come naturally or by effort, but is the gift of God through His Holy Spirit (see Gal. 5:22, 23; 2 Tim. 1:7). Nonetheless, the Christian consciously lives out this self-control just as an athlete exercises self-discipline (see 1 Cor. 9:25-27).

There is no ultimate power over self, but only a control granted

and sustained by God. This is the primary reason that a concept so central to Greek ethics found such a small place in biblical ethics.³

"Biblical man regarded his life as determined and directed by the command of God. There was thus no place for the self-mastery which had a place in autonomous ethics."⁴

The ultimate goal for self-control is *wholeness*. The Hebrew word *shalom* has intrinsically meant "wholeness," which refers to "soundness, an unimpaired state, integrity, the character of having nothing wanting, or having all its parts in due connection, in completeness and perfection."⁵ We find in this connection that the term *temperance* includes the avoidance of excess in eating harmless foods as well as the principle of total abstinence from harmful substances.⁶ We can promote a close connection between physical, mental, and spiritual health, resulting in a coordinated effort to maintain balance by practicing temperance and overcoming temptation through the power of Christ.

1. From C. Swindoll, *Living on the Ragged Edge* (Waco, TX: Word Books, 1985), p. 1.

2. Jean-Paul Sartre, in G. Seldes, *Great Thoughts* (New York: Ballantine, 1985), p. 370.

3. From Bromiley, *ISBE*, vol. 4, p. 386, article "Self-control" by V. R. Gordon.

4. *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament*, vol. 2, p. 342.

5. *The Oxford English Dictionary*, 1970, vol. 12, p. 92.

6. *Ibid.*, vol. 11, pp. 161, 162.

by Gnanamuthu S. Wilson

Gnanamuthu S. Wilson is an adjunct religion instructor at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Thursday, October 24

Just Ask Why

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 16:17

Look at advertising schemes today. "Relief in as little as 15 seconds." "Zero to 60 in 8.3 seconds." "Ready in five minutes." At my house my wife and I consider it home cooking if we use both the microwave and the toaster oven for the same meal.

I recently ordered memory-expansion cards for one of our office computers. The director of public relations and I were trying to decide whether we wanted the 100-nanosecond or the 120-nanosecond chip. Think about it. A nanosecond is *one-billionth* of a second. We were talking about a span of time that, for all reasonable purposes, was not even perceptible!

What's the point of all this? We need to think about the consequences of our actions. Instant relief may come in the form of artificial chemicals introduced into our bodies. Fast cars are usually at the expense of precious fossil fuel and air quality. And many plastic food containers will be around for years after the food—and the consumer—are gone.

Our choices have natural consequences. We've all heard it. "The wages of sin is death." But let's be specific. The wages of not exercising is a heart attack. The wages of promiscuous sexual activity is disease and damaged psyches. The wages of ice-cream sundaes three times a week is, well, we know where the payment shows up.

In John 10:10, NIV, the Lord says, "I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full." The plan He set for us is one that will enable us to be happier *in the long run*, but perhaps not right now.

Instead of "Just say *No*," perhaps it should be, "Just ask *Why*?" Is it really worth the instant total gratification? Can you live without it now? Can you live without it at all?

REACT

1. What effect does dieting during the week and "pigging out" on Saturday night have on *total* health?
2. What spiritual preventive medicine can we use to combat sins that we seem to fall into again and again?
3. Why did God originally create sexual desires in us?

by Eddie Braga

Eddie Braga is the director of admissions marketing at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

A Dialogue With Solomon

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 31:10, 30

Once upon a time there was a beautiful young woman named Vanity. The focal point of her beauty stemmed from her big brown eyes.

But Vanity began to think more and more about her appearance. She began taking her curling iron with her to work so that she could touch up her hair after her 20-minute commute. She plastered on foundation and painted on lipstick, but she never used eyeliner, for this beautiful young lady had a deep, dark secret. She had to wear contact lenses.

Vanity was extremely near-sighted, and in the far left-hand corner of her bureau drawer sat a pair of thick eyeglasses. Over time, something happened to her contact lenses. She was forced to don the dreaded glasses.

The first morning she put them on, she almost cried. The bulky plastic frames were obviously obscuring her beauty. She avoided her friends as much as possible; she didn't look anyone in the eye, stop to chat with anyone, or even pause for a friendly smile. Vanity just rushed to the refuge of her room and called up an old friend.

"Solomon, you won't believe what an awful day I've had," she sobbed.

"Let me guess. You had to

wear your glasses today."

"How did you know? Has the news already spread?" Vanity asked.

"No, nothing of the sort," said Solomon. "However, I do fail to see what the problem is."

"I thought you understood me, Solomon," Vanity whined. "It's embarrassing to go around with these things on."

"Remember, Vanity, pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall."

"I guess you're right. I have fallen pretty far. Everyone used to think I was beautiful . . ."

"Vanity, you're missing the point. When pride comes, then comes shame, but a gracious woman retains honor."

"I get the feeling, Solomon, that you don't think looks are important. To get ahead in this world you have to look your best. You've got to put your best face forward."

Solomon sighed. "Is that what you really care about," he asked sadly, "getting ahead in this world?"

"I realize I need to get my priorities straight. I've been concentrating so hard on looking my best that I haven't been the best person I can be."

"I have a saying for you, a proverb," replied Solomon. "Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies." "Favour is deceitful, and beauty is vain: but a woman that feareth the Lord, she shall be praised."

by Leslie Headley

Leslie Headley is a senior English major and the Student Association vice-president at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Lesson 5, October 27–November 3

Your Choices Determine Your Destiny



“Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course” (Prov. 15:21, NIV).

Sunday, October 27

The Saturday-Night-Video Dilemma

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Josh. 24:15

Have you ever thought about how many choices you make in one day or even one hour? Some choices are a lot more important than others, but even the less important require energy in the decision-making process.

For instance, have you ever gone into a video store with no idea what you wanted to watch that evening? Usually by the time 30 minutes have gone by, you have it narrowed down to *Pollyanna*, *Monty Python's In Search of the Holy Grail*, *The Ten Commandments*, and *Ernest Goes to Camp*. Well, when you find out that most of the group has seen *Pollyanna* 25 times and that half of the group doesn't enjoy English humor, you rule out *Pollyanna* and *In Search of the Holy Grail*. This, of course, takes another 15 minutes to decide.

In the next 20 minutes the group decides that Hollywood probably wouldn't shed any new light on the subject of the Ten Commandments. So that leaves only *Ernest Goes to Camp*. But then in a quick committee meeting, the group decides it wants something with a little more substance, so now you are back where you started almost an hour before.

By now the video store is going to close in 10 minutes. Everyone

is becoming frustrated and restless, and you feel hurried and uncomfortable. Your friends are mumbling about being tired and leaving, so before you can change your mind, you quickly rent *Pollyanna* and take it home to watch it for time number 26.

Even though this is an exaggeration, it does show how something that should normally take up an hour-and-a-half of your Saturday night, and will have very little if any bearing on the rest of your life, can turn into something that can waste a lot of extra time, cause contention, and maybe even upset some people.

If we would expend an equal amount of energy on things that will be of some importance in our later lives as we do on the things that will have little or no bearing later on, some facets of our everyday life would not seem as difficult to cope with as they do now.

The only choice that is really important is that of whom we are going to let lead us. Are we going to follow Christ or Satan? We can't walk the fence between these two choices, because by *not* making a choice, we *are* actually choosing. When we do make a decision either way, things will be easier in that a lot of our choices will then fall into place. "Choose you this day whom ye will serve; . . . as for me and my house, we will serve the Lord" (Josh. 24:15).

by Kent Rogers

Kent Rogers is a sophomore English/religion major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Monday, October 28

The Truth About the Truth

LOGOS

Prov. 15:21, NIV

Although God is the designer of the laws that govern all matter, energy, and life, He is not responsible for the harvest I reap. I sow the seed of my choice. If I am a fool, I will be condemned, not for my weakness, but for refusing the help that is available. Or I can choose to live in harmony with the laws of life and receive the necessary power from God to choose the harvest unto eternal life.

The Divine Standard (read Prov. 3:1-7)

Here lies a nearly forgotten view of the law. The divine standard is more than a frustrating round of attention to a plethora of man-made rules. It is not to be a burden to us—though many have made it thus for themselves! Instead, we receive a different picture of the law.

The law essentially directs us to live two ways: loving God and loving those around us. And how refreshing it is to see Solomon in his wisdom reflect upon the law so: "Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart" (verse 3, NIV). Solomon expresses the intrinsic value and beauty of the law; we are to wear it as an adornment instead of as a noose.

For those who will keep the law mechanically, apart from Christ, Solomon adds this message: "Write them [love and faithfulness] on the tablet of your heart." We are not called to perform works merely for man to see, but rather our obedience is the outflow of our devotion to and partnership with Christ. Essentially this leads us to shunning legalism and ritualism; our hearts become vessels only for God.

Works performed apart from Christ are only a cleansing of the outside of the cup. We are called to cleanse the inside of the cup so that the vessel, our hearts, will be pure for God to inhabit. The divine standard is best evidenced by the life of Jesus—love and faithfulness to His Father in heaven shone through in all He did—"I do always those things that please him" (John 8:29).

Do you view the law as adornment or as a noose? Why?

Find specific incidents in the life of Jesus in which He demonstrated a view of the law that sharply contrasted with the law as interpreted by the Pharisees. How and why are they different?

The Folly of Lawlessness (read Prov. 15:21, NIV)

"Folly delights a man who lacks judgment, but a man of understanding keeps a straight course" (Prov. 15:21, NIV).

C. S. Lewis once stated that

by Michael Kinnen

Michael Kinnen, editor of the *Loma Linda University Criterion*, is a graduate student in medieval literature and a senior accounting major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

there will be more theologians in the depths of hell than in heaven, because they are more concerned with their own thoughts about God than with God's thoughts for man.

How often theology is substituted for the gospel. And while we debate arcane and useless issues, people around us perish without ever hearing the gospel—or worse, without seeing the gospel in our lives. How easy it is to know *about* God—but to know *Him* personally is quite different. We live in an age in which many proudly recite all our truths without proclaiming the truth Himself.

Richard Wurmbrand, who spent 14 years under torture in concentration camps because he had dared to preach the gospel, was asked which scriptures helped him to endure the terrible torture. He replied that to know the verses was not enough; only knowing the Author of those verses gave consolation.

We must fellowship with God and know Him. To know only *about* Him will not suffice.

The Reaping Time (read Prov. 22:8)

"He who sows wickedness reaps trouble, and the rod of his fury will be destroyed" (Prov. 22:8, NIV).

The wicked's oppression will be

destroyed. And, sadly, so will they. Salvation or eternal loss is not God's choice; it is our own. We are responsible for our actions and the motives that prompt them. God isn't responsible for the harvest we reap, because salvation is our choice.

When the time of judgment arrives, we will all (as far as our own personal merit is concerned) be found wanting in the scales; yet those who have chosen fellowship with God will find that their acceptance of Jesus' blood for their sins, plus His mediatorial ministry for them since His ascension, has drawn them into the heavenly kingdom, not through their own works, but only through Jesus' sacrifice and *His* merit.

The decision to accept salvation—victory in Christ—is important and cannot be put off. Don't make the 2,300 days the center of your religion. Jesus will come as a thief in the night for all the people into whose timetable He doesn't fit. If you or I should die tomorrow, that for us will be the second coming. It will seem only a moment has elapsed when we awaken to His resurrection summons. Salvation is about accepting Jesus and His forgiveness for our sins; it is also a continual preparedness in heart and spirit. In the reaping time our final hope is that Jesus will reap *us*.

Tuesday, October 29

Max's Choice

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 12:14

Max Loeb grew up in King Estates, an island community outside Miami. His father is a multimillionaire Jewish surgeon who owns the luxurious 140-bed Bel Air Medical Clinic and the showpiece residential villa in this prestigious neighborhood. Max had a tough childhood.

He had to grow up in a family that owned its own private marina, swimming pool, tennis courts, Rolls-Royce, Mercedes, cabin cruiser, yacht, stables, polo field, and heliport. No one entered King Estates without a magnetic pass card, and its code was changed weekly. It was a community lined with armed private guards whose patrol cars and boats were equipped with sirens and searchlights.

Max attended the finest schools, dated the finest women, and found himself preparing for a specialty in thoracic surgery without ever having to exercise his freedom of choice or exert his will. You might say that he grew up with different kinds of choices than most of us; in fact, his destiny seemed to be determined whether he chose it or not.

Ellen White says a great deal in her writings about the importance of choice. How we exercise our freedom of choice will determine our character development,

our happiness, our influence, our attitudes, and our salvation. She declares that "every student needs to understand the relation between plain living and high thinking. It rests with us individually to decide whether our lives shall be controlled by the mind or by the body. The youth must, each for himself, make the choice that shapes his life; and no pains should be spared that he may understand the forces with which he has to deal, and the influences which mold character and destiny."^{*} She argues that we are not simply the victims of our own genetic endowments or social, physical, financial, and spiritual circumstances. People can change regardless of their backgrounds, and these changes can be dramatic.

Max, for example, suddenly dropped out of his medical residency, left his palatial home, and moved into the poorest ghetto of Calcutta to work with Mother Theresa, helping the lepers and the starving children. On more than one occasion he nearly lost his life through disease, scorpion bites, or, in one instance, falling into a sewer manhole filled with human excrement. Why would Max make such a choice? He probably came to realize that true happiness involves saying Yes to God.

^{*}Education, p. 202.

by Steve Daily

Steve Daily is campus chaplain at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Hoping for Salvation

EVIDENCE

Key Text: John 14:6

Don't bother merely hoping for salvation. Live it and experience it now, because it is already available through the blood of Jesus on the cross—already ours unless and until we bring reservations into our commitment to Christ. It can be ours today and lost tomorrow unless we maintain a vital connection with Jesus.

Salvation is ours. The price was paid at the cross and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Yet why do so many Christians today not believe that they are saved? Do *you* know, without any doubt, that if you would die in the next minute, you would be saved? Do you doubt that you would make it?

Salvation, elusive and well nigh impossible in the minds of many, is one of the simplest choices for Christians today. Unlike joining a church, where one takes hours of studies and is recommended by a pastor for baptism and then membership, Jesus simply asks us to invite

Him into our hearts. Acceptance of Christ and allowing Him into our hearts is all it takes.

We must understand from the Bible that doctrines and all our neat little works and deeds won't get us into heaven. As a matter of fact, for us to try to get into heaven through our own unaided works and deeds is the greatest form of sacrilege. Why? Because anyone who does this is essentially saying that he can obtain salvation on his own. But Jesus says, "No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV). Salvation is not merely for Seventh-day Adventists but for all who will truly accept Jesus Christ. We, the world body of believers, are saved by Jesus Christ and His blood. And ultimately, salvation is not something that we may experience only in some future time; rather, it is something into which we can enter and begin living today.

REACT

If knowledge of Christ's teachings cannot save us, what role should it have in a Christian's life?

by Michael Kinnen

Michael Kinnen, editor of the *Loma Linda University Criterion*, is a graduate student in medieval literature and a senior accounting major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Thursday, October 31

Just Do It!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 23:26

When was the last time you paused for a brief moment, taking time out from whatever you were doing, and simply recommitted yourself to God? Perhaps you were too busy studying for that exam or writing that report or fighting the rush-hour traffic. Perhaps your commitment wouldn't be sincere enough if you weren't on your knees. Maybe it was just never "the right time."

Often we think of a spiritual recommitment as a lengthy process, motivated by weekly discussions with the pastor and by hours of diligent prayer. The fact is, you can give your life to the Lord anytime, anywhere, without even getting sore knees. It is simply a matter of making that choice to accept God's plan. Here's how:

1. *Come before the throne.*

Esther came before the throne of King Ahasuerus with full knowledge that he could have her executed. Rather than rejecting her, Ahasuerus showed his love for her by holding out his scepter, allowing Esther to confront him (see Esther 4, 5). Our heavenly Father holds out His scepter all the time; we must only reach out and touch it. If we reject Him, refusing to accept His love, we cannot live; by taking His offer, we accept new life from Him.

2. *Accept new life.* One of my favorite biblical passages is Ephesians 2:1-10. Paul tells us that we are "created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them" (verse 10, NKJV). When we commit ourselves to God's original plan, we are given new life, able to conform to His holy law. Even after we have sinned, God is willing to return to us that life, if we are willing to try to live it.

3. *Dedicate yourself now.* You can decide anytime to give up your old life and start over. You can start over a hundred times a day, every day, "For You, Lord, are good, and ready to forgive, and abundant in mercy to all those who call upon You" (Ps. 86:5, NKJV). However, nobody can make that choice for you, not even God. The responsibility is yours.

Give your old life to the Lord now. Just do it! Stop reading and say aloud, "Jesus, I want to dedicate my life to You right now and receive new life in You."

There, was that so difficult? God will not reject you because you aren't committed enough or turn away because you didn't spend enough time on your knees before dedicating your life to Him. If you are willing to come before His throne, He will bring you into fellowship with Himself. You are a part of His plan!

by Peter Cress

Peter Cress is a communication major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

My Class Project

OPINION

Key Texts: Josh. 24:15-18; Prov. 3:5, 6

Bzzzzz! I reached over the covers and hit the off switch on the alarm clock. As I slowly joined reality, I wondered what day it was. I looked at the clock—8:00 a.m. My eyes widened as I sat up in bed. “Oh, no!” I exclaimed. “I overslept! I should have been opening the preschool two hours ago!” Then I remembered it was Sabbath. I relaxed and snuggled back under my blankets.

An hour and a half later, I wandered through the church halls, trying to figure out which Sabbath School class to attend. Listening to a bunch of crying children who wanted their mommies at 6:00 a.m. almost seemed more enjoyable than deciding on a place to worship the Lord.

I finally picked a Sabbath School class geared for college students and began to count the couples sitting together. *Wow*, I thought, *a lot of couples today, and spring is half a year away*. After I counted the couples, I whipped out my pen and began to color in the O's typed in my bulletin. Little games at Sabbath School are what I resort to when I become bored with the program or tired of criticizing it.

On the first day of school I found out that I would have to do a project in my religion class: observe four different churches or plan an experimental Sabbath School at the collegiate church. The whole class obviously picked the first choice as their project. What college student had the time or will to plan a Sabbath School every week anyway? I surely didn't, but then again, I was wrong. God knew better.

That afternoon when I went to work (ironically, I was the teacher's assistant for my religion professor), I had a strong impression to change my project. This decision proved to be one of the better decisions I had made in my college experience.

I now wake up Sabbath mornings excited to go to Sabbath School because I am a part of it. The project finished long ago, but the Sabbath School lives on. Worshiping the Lord definitely gives more joy than crying children at six in the morning.

REACT

1. Why is it easier to sit and criticize than to stand up and do?
2. What is the purpose of worship?
3. Why do I choose to worship the Lord? Is it because I actually want to, or is it because I think I have to?

by K. Elaine Pascual

K. Elaine Pascual is a junior child-development/nursing major at Loma Linda University Riverside, California.

Lesson 6, November 3-9

Live Within Your Means



“Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine” (Prov. 3:9, 10, NIV).

When Your Means Don't Mean Much

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 3:10, 11, NIV

Does God really expect a Christian to heed the counsel given in Proverbs 3:9, NIV, which says, "Honor the Lord with your wealth, with the firstfruits of your crops"? Even households with two incomes have barely enough money to hold things together, with demands such as food, clothing, shelter, and Christian education. And future projections give little hope of relief from astronomical educational expenses:

"By the year 2001, four years of tuition at a private college will cost \$93,497. And a state university won't be any bargain, either. You'll probably be set back \$52,913 before your kid ever gets fitted for a cap and gown, not including the cost of room and board, books, transportation, and dozens of other expenses."¹

Despite these alarming statistics, God expects to be included in a Christian's financial affairs. The Christian can manage his means efficiently if he utilizes them appropriately. The Christian must honor the Lord in his giving, avoid making riches his god, be generous, plan ahead, and avoid getting into needless debt.

When the Christian manages his personal affairs and business

practices according to biblical counsel, the Lord gives His approval and blessing. Proverbs 3:10, NIV, says, "Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine." God's blessings rarely come in the form of a million-dollar jackpot or an expensive car, but His blessings do come.

A story is told of a hard freeze that struck Florida during November 1957. "One night the thermometer stood at 17 degrees for twelve hours. When the papers announced that such a cold wave was imminent, one of our Adventist families living near St. Augustine knelt and claimed God's promise in Malachi 3:10, 11. They watched the mercury dropping, dropping. Since they had been faithful stewards, they felt the Lord would preserve their grove. He did! Throughout an area of hundreds of square miles trees were frozen. Our faithful members' grove was left unharmed."²

To those who honor the Lord in financial matters, He is still in the "blessing business," even in the 1990s.

1. John Crudele, "New Ways to Save for College," *Parents*, February 1990, p. 202.

2. Robert H. Pierson, *501 Adventist Illustrations and Stories*, p. 294.

by Karen I. Tucker

Karen I. Tucker is an assistant professor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Monday, November 4

Thriving Like a Green Leaf

LOGOS

Luke 6:38

God's Pledge to Faithfulness and Integrity

"Honor the Lord with your substance . . . then your barns will be filled with plenty" (Prov. 3:9, 10, RSV).

To honor God is to engage with Him in a giving-and-sharing experience. Giving becomes a relationship in which we learn to give as He gives. The route to giving as He gives passes through honoring God with substance and self.

Proverbs 3:9, 10 focuses on a simultaneous process. As God is honored, He honors the one who honors Him. Jesus was probably influenced by Proverbs 3:9 when He said, "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over" (Luke 6:38, NIV). The passage describes the benefits of a completed act constantly overflowing. God's gift to us makes it possible for us to have something with which to honor Him. The process—God to us to God to us to God—becomes a never-ending scenario of promise and fulfillment.

The August 1990 issue of *Reader's Digest* features a story about Milton Petrie, "Millionaire With a Big Heart." When he was questioned concerning his philanthropy, Petrie responded, "The

more money I make, the more I can give away. How can I not? After all, I am paying the Lord back for what He's done for me."

Emulating the Petrie way is an acceptable way of honoring the Lord with your substance. Jesus confirms this in the saying: "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40, NIV). According to verse 34, such service is a precondition for inheriting the kingdom.

As we occupy, honoring Him until He comes, the overflow continues to run into the barns and vats of those who honor Him with substance and self. The character of the overflow adjusts to include understanding, discretion, wisdom, and knowledge.

Overflowing Understanding

The one who honors God understands empirically that "he who trusts in his riches will wither" (Prov. 11:28, RSV). Commenting on a related proverb (11:18), R. B. Y. Scott says, "One of the answers to the problem of the prosperity of the wicked is that this prosperity does not last"¹ (cf. Ps. 73:12, 16-20). Verses 18 and 28 of Proverbs 11 emphasize that the one who trusts in his personal wealth is wicked.

Evil associates itself with wealth when the objective form of wealth—money—becomes an object of love. According to 1 Timothy 6:10, "the love of money is a

by James H. Melancon

James H. Melancon is professor of New Testament and biblical languages at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

root of all kinds of evil" (NIV). The passage further informs: "It is through this craving that some have wandered away from the faith" (verse 10, RSV). From this we understand that love for money is truly an apostasy mill.

"Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf" (Prov. 11:28, NIV). To trust in riches is equivalent to trust in man. The affirmation of man as an object of trust denies God, who instructs: "Put not your trust . . . in a son of man, in whom there is no help" (Ps. 146:3, RSV).

Overflowing Discretion

Discretionary factors of generosity and contentment effectively enter the experience of one who honors God with substance and self. The two proverbs in 11:24 and 25 say: "One man gives freely [like Milton Petrie], yet grows all the richer." "A liberal man will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered" (RSV).

Verse 25 is a rare occurrence among the proverbs in that its clauses are complementary; this focuses the importance of the proverb. Generally, the clauses in a proverb are antithetical, as in verse 24.

The "what he should give" of verse 24 increases in direct proportion to the larger imperative in giving. In giving what he should, the giver accepts that he is his brother's keeper.

The experience of the generous is an unending cycle of replenishment. Withhold what should be given and watch it become worthless. Give and be content, noting that what is left is more than enough.

Overflowing Knowledge

"The rich rules over the poor,

and the borrower is the slave of the lender" (Prov. 22:7, RSV).

This proverb provides what has been called "a frank recognition of the power of wealth."¹ The rich can manipulate the poor because of the unrelenting indebtedness of the poor. The obscenity of debt is that it further impoverishes.

Surety is a leverage the rich use against their debtors. It was necessary in ancient society for men to sell themselves and their children into slavery because of indebtedness; debtors were routinely enslaved by creditors as surety (see Prov. 22:7; Exod. 21:2-7; 2 Kings 4:1-7).

The latter passage is a summons to live within one's means. It indicates God's guarantee that one can live within his means.

Debt can summon all of a family's living as surety. In the process of courting indebtedness, one encircles his own neck with the creditor's noose.

Indebtedness is rarely incurred in pursuit of necessity. It is generally a product of craving. Avoiding indebtedness is a concomitant of contentment. A Christian should confound indebtedness and the ensuing imposition of surety. He honors the Lord with substance and self. Simultaneously, his barns and his vats receive the overflow of understanding, discretion, and knowledge, each of which supplies increased efficiency in living within one's means for the sake of God, family, and society. In such an arrangement, God Himself becomes surety.

1. R. B. Y. Scott, *The Anchor Bible: Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (Garden City, New York: Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1965), p. 88.

2. William McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1977), p. 566.

Tuesday, November 5

A Tithepayer's Mistake

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 3:13-16

"Money is a trust from God. It is not ours to expend for the gratification of pride or ambition. In the hands of God's children it is food for the hungry and clothing for the naked. . . . You could bring happiness to many hearts by using wisely the money that is now spent for show."¹

"Our money has not been given us that we might honor and glorify ourselves. As faithful stewards we are to use it for the honor and glory of God. Some think that only a portion of their means is the Lord's. When they have set apart a portion for religious and charitable purposes, they regard the remainder as their own, to be used as they see fit. But in this they mistake. All we possess is the Lord's, and we are accountable to Him for the use we make of it. In the use of every penny it will be seen whether we love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves."²

"Many, very many, have not so educated themselves that they can keep their expenditures within the limit of their income. They do not learn to adapt themselves to circumstances, and they borrow and borrow again and again, and become overwhelmed in debt, and consequently they become discour-

aged and disheartened. Many do not remember the cause of God, and carelessly expend money in holiday amusement, in dress and folly. . . . Thus they rob God in tithes and offerings, and through their selfish indulgence they lay the soul open to fierce temptations, and fall into the wiles of Satan."³

"The history of David affords one of the most impressive testimonies ever given to the dangers that threaten the soul from power and riches and worldly honor—those things that are most eagerly desired among men. . . . David's early life as a shepherd, with its lessons of humility, of patient toil, and of tender care for his flocks . . . had been appointed by the Lord as a preparation for the throne of Israel. . . . And yet worldly success and honor so weakened the character of David that he was repeatedly overcome by the tempter."⁴

We should always be on guard and not allow ourselves to spend money upon unnecessary things that are simply for display.

REACT

What can we do as young people to learn early how to manage our money?

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 351.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 310.

3. *Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 249.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 746.

by Allen A. Brown

Allen A. Brown is a theology/psychology major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Conduits for God's Blessings

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 6:19

Just one breath separates each of us from eternity. When our life is based on too much concern for amassing wealth, it stands in antithesis to Jesus' admonition: "Take no thought, saying, What shall we eat? or, What shall we drink? or, Wherewithal shall we be clothed?" (Matt. 6:31).

We can become so wrapped up with trying to make a living that we forget the sole purpose of our existence—loving God with all our hearts and loving our fellow human beings as ourselves. Often we become so mesmerized by the temporal things the world offers that we actually seem to enjoy being influenced by those things. We act like children, except that the toys we want are much bigger—cars, houses, boats, etc.

Whenever we become engrossed in the cares of this life to the exclusion of eternal things, we are unconsciously sending a message that we are not sure the Lord, who promised to take care of our needs, is true to His word. As Christians we should not worry unduly about our physical and temporal needs. The Lord, who rained manna from heaven to feed the Israelites in the wilderness, still conducts the miracle of

the manna. Many times we have been faced with seemingly insurmountable obstacles—how to obtain money to register for school, how to get something that we really needed—but the Lord has "come through" for us.

God is a great God. He is true to His promises, on certain conditions. If we would obey, we would "eat the good of the land" (Isa. 1:19).

Admittedly, God owns everything. Why does He need any of what we acquire to complete His plans for this world? The answer is simple—He wants us to cooperate with Him in saving the world. We are co-laborers with the Lord Jesus Himself. What a grand opportunity to make our lives count for others in sharing what we have with the Person who made it possible to be so blessed.

After all, we are only temporal custodians, by divine grace, of whatever we have. We should not be so caught up with the things of this life that we lose sight of the grand finale. The best love we can express to Him is to give of ourselves unreservedly and to help in whatever way we can in promoting a quick answer to the prayer: "Even so, come, Lord Jesus" (Rev. 22:20). In effect, we are only conduits for God's blessings to reach others so they can "taste and see the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8).

by Sammy R. Browne

Sammy R. Browne is an assistant professor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Thursday, November 7

Where Donald Trump Went Wrong

HOW-TO

Key Text: Deut. 16:17

We've been studying stewardship in this week's lesson. God entrusts us with health and material wealth to the degree that we remain faithful in the discharge of our obligations to Him. As we return to God what He requires of us, our natural selfish bent is tempered—we become willing to share our means and ourselves with others. That is faith in action. It is a dynamic relationship with God. Stewardship is an active demonstration of the careful use of what God entrusts to us.

Our hearts become right with God because we give unreservedly. Closeness to God is measured by our relationships with others.

1. *Return to God what is rightfully His.* Put God to the test of returning the tenth of your income to Him, and see what blessings you receive (see Mal. 3:10-12). Do your part and trust that God will do His.

2. *Be satisfied with what you have.* Many of us look for material blessings, but God knows what we need most. The danger of fall-

ing into the I-want-that-one-too habit should suggest Jesus' warning about gaining the whole world but losing your soul (see Matt. 16:26). Let's be diligent in safeguarding our souls.

3. *Owe no man anything but love.* In a society that thrives on credit, this sounds like hitting the drum on the wrong side. But the principle of being debt-free works. A sense of peace from unnecessary worries comes with such freedom. We should try to pay our obligations and get out of debts that seem to encroach on our fidelity to God and others (see Rom. 13:8).

4. *Be a strategist.* Plan to be a faithful caretaker of the blessings God gives you. Undertake a careful planning in the four major areas of the disbursement of your income—how much to give God, how much to spend, how much to save, and how much and in what to invest. Success will depend on following God's directions. Even the Donald Trumps can lose it all when they are not directed by God's will in the resources He places in their hands.

REACT

How can you know exactly what God's financial expectations of you personally are?

by Sammy R. Browne

Sammy R. Browne is an assistant professor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

More Than Money

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 10:16

No doubt you've read those letters and seen those signs. The eye-catching letters that tempt: "As a responsible soon-to-be college graduate, you've demonstrated the ability to reach goals and handle demands. The _____ company values these qualities and feels that they'll help you when using the enclosed credit card. . . .

"Now that you're graduating, our credit card will come in handy for furnishing that new apartment, paying for business trips, and making payments on that new car."

And the alluring signs beckon: "Up to 80 Percent Off." "Instant Credit Available." "Going-Out-of-Business Sale."

It all seems to be part of a conspiracy to have us spending money that we can't afford and creating debts that it takes a lifetime to repay.

Arguably, many of the inducements are good and useful and valuable—as are the next ones and the next ones that we hanker for almost immediately afterward! Such an addiction causes someone to overlook the fact that a thing's economy, fashion, durability, or even value does not determine whether it should be bought or accepted. Vital questions like these need consideration: Is the item necessary? Is buying it practical?

Is the item affordable?

Of course, this approach makes it easier to return tithe. But that's not enough. More is needed. In this challenging world of broken lives, impoverished families, and starving people, assisting God in the work of salvation also means helping Him by systematically supporting social causes. Money can be transformed into food for the hungry. Water for the thirsty. Clothes for the naked. Literacy for the illiterate.

To paraphrase Paul, though, God's kingdom is more than dollars and cents. Many have painfully discovered that their best days, spiritually and otherwise, occur when they make time to pray to and study with God *before* the day's challenges begin and when they keep Him before them throughout the day. Interestingly, maintaining a relationship with God spills over into one's personal finances. When added to an active desire to honor Him, it becomes a joy to return tithe and give offerings, for such actions advance the cause of the One who gave all for us and help the beings He created.

Yes, material blessings do come along with such dedication; but they are secondary. The creation of pure motives, the empathy with less-fortunate fellow beings, the establishment of love as a principle of action—these and other priceless traits teach us that wealth is more than money!

by Derek C. Bowe

Derek C. Bowe is an assistant professor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 7, November 10-16

As the Needle to the Pole



“The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity” (Prov. 11:3, NIV).

It's Not a Federal Offense! (Or Is It?)

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 21:6

There are times when, because of extenuating circumstances, editors are forced to assign an article to an author on short notice. Naturally, an author has the option of turning the assignment down (it isn't school, after all). But if the author and editor have a good working relationship, they can usually reach some kind of accommodation. Writing most of this week's lesson was one of those times.

For some, the creative process is heightened by the pressure of tight deadlines. The same might be said of me also. Unfortunately, a tight writing deadline seems to stimulate my creativity toward my stained-glass projects or my water garden—two hobbies that have brought me hours of fun, but weren't doing my editor any good!

I should also add that unlike

other years, when I had little yardwork after mid-July (lack of rain had turned everything brown by then), I was still mowing every weekend right through September. I needed a break, a day off when I could get my writing done.

I didn't really want to use vacation time. So someone suggested I just call in sick. After all, who would know? Besides, everyone needs a "mental-health day" once in a while. And it's not as if it's a federal offense.

The argument had a certain appeal. (In fact, I had thought about it even before the suggestion was made.) But I was to write about integrity and duplicity, faithfulness and unfaithfulness. Could I write about such subjects and call in sick when I really wasn't?

Well, I decided that I wasn't into the "fleeting fantasy of those who seek death" (Prov. 21:6, NKJV). So I took a day's vacation. And most of the following is the result of my decision. Honestly!

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, November 11

A Compass to Guide By

LOGOS

Prov. 11:3

Choosing a Pole to Guide By

"The integrity of the upright guides them, but the unfaithful are destroyed by their duplicity" (Prov. 11:3, NIV).

Being lost is no fun! Not long ago three little girls spent a long cold night learning that lesson out in the forest east of the Pacific Union College campus. If they had been able to become oriented, they would not have wandered around in circles until rescuers found them the next morning. A little thing like a compass was all that was needed.

However, a true woodsman can tell you that even a compass can be deceiving! There is a big difference between the north to which a compass points, or magnetic north, and the "true" northern point on our globe—of as much as 1,000 miles. Modern navigators figure in this variance through a process known as declination.

The need for an accurate "compass" is just as critical in life. Every day, choices must be made, with far-reaching consequences. People are constantly looking for insight or special guidance in making the correct decision. But the guidance mechanisms of this world can have serious hidden defects, just like the problem with the magnetic compass.

In His wisdom God understands the problem we face in making choices. The Bible is His compass to use in making choices in this life. Additionally, He has empowered us through His Holy Spirit to live lives in harmony with the "true north" of life. The choice before us is whether we will decide to be true to the integrity given us.

What is integrity? Is the integrity taught and advocated in the Bible out of place or out of date in our modern world?

Working Self Into the Guidance System

"Two things I ask of you, O Lord; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, 'Who is the Lord?' or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God" (Prov. 30:7-9, NIV).

The messages we get today on the issue of self are focused inward. Self-help how-to manuals top the bestseller lists, and psychiatric couches are well occupied. The consistent message given is one of self-focus. Taking care of number one is the main solution.

To a point, there is wisdom in this message. After all, how can one give selflessly or sacrifice self if one doesn't know who self is? The problem is that only part of

by John Stark

John Stark is the general manager of Howell Mountain Enterprises, the business arm of Pacific Union College.

the answer is being addressed. Just as with the compass, the bearing given by the world's message is not for true north.

Proverbs 30:7-9 proclaims the message of balance. We do have needs that must be met—very personal needs that are recognized only when in touch with self. God will provide for these needs, but we should recognize the wisdom in balance. Security is found in having just enough. Likewise, security is found in knowing, but not forever dwelling on, self. Jesus was our ultimate example in balance. He lived a life very clearly focused on others, yet He took time to pray and to rejuvenate His inner self. One of the hidden “treasures” in the events of His last week is found in the intense and rich time He spent alone in the garden!

Beyond Self to Others

“A kind man benefits himself, but a cruel man brings trouble on himself” (Prov. 11:17, NIV).

Once we have connected with self and are firmly grounded in Christ's example to us, the needle should swing us to the “true north”—service to others. It has been said that giving to others is a gift that keeps on giving. But the true gain in kindness is found even if there is no return. There is a peace in knowing that the right thing has been done, and a freedom in reaching out.

How does it feel to give to others? Is it somehow just as important to know how to receive?

Integrity in Relationships

“Food gained by fraud tastes sweet to a man, but he ends up with a mouth full of gravel” (Prov. 20:17, NIV).

When we interact with others, a whole new set of temptations

and problems face us. The reality of life is that we don't all have fair portions. Envy, jealousy, and larceny can easily brew when we come face to face with this reality. When we are bombarded with newspaper headlines telling us that others are getting away with a lack of integrity, it is easy to conclude that this is acceptable.

Everyday dealings challenge our integrity in many ways. Just how honest should we be on our income taxes? Should every income item be reported? At work, is it all right to balance our checkbook, develop the shopping list, or spend time catching up on the latest gossip while on the company's time? Do we really give the time we should to our families, our friends, our God?

All of these areas must be evaluated against some standard. Although it is easy to develop arbitrarily some sort of rigid standard to handle these questions, what about developing something realistic that we can commit to?

Once again the proverb offers very practical advice. In dealing with difficult ethical decisions, it is best not to rely on feelings and emotions. Things may feel right, but lead to pain and anguish. The loving God whom we serve knows what it is like to face these decisions, and He has given us powers of reason with which to resolve these difficult decisions. The question is whether we will take the time to process the information and ponder the consequences.

We have to *know* our God in a very personal way and be willing to accept His guidance. We also have to pick up the “compass” and use it. While the world is full of false leads, God has promised to lead us if we will just let Him! “Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life” (Prov. 22:4, NIV).

Tuesday, November 12

A Few Good Men

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 11:6

Whether you are a sports fan, a jock, or a person who enjoys cruising the mall looking for bargains, the phrase “a few good men” immediately brings to mind the Marine Corps. The marines are looking for a few good men with the mettle to become marines.

But the marines aren't the only ones looking for a few good men—and women, I might add. “The greatest want of the world is the want of men—men who will not be bought or sold, men who in their inmost souls are true and honest, men who do not fear to call sin by its right name, men whose conscience is as true to duty as the needle to the pole, men who will stand for right though the heavens fall.”¹

To those of you who have been associated with Adventists for any length of time, this quote may be as familiar to you as John 3:16. Maybe you even had to memorize it. But have you ever taken note of the paragraph following it? “Such a character is not the re-

sult of accident; it is not due to special favors or endowments of Providence. A noble character is the result of self-discipline, of the subjection of the lower to the higher nature—the surrender of self for the service of love to God and man.”²

“Of a meek and gentle spirit, Elisha possessed also energy and steadfastness. He cherished the love and fear of God, and in the humble round of daily toil he gained strength of purpose and nobleness of character, growing in divine grace and knowledge.”³

Indeed, if Ellen White were writing today, she might write that Seventh-day Adventists were looking for a few good Christians with the mettle to be called the sons and daughters of God.

REACT

1. Is heaven only for the few, the strong, and the brave?
2. Can you be part of that group?
3. What and where is basic training?

1. *Education*, p. 57.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 58.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Hero Worship or Worshiped Heroes?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 29:16

At this writing, the Middle East seems poised on the brink of war. A war in this region would affect more than just the price of a barrel of crude. Such a conflict would determine how and where many people will live, as well as the integrity of the world powers involved.

However, in spite of the spectacular gains and losses of war, in spite of the personal achievements and heroism in such times of crisis, God has chosen the following as His hallmark of integrity: "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth!" (Ps. 46:10, NKJV). God's hall of fame includes few military

leaders. And no one in God's hall of fame achieved greatness on his own.

By *faith*, Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Joseph, Moses, Rahab, Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel, and the prophets were, out of weakness, made strong in order to subdue kingdoms, work righteousness, obtain promises, and stop the mouths of lions.

Yet, what value would our integrity have if it were not tested? So it is that some of the faithful were stoned, sawed in two, or forced to run for their lives. Of these, God said the world is unworthy (see Heb. 11). "The just shall live by faith; but if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him" (Heb. 10:38, NKJV). Indeed, integrity is the action form of faith.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Thursday, November 14

Just Say No

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 21:15

I'm sure most of you are familiar with the concept of free association in which one person mentions a word, a name, or a concept; then the other person immediately says the first thing that pops into his or her mind. Well, my library has relatively few how-to books, because when I free associate *how-to*, the first thing that pops into my mind is "easier said than done" or "show me." Only much later do I get "sure—no problem." Therefore, I view "Just say No" or "Just do it" (the popular answers to today's problems) with a good deal of skepticism.

Integrity, or faithfulness (and the two are associated in Prov. 11:13) has two sides: (1) what we do to maintain it and (2) what we

do that destroys it. Being faithful in small, unimportant things before we are called upon to make major life-altering decisions is not only found in Ellen White quotes; it is a biblical principle (see Matt. 25:21; Luke 16:10). Besides, this principle just makes sense. After all, no major league ballplayer ever made the game-saving catch or the game-winning hit after only *contemplating* the game.

The fact is, each major league player has made hundreds—even thousands—of runs, hits, and errors before ever reaching the majors. Integrity not only involves doing right things; it also involves not doing wrong ones.

Maintaining our integrity requires honesty in doing even little nickel-and-dime things, avoiding other small but dishonest or harmful habits, and replacing them with positive, honest, and helpful actions (see Matt. 12:43-45).

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Honest Bread and Morning Mouth

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 20:17

If you bother to listen to “older” folks, you will undoubtedly hear them pine for the days when it was safe for a woman to walk the streets at night and when a man’s word was his bond. Aside from the fact that women are not totally helpless, it is doubtful that anyone is old enough to remember when walking the streets of a major metropolitan area at night was all that safe for anybody.

What can you do about it? Not much.

However, when it comes to your word being your bond, that is something you *do* have control over.

The Sermon on the Mount is the entire gospel in a nutshell and a tremendous lesson on personal integrity. In Matt. 5:33-37, Christ instructs us not to promise things over which we have no control but simply to say what we

mean and to mean what we say (no campaign promises!). If we are always honest, then no one needs to question what we say because he will be used to trusting us.

On a recent trip to the bank, a new teller asked to see my driver’s license to cash a non-payroll check. As I reached for my wallet, the teller next to mine said, “Don’t bother. He’s OK.” She vouched for my integrity because I was a faithful customer. Oh, sure, it might be exciting to beat the system and rip them off for \$50. But would that bring me any lasting enjoyment, having to worry constantly about being caught? That “bread gained by deceit” (Prov. 20:17, NKJV) would give me as much happiness as a mouthful of gravel (an apt description of morning mouth).

As a Christian, don’t I have an obligation to be just as honest and faithful in everything—large and small—as I am with my bank? Think about who has the better accounting system!

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Lesson 8, November 17-23

Apples of Gold



“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver” (Prov. 25:11, NIV).

They're Only Words

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: James 3:3-6

A word aptly spoken: "Why did you come to this college from so far away?" I was curious about why a young girl would come all the way from Africa to a little college in Texas.

Was it her major? No, she said she could have chosen other Christian colleges with the same major. How about the climate? No. The cost? No. "OK, I give up. Why did you choose us?"

She told me it was because of a phone conversation. She went on to tell me about calling several colleges, at great expense, for information. She said all the colleges were similar, but when she spoke with our college, the student secretary was the only one who immediately said, "Let me call you back to save you money." The secretary did call back and was so pleasant and helpful that this girl made up her mind that she wanted to go to the college with which this secretary was associated. The church, like big business, is beginning to realize that you can spend millions on buildings and catchy slogans, but all of this can be undone by the greeter at the door or the person who answers the telephone!

A word *not* so aptly spoken: All semester I had problems with Dave. He was sullen in class, and I was sure he hated me. But I couldn't figure out why. He rebuffed my attempts to make

things friendlier both in and outside of class. Finally, after a particularly bitter response in class, I asked him to stay after class had ended.

Arms folded, eyes looking away—his body language was saying he didn't like me. After I insisted on an explanation for his bitterness, he finally told me. All the bitterness and attitude problems stemmed from a comment I had made about his Bible project early in the semester.

I couldn't remember any comments I made about anyone's project. But if I didn't remember, he certainly did!

He reminded me that each student had had to stand up in front of the class to explain his project, and that I had warned the class to be careful of their comments so as not to hurt anyone's feelings. Dave told me that I had said something about his poster that elicited some grins and chuckles from the class. He said this was very hurtful coming from the teacher, and he had decided that I didn't deserve his respect. I went home that day thinking, *All this grief just from a few words that I couldn't even remember speaking.*

This week the study is on what Proverbs says about our words. James 3:1-14 is a good collateral passage to study with this lesson. What we say can be a power for good or for evil. As you study the lesson, think about your words. Are there more good words or more evil words?

by Victor Brown

Victor Brown is enrollment vice-president and chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Monday, November 18

Uplifting or Upsetting Words

LOGOS

Prov. 15:4

In the world of gossip magazines we tend to think that slanderous words are OK because they are a part of society, and that hurting someone is really not a big deal. Then we get slapped in the face by someone who has spread big lies about us. It hurts because even our good friends will believe some of the lies.

Instead of going and asking the one who hurt us, we start to spread rumors about him. It is a vicious cycle. The result is that no one will trust us or the other party with the facts, because we might spoil the truth.

Christianity has suffered because of rumors. Many good people have left the faith because someone has been gossiping. Jesus always gave people the benefit of the doubt. He kept His words to a minimum, speaking only when He had a full grasp of what the situation was. He knew Proverbs 15:4, "A wholesome tongue is a tree of life" (NKJV).

There it is. Jesus is the True Vine, and we are the branches. Our words are an important part of who we want to be. We can help a fallen brother, or we can be his death.

"He is in the way of life that keepeth instruction: but he that refuseth reproof erreth" (Prov. 10:17).

As born-again Christians in-

tent on learning about Christ and waiting for His return, we still make mistakes. If we were able to take gentle rebuke from our peers, we would learn from our mistakes and be much happier Christians.

On the other hand, many Christians have taken this reproof business too far. They forget that Jesus was gentle and considerate when He told someone about his sin. He wrote it in the sand or took the person aside. He never fought fire with fire.

Matthew 7:3-5 speaks of removing the beam from your own eye first. You need to know where you stand in Christ and be ready for someone to criticize *you* if you are going to rebuke your peer. And the way that you rebuke someone will probably be the way you are treated. "Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him" (Prov. 30:5).

One of these days we are going to be walking down the streets of gold. All of God's people—red, yellow, black, white—are going to be living together. Even some people you thought would never make it to heaven are going to be there.

But *you* might not be there, because you cannot love someone who is not the same color. Those are sobering thoughts. Heaven will be the ultimate melting pot! We are to be like Christ. He is our example, and we should be walking every day toward a closer relationship with Him.

by Terry Johnson

Terry Johnson is a junior theology major and assistant chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Proverbs 10:19 says we can make someone great, or we can crush him into the ground. We have the power through our words to uplift a fellow Christian or to degrade him. Proverbs 13:3 states, "He who opens wide his lips shall have destruction" (NKJV). How many times have you wished that your lips would have remained closed instead of open?

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me." Even for those grounded in Christ, this phrase is just not true. Words can cause much more pain than physical wounds.

How we speak to and about certain people affects the image we have of them. God says in Ex. 20:5 that the sins of the parent will be passed down to the third

and fourth generation. So our words can come back and hit our grandchildren with full force. A good example of this can be seen in black-white relations in America.

From the time of the Emancipation Proclamation until now, more than 100 years later, blacks have been fighting for real freedom. And still they don't have total freedom because we have repeated to our children the same lies. Our words often reveal our ignorance, which is a principal cause of racism and hatred.

Our Saviour said for us to love our neighbor as our brother. Proverbs says that one of the most powerful weapons we have for our use in showing this love is our words. It is our choice to use our words as a tool of peace or as a weapon of destruction.

Tuesday, November 19

To Say or Not to Say?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 10:19-21

We as Christians should stop and think about how our words will affect the person or persons to whom we are speaking. Mrs. White's writings point out how our words can affect people.

For example, in *Christ's Object Lessons*, Mrs. White says, "In seeking to correct or reform others we should be careful of our words. They will be a savor of life unto life or of death unto death. In giving reproof or counsel, many indulge in sharp, severe speech, words not adapted to heal the wounded soul. By these ill-advised expressions the spirit is chafed, and often the erring ones are stirred to rebellion."¹

How many times have you stopped and thought about how your counsel or reproof would affect someone? "Under all circumstances reproof should be spoken in love. Then our words will reform but not exasperate. Christ by His Holy Spirit will supply the force and the power."² We should not take our words into our own hands; instead, we should let God take control of our speech. How many times have you said something and then almost im-

mediately wished you hadn't?

"Our acts, our words, even our most secret motives, all have their weight in deciding our destiny for weal or woe. Though . . . [our words] may be forgotten by us, they will bear their testimony to justify or condemn. . . . Yet how little solicitude is felt concerning that record which is to meet the gaze of heavenly beings. Could the veil which separates the visible from the invisible world be swept back, and the children of men behold an angel recording every word and deed, which they must meet again in the judgment, how many words that are daily uttered would remain unspoken."³

Our words are a test of our Christian experience. "We are not only to say, 'I believe,' but to practice the truth. It is by conformity to the will of God in our words, our deportment, our character, that we prove our connection with Him."⁴

REACT

In what ways can we incorporate these principles into our daily lives?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 337.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Great Controversy*, pp. 486, 487.

4. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 92.

by Kandi Dye

Kandi Dye is a sophomore business administration major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Sticks and Stones

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 10:19

"Sticks and stones may break my bones, but words will never hurt me!" Most of us have used this childhood retaliatory remark. Words seem to be such harmless, little things, but words are more powerful than we realize.

Working in a college public-relations office has taught me that words can make or break an image. Utmost care is taken in writing an article for local newspapers or church publications. Some people may think there is nothing to writing a good story. They think all you need is a good opening statement, the chronologically correct facts, and a nice closing statement. Wrong! Writing is a delicate craft, just like weaving a blanket or building a house. One little mistake can ruin the finished product.

Compare these two headlines: *Diplomas Were Given at Parker College* and *Diplomas Were Conferred at Parker College*. Do you catch the difference in the sentences? One implies that Parker College is a diploma mill; the other makes the college sound more genuine.

The written and spoken word plays a powerful force in our lives. It can make us unconsciously form opinions about things we know nothing about. One senator who was running for office defeated his

opponent by stating that he had a monogamous marriage and is a *Homo sapiens*! We laugh at such a trivial statement, but when people don't understand, they come up with some pretty bizarre responses.

A story in *Insight* magazine told of a young academy girl who committed suicide after being bad-mouthed by her peers. It didn't go into detail about what was said; it didn't have to. Words unintentionally were used to kill.

One of the reasons that negotiations for peace are often so difficult is that it is hard to find words in two or more languages that carry the same meaning and conviction. All treaties must be in the language of all parties involved in the agreement, and many times the treaty hinges on the meanings of one or two words.

Christians should be known for good words and tact. The word *Christian* means to be Christlike. A kind word can raise spirits, stop arguments, and free a stubborn mind. Society today views kind and gentle words as a sign of weakness. Sarcasm, stinging one-liners, and profanity seem to have replaced tact and kind words.

But as Christians, we cannot fall into this mold. We are, in effect, the public relations department for Christ. Everything we do or say reflects to others what Christ really is all about. We can make or break Christ's image with just one word.

by Jea Hyun Lee

Jea Hyun Lee is a sophomore biology major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, November 21

Oh, Be Careful, Little Mouth, What You Say

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 12:25

Many of us tend to use cutdowns jokingly as a form of address. I was walking to my car after a class and saw a friend of mine walking up the sidewalk. He came into hearing range and said rather loudly, "Hey, you ugly bum, where you going?" Any other day I would have hollered just as loudly, "Looking for the biggest jerk in the world, and I just found him!" Unfortunately, that day was not any other day.

Instead of setting my clock for 6:30 a.m., I had set it for 6:30 p.m. I didn't wake up until 7:50. Unfortunately, my first class had started at 7:30. I threw on the closest clothes I could find and grabbed a hat. As I passed the bathroom, I decided I didn't have time to brush my teeth or to shave. When I got to class, I opened the door and tried to slip into the back row. As I sank into a seat, I remembered that we were having a test that day. I had studied for it, but I was still a little groggy, and most of the questions made no sense. Coming out of there, I felt pretty rotten.

Then along comes my friend and calls me an ugly bum. At that point I *felt* like an ugly bum, and his words sank my spirits even lower. As I passed him, I mum-

bled some unintelligible greeting and went to my next class.

There are many songs, wise sayings, and poems telling us about words and the power they have over people. We should always watch what we say, for we're never sure what effect our words could have.

Here are a few things to think about before saying anything:

1. *Be aware of the positive power words have.* Few things can brighten a down day better than a few kind words. Walk up to a friend, give him a hug, and tell him how much you love and appreciate him.

2. *Think before you speak.* There is an old saying: "Be sure brain is in gear before engaging mouth."

3. *Carefully consider statements about a person's physical appearance.* Many of us are not comfortable with the way we look. Many wish they were taller, shorter, better looking, etc. Even comments not meant to hurt a person's feelings can ruin his day.

4. *Know what is appropriate and what is not.* I have adapted a passage in Philippians for this situation: Finally, *say* only those things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report (see Phil. 4:8).

by Jim Landelius

Jim Landelius is a history/secondary-education major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Telling Someone Off in a Nice Way?

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 15:1

My innards were boiling. The dream of a great Saturday night was shattered into a million pieces. Why? Let me reset the stage.

It was one of those odd weekends in which I had four invitations for Saturday night to choose from. Thoughts of the game show "Let's Make a Deal" whizzed through my mind. Would my exciting night be behind curtain number one, two, three, or four?

In the back of my mind was the dreaded thought, "What if I get zonked?" No, with four choices, that won't happen! So I chose a logical and rational way to decide my fate. I flipped a coin. This way I narrowed it down until I reached curtain number three.

When I reached Sue to tell her I would go out with her, she said, "Oh, I'm sorry, I changed my plans and forgot to call you. We'll get together some other time."

My other choices for the evening involved big groups of people, but they had already left for the evening. While I was driv-

ing to Dallas to try to find my friends, I wondered, *How could Sue do this to me? Why had she asked me to go out in the first place? Why was it so trivial to her? When I talk to her, I'm going to give her a piece of my mind!*

By the time I saw her again, the next day, I had remembered I was the only Adventist Christian Sue knew. I decided she needed a piece of my mind different from the one I had planned to give her. If I acted in a harsh and rash manner, her ideas of our faith would be distorted.

So mentally biting my lip, I tried to put my anger over the evening in a context of calmness. Instead of the defensive response I would have gotten from the good blasting I had planned, my non-aggressive tone melted her like butter. Because of the method I used, we became closer friends instead of having a falling out. Later on I could share my faith with her without any of the guilt I might have had. I think I told Sue off right!

REACT

What are some guidelines for telling people off nicely?

by Roy Lowe

Roy Lowe is a sophomore corporate communication major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Lesson 9, November 24-30

What Hath God Wrought?



“By wisdom the Lord laid the earth’s foundations, by understanding he set the heavens in place” (Prov. 3:19, NIV).

Sunday, November 24

God's Recipe for Me

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 8:22

His favorite cookie was chocolate chip—large chunks of melting chocolate held together with soft, delectable cookie. It was impossible to concentrate on the history assignment while visions of the perfect cookie danced through his head. He would never finish his homework if he didn't banish his hunger pangs. But the stores were closed. Surely it wasn't hard to make cookies. Once made, they wouldn't haunt him any longer.

Later he busied himself in the kitchen, humming a satisfied tune. Some flour, sugar, lots of chocolate chunks, salt, and water to moisten the dough. Looked about right. Now, into the oven. His mouth watered in anticipation.

After 15 minutes, he removed the pan from the oven. The sweet aroma sifted into the far corners of the room. The wait for cooling stretched forever. Just when he couldn't stand it any longer, the cookies were cool to the touch. Dismay crept into the edge of

consciousness. Picking up a cookie, he noticed it was much harder than the kind he bought at Mrs. Fields. Maybe the oven had been too hot or the time too long.

He popped the first morsel into his mouth. Distress was full-born. The cookie had a blank, gluey texture.

Although it wasn't one of life's major difficulties, the disappointment bothered him. Postponing his studies, he telephoned a friend and poured out the sad story.

"What recipe did you follow?" the friend asked. "Did you use any leavening like baking soda? Or seasoning like vanilla? Or binder like egg whites?"

Long silence. "I didn't think I had to—chocolate chip cookies are supposed to be simple."

"That's true, if you know the formula or recipe. Whether you're baking cookies or inventing a non-polluting engine fuel, you have to have more than the desire for the product. Creating involves understanding the elements necessary to achieve the desired outcome."

by Norma J. Sahlin

Norma J. Sahlin is director of development for Home Study International in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Monday, November 25

Fearfully and Wonderfully Made

LOGOS

Ps. 33:8, 9

The Earth

"By wisdom the Lord laid the earth's foundations" (Prov. 3:19, NIV).

Sometimes it's tempting to think it would have been better if the words *creation, creator, and create* had never been . . . ah . . . created. Why? Because the words are so easily spoken that the extreme complexity of the process is somehow simplified, even trivialized. "God created the heavens and the earth." Good, next point. Yet when you look upward at God's created universe, and that includes the earth and you, all the words in the language could not explain what you are seeing.

When you consider God as the *Creator*, do you see Him as being *creative*? Do you see Him as a being of ultimate power who speaks whole universes into existence merely with a word and a whim? Or might you see Him hunched over a kind of cosmic PC, painstakingly working out the critical specifications of His planned creation? Running and re-running programs. Testing and discarding models and mockups. Until in the early hours of the "beginning" He has what He has been looking for.

No. We do not want to read humanity into the work of God. Ellen White wrote: "In the creation of the earth, God was not

indebted to pre-existing matter. 'He spake, and it was; . . . he commanded, and it stood fast' (Ps. 33:9). All things, material or spiritual, stood up before the Lord Jehovah at His voice."*

However it happened, it is a great accomplishment, a true work of art.

Do you suppose God felt sorrow and perhaps some anger when His beings for whom He had made this world became defective?

What do you think about our ability to deface God's planetary masterpiece?

The Stars

"By understanding he set the heavens in place" (Prov. 3:19, NIV).

Space exploration. What was a fascinating dream in the 1950s and an enthusiastically supported process in the 1970s has become rather ho-hum in the 1990s.

Today we are mainly launching communication and spy satellites. The space shuttles sputter up now and again; experiments with tomato seeds and a little campfire are performed. But mainly overbudget space trash. The Hubble telescope may eventually become fully operational. Most of us don't really care.

Us is what's hot now. Your mind. Your psyche. How you interact with others and your environment. And how you can get ahead. We have shut ourselves up in our little inner world.

by William Cleveland, Jr.

William Cleveland is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

What's uppermost in your mind today? The remark someone made that you didn't like? The ding in your car door?

Contemplation of the stars can go far in helping us keep our lives in perspective. A long, careful look at the uncountable stars, the immeasurable distances of the cosmos, is excellent for crowding out the smug "I-can-handle-things-myself" conceptualizing that defines us today.

Man

"You made him a little lower than the heavenly beings and crowned him with glory and honor" (Ps. 8:5, NIV).

Do you sometimes feel not so wonderful? Fragile, easily hurt, quick to break out in zits? Sometimes it may be hard to see, but we are part of God's created cosmos, the part that was "crowned with glory and honor."

You reflect the handiwork of God, a simple yet complex object. You have twin camcorders arranged to work as a stereoscopic pair providing 3-D effects; a twin microphone that hears in stereo, with terrific specs; a mainframe with amazing flexibility, extensive data storage, great retrieval speed, and the ultimate in fuzzy logic. You are an efficient chemical conversion plant, an irrigation and waste-evacuation system, and an oxygen-conveying system.

Would this understanding of you and your brothers and sisters as the handiwork of God affect the way you treat others?

Animals

"Ask the animals, and they will teach you" (Job 12:7, NIV).

These words are Job's reply to his friend Zophar in which, after a bit of eloquence, he concludes: "The hand of the Lord has done

this" (verse 9, NIV).

When we look outward from our ash heap, our world of problems and obligations, we see also our companions on this earth, the animals. Perhaps the greatest lesson they teach is what they don't do.

1. *They don't waste their lives.* "Go to the ant, you sluggard; consider its ways and be wise! It has no commander, no overseer or ruler, yet it stores its provisions in summer and gathers its food at harvest" (Prov. 6:6-8, NIV).

We seem to be the earth's only procrastinators, putting off what needs to be done—often for our very survival.

2. *Animals don't hold grudges.* Our pets demonstrate an amazing level of loyalty and forgiveness. A pet can be abused to a sad extent, and still the bonds of devotion, once established, are not broken. Yet it often takes very little to turn human friendships to suspicion and dislike.

3. *Animals don't abuse their sexuality.* Only man plays around with his sexuality to the extent that what is created to be a beautiful and fulfilling experience becomes hurtful, self-destructive, and dangerous.

4. *The animals aren't cruel.* We speak admiringly of the balance of nature without sometimes a clear view of what that balance really means. The animals don't kill for fun, they don't kill for political advantage, and they don't kill out of anger. They simply act for survival.

There are many things we can learn from the animals.

**The Ministry of Healing*, pp. 415, 416.

Tuesday, November 26

A Closer Look at Infinity?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Heb. 1:10

"If we will listen, God's created works will teach us precious lessons of trust and obedience. The stars follow their unmarked way through the sky year after year as they obey God's laws. The smallest bit of created matter also follows the same laws of God."¹

Angels enlighten minds as we study God's works. "God calls men to look upon the heavens. See Him in the wonders of the starry heavens. We are not merely to gaze upon the heavens; we are to consider the works of God. He would have us study the works of infinity, and from this study, learn to love and reverence and obey Him. The heavens and the earth with their treasures are to teach the lessons of God's love, care, and power. . . . The heavenly bodies are worthy of contemplation. God has made them for the benefit of man, and as we study His works, angels of God will be by our side to enlighten our minds and guard them from satanic deception. As you look at the wonderful things God's hand has made, let your proud, foolish

heart feel its dependence and inferiority. As you consider these things, you will have a sense of God's condescension."²

"All heaven took a deep and joyful interest in the creation of the world and of man. Human beings were a new and distinct order. They were made 'in the image of God.' . . . God's glory in the heavens, the innumerable worlds in their orderly revolutions, 'the balancing of the clouds,' the mysteries of light and sound, of day and night—all were open to the study of our first parents. God created man a superior being; he alone is formed in the image of God, and is capable of partaking of the divine nature, of cooperating with his Creator and executing His plans."³

"He connected the works of God's finger in the heavens and upon the earth with the words of life He wished to impress upon their minds, that, as they should look upon the wonderful works of God in nature, His lessons might be fresh in their memories."⁴

1. *Steps to Jesus*, p. 85.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 4, p. 1145.

3. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 7.

4. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 580.

by William Cleveland, Jr.

William Cleveland, Jr., is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Earth's Architect

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 89:5, 6

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands" (Ps. 19:1, NIV).

For some a careful study of the heavens has destroyed their faith in the limited and provincial god they wish to believe in. For others it gives a new look at an all-powerful, all-wise, and everlasting God.

The earth and the solar system, the "heavens and the earth" of Genesis 1:1, show not only the handiwork of God but also His intention. This home was built especially for us.

Stephen H. Dale's book, *Habitable Planets for Man*, outlines one's requirements in a planetary environment:

1. *Temperature*. Must range between an average of 32 and 86 degrees Fahrenheit. (Remember, low and high temperatures may range well beyond these figures.)

2. *Light*: from dark to about 50 lumens (the approximate glare of sunlight on snow).

3. *Gravity*: from weightless to about 1.5 g (one g is earth's gravity). More gravity causes excess fatigue and can shorten life.

4. *Atmospheric pressure*: from 60 milliliters of mercury on the low end (about 21,000 feet above

sea level) to 400 milliliters of mercury.

5. *Breathable atmosphere*: only oxygen and a small amount of water vapor are essentials, but other gases must be present to hold oxygen to certain levels. Pure oxygen is eventually toxic.

And, of course, there are many other factors, such as large, open bodies of water and food sources.

Consider also:

1. *If the earth were 10 percent farther from the sun, its livable regions would shrink to only a 47-degree band above and below the equator.* (Check a globe to see what this would look like.)

2. *If the moon were only 95,000 miles away, the earth's rotation would be slowed so that a day would equal 165.6 hours, enough to cause the earth to cool too much at night for plants to survive. If the moon moved out to 450,000 miles, it would keep going.*

Any study of this earth and its conditions leads to the conclusion that this world was created with us in mind.

Any study of the stars, planets, asteroids, galaxies, nebulae, and other components of our universe would be a good sideline study or hobby. What you see will, undoubtedly, change some of your concepts of God. But that won't hurt. The truth always inspires confidence.

by William Cleveland, Jr.

William Cleveland, Jr., is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Thursday, November 28

Pain in Perspective

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 11:28

"I am afraid my life is ruined. I think I have [a sexually transmitted disease]."

"I have just been through my sixth surgery in the past year, and all I seem to have ahead of me is more pain and sickness."

"Can God forgive an unwed mother?"

"I have a brother who has some brain damage because he got into some heavy drugs."

"I just feel like a total failure."

"I feel so lonely that sometimes I just want to end it all."

"I don't have any problem feeling close to God when things are going smoothly in my life, but when things get rough, then God seems far away."¹

While you are mapping out your life from here to "millionaire acres," have you made provision for those inevitable interruptions that can alter or throw lives off track?

"Because we are created, our lives have a beginning and an end. In between those two points we are in transition."²

Those transition points can range from good fortune, through annoyance, to total despair. But we need to be looking outward

from a seemingly hopeless world to the larger universe.

1. *It helps to get a change of view, a new perspective.* Job needed to look away from his ash heap. When you keep your attention only on your problems, they tend to swell in size and scope. Christ told His disciples, "You need to come away for a while."

2. *That the stars appear at night has long been accepted as a message of hope.* Who could stand up to a difficult situation if he thought that it would last forever, that his problems have no resolution?

3. *The universe reminds us of the power of God.* As Paul said, "If God is for us, who [or what] can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31, NIV). Perhaps you can't handle the situation; *Someone* can.

4. *The scope and immensity of the universe can encourage us to place our problems in perspective.* However, that doesn't belittle your problem or situation, nor does it mean God cares any less.

1. Billy Graham, *Answers to Life's Problems* (Waco, Tex.: Word Books, Publisher, 1988).

2. J. B. Ratliff, *When You Are Facing Change* (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster Press, 1989), p. 41.

by William Cleveland, Jr.

William Cleveland, Jr., is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Some Cosmic Questions

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 145:3

“By faith we understand that the universe was formed at God’s command, so that what is seen was not made out of what was visible” (Heb. 11:3, NIV).

An interesting question about the creation of the “universe” is posed by cosmic distances. Light travels 186,000 miles per second, about six trillion miles in a year. Yet many stars and galaxies are thousands and millions of light-years away. That means that the light that reaches your eye left the star, for instance, one million years ago—before the creation of the earth.

Does this mean, then, that God created the entire universe in the same instant? Or do you think that His acts of creation took place in phases over varied time periods? One star system here, another, thousands of years later in another place?

Do you consider such a theory to be a problem?

The Bible states clearly that God has existed forever—back through time—and will exist forever. Ten million years is but a

day to Him. “You are *from* all eternity,” David declares (Ps. 93:2, NIV).

Ellen G. White speaks often of beings on “unfallen worlds.” What is your concept of these beings? Could some be our elders by a million years? Might they be physically unlike us and live according to different situations?

The concept of God as being intimately concerned with the operation and well-being of thousands of races and planetary systems, while at the same time giving attention to the five billion of us, is somewhat unsettling. Many of us, thinking in human terms, of course, think it not likely that God can be overly concerned with each of five billion individuals. Do you suppose, perhaps, we are being a little unfair when we ask Him to help us find our keys or to get a particular grade?

More than having a possessive attitude toward God, I like to think that He, Creator and Administrator of a large interstellar empire, still cares about me individually, with all my faults.

Accepting the greatness of God does not diminish us; it brings us up, also.

by William Cleveland, Jr.

William Cleveland, Jr., is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Lesson 10, December 1-7

Like Father, Like Child



“A cheerful heart is good medicine, but a crushed spirit dries up the bones” (Prov. 17:22, NIV).

The Cup-of-Cold-Water Debate

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Prov. 17:22

"Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time" (Prov. 17:22, TEV). This advice is proffered by that sage of antiquity, King Solomon. It is also reflected by the contemporary humorist Garrison Keillor in his writings about his childhood in the imaginary town of Lake Wobegon.

Let us look in on the Sanctified Brethren of Mist County, whom Keillor characterizes as "scholarly to the core and perfect literalism, . . . arguing over points that, to an outsider, would have seemed very minor." But "once having tasted the pleasure of being 'correct' and defending 'true doctrine,' they continued to factionalize."¹

Uncle Al, who had family and friends on both sides of the cup-of-cold-water debate, decided to mediate between the factions by inviting Brothers Johnson and Miller to share Sunday dinner with him and Aunt Flo. The meeting was not to discuss the hospitality-to-error doctrine, mind you, but just to "enjoy a dinner of Aunt Flo's famous fried chicken." (The hospitality-to-error doctrine had to do with whether showing kindness to one who holds false doctrine implicates you in his/her wrongdoing.)

The dinner, which took weeks

to arrange through the intermediary, Brother Fields (qualified because he had never shown hospitality to anybody), finally took place. "Prayer was a delicate matter. Brethren were known to use even prayer before a meal as a platform, and so Al . . . said, 'Let us bow our heads in silent prayer.' . . . They bowed their heads . . . a long time passed; the old clock ticked on the bureau; a cat walked in and meowed and left; a child snickered and was stifled; cars went by; there were dry sniffs and throat clearings; . . . they were seeing who could pray the longest. Brother Miller peeked through his fingers at Brother Johnson, who was earnestly engaged in silent communion with the Lord. . . . So Brother Miller dove back into prayer. . . . Heads stayed lowered, nobody would come up. To stop praying might imply a weakness of faith."²

Only Keillor could tell us in such a way that we take ourselves too seriously, that a religion that does not promote a cheerful spirit is no better than a slow death. This week we will study the intriguing facts behind Solomon's proverb about a merry heart.

1. Garrison Keillor, *Lake Wobegon Days* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1985), p. 105.

2. Garrison Keillor, *Leaving Home* (New York: Viking Penguin, Inc., 1987), pp. 155-157.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, December 2

What Is a “Merry Heart”?

LOGOS

Prov. 15:15

A proverb is like a seed. It carries a germ of truth that, when planted, can grow to mean much more than the original proverb. Since the book of Proverbs mentions the word *heart* approximately 80 times, it is apparent that Solomon’s “seed bag” of truths about the heart was well stocked. Today’s verse, “All the days of the afflicted are evil, but he who is of a merry heart has a continual feast” (NKJV), is a mirror image of Proverbs 17:22, our theme for the week.

What does Solomon mean by a “merry heart”? Both Nabal and Ahasuerus had merry hearts (see 1 Sam. 25:36; Esther 1:10). But their merry hearts were chemically induced and did not contribute to their good health!

James 5:13 suggests that if anyone is “merry,” “let him sing psalms.” Because the psalms James might have been familiar with probably came from the book of Psalms, let’s look there to see what light they might shed.

Psalms 105:3 says, “Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice” (NKJV). So seeking the Lord and a merry heart are connected. David, in seeking the Lord,

asked that God create in him a new heart (see Ps. 51:10). So repentance and change are also part of a merry heart. Another way we can assure a merry heart is by studying God’s Word, as well as anything else that speaks about God’s love for us. Psalm 119 says, “I cling to Your testimonies; . . . for You shall enlarge my heart. . . . Give me understanding, and I shall keep Your law. . . . Incline my heart to Your testimonies. . . . Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things” (verses 31-37, NKJV). Verse 111 says, “Your testimonies I have taken as a heritage forever, for they are the rejoicing of my heart” (NKJV).

David states, in Psalm 16:8, 9, that putting his trust in God and always putting Him first helped his heart to be glad and his flesh to rest in hope.

Thus we see what a merry heart has to do with accepting the good news of salvation through Jesus Christ. After all, the statements in Psalms about following the law and testimony of God are not so different from Christ’s command in John 14:15 to keep His commandments as a token of our love for Him. Thus, love for God and our fellow humans (see Matt. 22:37-40; 1 Cor. 13) produces a merry heart. Anything else is really just a slow death.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

A Merry Heart, a Merry Whole

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 15:13

“The relationship which exists between the mind and the body is very intimate. When one is affected, the other sympathizes. The condition of the mind affects the health of the physical system. If the mind is free and happy from a consciousness of right doing and a sense of satisfaction in causing happiness to others, it creates a cheerfulness that will react upon the whole system, causing a freer circulation of the blood and a toning up of the entire body. The blessing of God is a healing power, and those who are abundant in benefiting others will realize that wondrous blessing in both heart and life.”¹

“It is a positive duty to resist melancholy, discontented thoughts and feelings—as much a duty as it

is to pray. If we are heaven-bound, how can we go as a band of mourners, groaning and complaining all along the way to our Father’s house?”²

“The whole Bible is a revelation of the glory of God in Christ. Received, believed, obeyed, it is the great instrumentality in the transformation of character. It is the grand stimulus, the constraining force, that quickens the physical, mental, and spiritual powers, and directs the life into right channels.”³

“Courage, hope, faith, sympathy, love, promote health and prolong life. A contented mind, a cheerful spirit, is health to the body and strength to the soul.”⁴

1. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, pp. 59, 60.

(See also *Testimonies*, vol. 4, pp. 60, 61.)

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 251.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 458.

4. *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 738.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Wednesday, December 4

Is Health a Laughing Matter?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 15:14

One wonders whether Solomon really knew what he was writing about. The claim that a merry heart can have significant impact on physical health is only now gaining acceptance from the scientific community.

The field, called psychoneuroimmunology, is barely into its teens as a scientific discipline. The concept of the mind's being plugged in to the immune system seems somewhat lunatic to some. But a study conducted by Candice Pert and Michael Ruff shows that when test subjects were made to feel helpless (by using noise to impair their concentration on a puzzle), their macrophages (amoebalike cells in the immune system that engulf bacteria) moved sluggishly.¹

In an article about England's Common Cold Unit, Mary Roach reports that she got a cold, while her roommate did not. When she asked her roommate why she had not gotten sick, her roommate replied it was mind over matter. Roach interviewed Sheldon Cohen, a psychologist with Carnegie Mellon University, who has questioned a thousand Common Cold Unit volunteers. Cohen told her that stress, among other things, does indeed affect the immune system.²

In *Health* magazine reports

that researchers, hoping to confirm an earlier report that elderly Jewish men were able to put off death until after Passover, studied records of Chinese women over 75 who died of natural causes. They discovered a 35 percent decline in the death rate one week before the Harvest Moon Festival, a time when these women figure significantly in family celebrations. The death rate increased by 35 percent the week following the festival.³

Finally, let us examine the case of Norman Cousins. Cousins, former editor of *Saturday Review*, and now professor of medical humanities at UCLA's School of Medicine, was so sick that doctors gave him a 1 in 500 chance of survival. Adrenal exhaustion brought on by stress was causing the fibrous substance that holds cells together to come unglued, causing Cousins great pain.

When he discovered that 10 minutes of laughter decreased his pain, allowing him two hours of rest, he self-prescribed, along with his more traditional treatments, "laughter therapy," and completely recovered.

Solomon was not only ahead of his time, he may even be ahead of our time!

1. Rob Wechsler, "A New Prescription: Mind Over Malady," in *Discover*, February 1987, p. 56.

2. Mary Roach, "How I Blew My Summer Vacation," in *In Health*, January-February 1990, pp. 70-80.

3. "Vital Signs," in *In Health*, July-August 1990, pp. 10, 11.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

“That Thy Days May Be Long”

HOW-TO

Key Text: James 3:13-18

It is said that no two people are exactly alike. Thus, if no two people are alike, we can assume that although there may be no single “happiness” regime for everyone, there are certain principles we all can follow.

Certainly, Solomon and James seem to be “on the same page” when discussing this topic. Solomon expresses his prescription for good health as having a “merry heart.” James expresses his prescription in terms of wisdom. James describes wisdom that is not from heaven as “earthly, sensual, demonic” (James 3:15, NKJV). *This* wisdom—bitterness, envy, and self-seeking (verse 14)—in light of what we’ve studied, is clearly destructive.

However, wisdom from heaven—purity, a willingness to yield, mercy, impartiality, and a lack of hypocrisy (verse 17)—promote peace of mind and good health. Thus, James adds a bit of detail to Solomon’s “merry heart.”

For those who like lists, here are some other suggestions for keeping a “merry heart”:

1. Don’t look for poor health. That is, don’t suspect that every headache is caused by a brain tumor.
2. Keep busy with useful work. Remember, “The blessing of God is a healing power, *and those who are abundant in benefiting others will realize that wondrous blessing in both heart and life.*”*
3. Take up a hobby.
4. Learn to like people for who they are—not for what they can do for you.
5. Learn to be satisfied. Remember, “Thou shalt not covet” is a commandment.
6. Face adversity with Christ and with courage.
7. Meet life’s little problems with determination. Make a decision, then “stick with it.” Have you ever heard about the paralysis of analysis?
8. Live in the present. And make the present a happy, pleasant time in which to live.
9. Maintain a sense of humor. Life may not be a joke, but without a sense of humor, it certainly is a cruel trick!

**Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 1, p. 60 (italics supplied).

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Friday, December 6

Just What the Doctor Ordered

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 15:13-15

One evening my parents went out, leaving my sister and me alone. I was sick and of a mind to test the “merry heart” theory of medicine. So my sister and I joked around. Suddenly there was an unwelcome return of supper, which I deposited on my bedroom floor. This scared my sister and led me to reevaluate Dr. Solomon’s prescription.

Through the intervening years I’ve come to realize that a merry heart includes much more than laughter. However, I must admit I’d prefer to see someone with a tear in his eye and hear him say, “I just needed a good laugh” rather than a “good cry.” Verse 14 of today’s text points to the fact that Solomon was not speaking about mere levity. He was speaking about a wise person seeking knowledge. Thus we can say that what makes the heart glad pro-

motes health. And what promotes health makes the heart glad.

But just what does that mean for us? It means that if we take care of our physical health by eating properly, exercising, and abstaining from tobacco, alcohol, and other drugs, we’ll be happy and have a better mental attitude. Also, if we have a proper mental outlook, we’ll maintain a proper relationship with others, which will make us healthier physically. Think of it: a proper mental attitude will keep us from lying, cheating, stealing, coveting, or committing adultery—any one of which could lead to serious, if not fatal, consequences.

Finally, a proper relationship with God will help us maintain both physical and mental health. So Solomon was on target with his prescription for a healthy heart, long life, and strong bones. It’s a prescription we don’t have to stand in line to have filled. And as a part of God’s gift of salvation, it’s free.

by Peter Chiomenti

Peter Chiomenti is a copy editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

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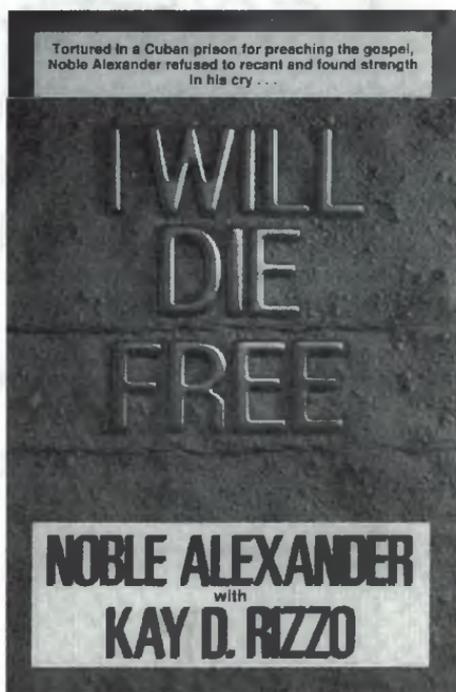
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Lesson 11, December 8-14

A Friend for All Seasons



“He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm” (Prov. 13:20, NIV).

The Judiths Around Us

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Tim. 6:17-19

She's my friend. Her list of qualities is long, among them understanding, kindness, and the ability to stimulate one's mind. She's attractive and radiates youth even as she approaches her forties.

Life has been generous to her. Her clothing is fashionable. The home she and her husband live in was bought and furnished for her. Since she is an artist, another floor in the same building has been given to her as a studio, where she has produced pieces that were sold internationally.

She was my Bible student in 1990 in Kaoh-siung, Taiwan, and her name is Judith. What a bright face she was in class! Judith is Chinese and Buddhist. Sometimes her wealthy sister and she would visit the temple. I watched as her sister generously donated money to the monks and burned her incense to Buddha. But Judith was different. She found peace and beauty at the temples but never bowed her head to the dragon etched in stone.

One day in class Judith said in her quiet way, "I want to be a Christian." My senses tingled. Would I be able to lead her to the God whom we sang about each day and read about in the Bible studies? She had grown up with various gods accumulated over

many generations. We became closer as time continued. We visited elite clubs, fancy restaurants, and interesting shops and markets. Rarely did I come home empty-handed, as my generous friend loaded me with gifts. Meanwhile, Judith watched from her plate of seafood as I ate my vegetables and caught my eye more than once after lifting my head from prayer. Many times I wanted to hold her hand and beg her to say yes to Christianity once and for all.

Now that I am home, I know there are Judiths all around us. They live in the big house on the hill, or maybe they are the ladies at work, always decked out, looking as if they are ready for a banquet. In their hearts there's a space ready for God to take over and direct their lives to Him. We need to share Him with them.

The mission fields are no longer just thatch huts and jungle homes; they're in mansions and high-rises. Matthew 6:19-21 says, "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust consume and where thieves break in and steal, but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust consumes and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (RSV). Heaven is a treasure that we can hardly imagine, and God's love is waiting to be shared. Can you help me share it? I want Judith to be there. Don't you?

by Tammy Huntsman

Tammy Huntsman is a senior psychology major at the University of Nebraska, Lincoln, and a recently returned student missionary from Taiwan.

Monday, December 9

From Knowledge to Wisdom

LOGOS

Prov. 13:20

As one reads the book of Proverbs, the contrasting statements make it clear that safety lies with God and His ways and danger with Satan and his ways. The challenge of being in the world and a part of the lives of people in the world, and yet cautious not to become entrapped by their ways, is similar to working a jigsaw puzzle blindfolded.

Many have attempted to “reach the sinners of this world” only to find themselves either disappointed with the results or destroyed and dragged down by the enemy. The texts for this week encourage us to be among the wise (see verse 20) and yet provide hospitality to enemies and strangers (see 25:21, 22; 31:20). The mechanics of this assignment, to say nothing of the philosophical mind-set necessary, make even “Mission Impossible” sound possible. How can we win souls to Christ by being sociable and hospitable and at the same time feel “safe in the arms of Jesus”?

There are three words, or concepts, recurring throughout the book of Proverbs that can assist us in coming to grips with the dichotomies of Solomon.

1. *Knowledge* is the accumulation of unrelated and unorganized facts without even the ability to make application of these facts

into daily life. It is not encouraged in and of itself, but is a necessary step in growing with God and dealing with life. By itself it puffs up (see 1 Cor. 8:1) and is a sign of the last days (see Dan. 12:4). Yet it can provide insight (see Prov. 9:10), the wise dispense it (see Prov. 15:2), and it is the basis of salvation and the truth (see Luke 1:77; 1 Tim. 2:4). Christians who have only knowledge study their Bibles for proof, and become streetwise in the ways of sinners (so they can better help them).

But knowledge is important. We should read the Scriptures with no purpose except to be with our Father and learn how He thinks. Come with no bias, no agenda—not to answer your quarterly or to find out what others think or to research some hot controversial topic so you can have texts to support your position. Just search the Scriptures because they testify of Jesus (see John 5:39). Retain those Scriptures through memorization or at least serious concentration on each word, because we are so easily led astray by what others think. God’s Word, carefully and prayerfully accumulated, is the first step in keeping me safe as I reach out to others.

2. *Understanding* is the ability to evaluate and organize thoughts. People without it “come to ruin” (Hos. 4:14). Jesus seemed to be amazed at people who lacked it (see Matt. 15:16; Mark

by Rich Carlson

Rich Carlson is chaplain at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

7:18), and amazed even the learned men of Jerusalem with His own (see Luke 2:47).

After we have read and re-tained Scripture, we need to ruminate on the Scriptures because understanding comes in God's time and not in ours. Rumination is to sheep what meditation is to Christians. Sheep take food all the way down to the roots and then, when they are free from distraction, bring it up again and spend "quality time" with it, bringing the very best out of it.

We are told that we will be blessed for reading the Word (see Rev. 1:3) and rewarded for studying the Word (see 2 Tim. 2:15) but guaranteed personal success for meditating on it (see Josh. 1:9; Ps. 1:3; 1 Tim. 4:15). Meditation is not Eastern mysticism, but a quiet reflection, a careful revolving of Scripture in the mind, a musing on each word, maintaining an attitude of prayer, realizing that this is the unfathomable Word of God. This step makes written words God's words made real in my life and is the second step in preparing me to pursue God with the proper perspective.

3. *Wisdom* is the ability to

make practical use of the facts gained about God through an understanding of how He has made those facts function in my life. It is seeing life from God's perspective as He has revealed it through me. It is not proof-texting but proof-living as I seek to make sense out of the chaos of life.

Wisdom comes through reflection on the Scriptures because they really do contain answers relevant to life, but they will be different from what I expect. His ways are not like my ways, and His thoughts are not like my thoughts (see Isa. 55:8, 9). I cannot, of my own power, make sense out of a senseless world, much less reach out to that lost world without being corrupted by its philosophy. I cannot see things from God's perspective as they relate to the world unless I have seen things from God's perspective in my own life.

Then I have power and protection to reach all those around me. I am safe because I am saturated with God's Word, satisfied with where it has led me, and secure as I reach out and touch, in a very real way, both enemy and stranger because my thoughts are God's thoughts, and my ways are His ways.

Tuesday, December 10

People Who Need People

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 31:20

How do we reach people—people outside our own family, people we work with, people we socialize with, the people next door? As small children in Sabbath School we were urged to reach out to the people around us. Many different ideas have been tried, but ultimately one thing keeps resurfacing—kindness.

Ellen White describes the scene in which Jesus had been invited to Simon's house for a great formal feast. While they were eating, Mary came in and washed Jesus' feet. Simon harshly rebuked her, but Jesus, with kindness, told him to let her alone. Suddenly Simon felt ashamed. Perhaps for the first time he saw himself as he really was. What was it that influenced him the most? He "was touched by the kindness of Jesus."¹

Human personalities are stimulated by kindness. They are programmed for exposure to the passive indifference of everyday society. Therefore, when we are able to break out of that passive mold and treat them with tenderness, they notice. Mrs. White concedes that "many can be reached only through acts of disinterested [unselfish] kindness. Their physical wants must first be relieved. As they see evidence of our unselfish love, it will be easier for them to believe in the love of Christ."²

Time after time, Jesus, during His life on earth, demonstrated His belief in the kindness principle. His approach always included taking care of another's physical need. Mrs. White endorses this approach by saying that "we should be self-forgetful, . . . watching for opportunities to cheer others and lighten and relieve their sorrows and burdens by acts of tender kindness and little deeds of love. These thoughtful courtesies, that . . . extend outside the family circle, help make up the sum of life's happiness; and the neglect of these little things makes up the sum of life's bitterness and sorrow."³

As Christians we must be willing to break out of our unconcerned, indifferent frame of mind and become a part of the people with whom we associate. Being friendly and kind to others doesn't necessarily mean that we would have to do all the same things that they would do. It does mean that we should be sensitive to the things that make them feel good about themselves and strive to reinforce those things. Look to Jesus for an example and allow Him to help you to be kind to everyone.

REACT

What are some things that must be strong in our own spiritual life before we can use kindness in helping the person next to us?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 567.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 84.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 539, 540.

by Jonathan Dale

Jonathan Dale is a business major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Brother, Can You Spare 80 Bucks?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 25:21, 22

When was the last time *you* spent \$80 on a total stranger?

The twentieth-century secular attitude is one of ever-increasing indifference to the lives of others. Many of us selfishly pass right on when a stranger is stranded by the side of a highway. We pacify our consciences by telling ourselves, "I've got to reach my destination as soon as possible," or, "Surely someone else will soon stop to help."

In Luke 10:30-35, Jesus gives us a challenging example of how we are to treat strangers. A Levite and a priest passed by an injured robbery victim. It was only the good Samaritan who gave of his time, energy, and finances to help a total stranger. In so doing, he spent the equivalent of two days' wages on the needs of the injured man. At \$5.00 per hour today in a full-time job, that would come to approximately \$80.00. The moral of the story? "Love your neighbor as yourself" (Lev. 19:18, NIV).

In Proverbs 25 we have counsel regarding how to treat strangers. In this instance we are told how to treat enemies, but the same advice can be applied to

strangers in general. In verse 21 we're told to minister to the needs of our enemies. This is in keeping with the demonstration of God's love for man as seen in Romans 5:6-11. In verse 8 we read that "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (NIV). Then in verse 10 we are called "God's enemies" (NIV). Christ therefore asks us to treat our enemies with the same love with which He treated us.

In Proverbs 25:22 we are told that by helping an enemy we "heap burning coals on his head" (NIV). This can be seen to refer to the effect nonretaliation has on the heart of a malicious individual. It can produce the fires of repentance that can lead to reconciliation between the two parties and further opportunity for witness.

If we spend enough quality time with Christ every day, it should become more and more natural for us to respond to strangers as the good Samaritan did and to love others as Christ loves us. When this happens we fulfill the goal of John 13:35, by this "all men will know that you are my disciples if you love one another" (NIV). Then those to whom we minister will say, "Your people will be my people and your God my God" (Ruth 1:16, NIV).

by L. Eric Galvez

L. Eric Galvez is a theology student at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Thursday, December 12

Where Do We Start?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Prov. 13:20

I have been struggling with writing this article for well over a month. Now it's down to the wire, and I'm really having to hurry. For a long time I couldn't figure out what was bothering me, why I couldn't get any ideas. I finally figured out what was wrong. The key text this week, Prov. 13:20, says, "He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm."

Immediately I think to myself, *I must associate mainly with Christians. If I become friendly with worldly people, I will become worldly. I will lose the inspiration of Christ.* Then I read the theme for this week's lesson: "Even though true friendship is contrasted with the danger of close association with unbelievers, we win souls to Christ by being sociable and hospitable, by kindness to strangers."

I don't know about you, but I kind of have a hard time with that. First, I've had it pounded into my head since first grade that I shouldn't associate with worldly people because I would thereby become worldly. At the same time I was told to witness to those around me. But when I look at those around me, I see only supposed Christians. Just like me. This has brought me to

an interesting thought, which I probably should have realized a long time ago.

Maybe the place I need to start my witness isn't on another continent or even at the local grocery store. Maybe it is right here. Maybe I need to turn to the person sitting next to me in Sabbath School and ask him how he is. Maybe I need to say "Hi" to the new girl living next door to me because I noticed no one ever talks to her or sits by her in the cafeteria.

It all needs to start here, in our Adventist community. Many of those around us who, we believe, have been experiencing a great Christian experience and have a strong relationship with the Lord may be struggling. How many times have you been questioning God and feeling as if you were all alone? Last year in college I often felt like this but never wanted to say anything to my friends. When one of them approached me feeling discouraged, I realized I wasn't alone. As the two of us talked about our doubts, we realized that God had brought us together to strengthen us.

Starting with the people closest to us instead of trying to start with someone we don't know at all, we can help strengthen not only their relationships with Christ but also ours and thereby prepare ourselves to witness to those who have never known God's love.

by Jodi McKellip

Jodi McKellip graduated with a communication major in 1990 from Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

The Woman in the Farmhouse

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 31:20

I pulled the collar of my ski jacket tighter around my neck and quickened my pace as the white farmhouse came into view. I had been walking only about a quarter of a mile, but at 6:30 in the morning and 15-degree weather, it felt like five miles!

I had left my younger brother, Mitch, in our red Buick Skyhawk back on the highway. We were village students at the academy and drove back and forth 60 miles to school each day. The old "red beater" was a gas guzzler and not very reliable, but we could usually make it to school before it overheated and died in the parking lot as we coasted onto campus.

This particular morning it sputtered and died about 14 miles from school, and we decided to seek help from one of the farmhouses scattered along the highway. As I stepped up to the door, delicious aromas of breakfast entertained my almost-frozen nostrils. I rapped on the screen door and was met by a middle-aged woman. Her warm smile helped me to relax and to find the courage to explain my situation to her and ask whether I could possibly borrow a bucket of water and make a collect call to my parents. She graciously of-

ferred to let me make the call at her expense. Then she sent her husband back to the car with me to find out what the problem was and, if it couldn't be fixed, to come back inside and have a warm breakfast.

The hospitality this woman displayed on that cold February morning to two kids in a beat-up old Buick will stay in my mind forever. It reminds me of the lessons we have read in our study for this week, especially Prov. 31:20, "She opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy" (NIV).

As we grow closer to Christ, we find closer harmony with others who reflect Christ's character. By being hospitable and kind to others, we demonstrate the character of God.

REACT

1. What ways can you think of to help someone around you today?

2. Has there ever been a time when you needed help but were too afraid or ashamed to ask for it or even pray about it? How do we know our needs will be answered?

3. The Bible tells us that angels eagerly wait to work through us for others. Are our efforts to help a friend or a stranger in need done purely out of love for God, or are they a way to gain personal glorification?

by Shelly Gonzales

Shelly Gonzales is a junior elementary-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Lesson 12, December 15-21

Drink From Your Own Spring



“Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting; but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised” (Prov. 31:30, NIV).

We Can Make It Together

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Prov. 18:22; 5:18-20

People today are constantly bewailing the breakdown of the nuclear family. Civilization does face great dangers as marriages collapse. But the loss of the so-called nuclear family may not be as great a danger as that of the vanishing extended family.

The nuclear family is a recent phenomenon. The human race has lived most of its history in the extended family. The extended family included several generations of adults: grandparents, aunts and uncles, cousins, servants, and hired help—all living in close proximity and constantly interacting with one another. In the extended family, a pair of parents did not rear the children—the whole family did.

If a mother and daughter got into a quarrel, a grandmother or aunt could reassure the girl that the mother did not mean all she had said in the passion of the moment and could remind the mother how she had felt and reacted when she was the daughter's age. The nuclear family does not provide so extensive a web of communication and role models.

The most destructive force to affect the extended family was the change in working and living patterns after World War II. Millions of people moved away from

farms and small towns and their extended families to seek employment in industries, congregating in larger cities. Now children rarely see their relatives because of sheer geographical separation.

In the biblical world the extended family was absolutely necessary for physical survival. Families had to raise and process their own food, clothing, and other necessities. It took a number of people to accomplish this. This is why Scripture is so concerned about the widow and the orphan. They did not have an extended family to provide their physical needs.

And perhaps just as important, the extended family offered emotional and psychological strengths to enable the ancients to cope with a harsh world. The institution of marriage had to be protected because it involved a much larger web of relationships than the modern nuclear family, and this web had to be guarded if humanity was to survive.

The book of Proverbs was viewing marriage within the context of the extended family, not that of the nuclear family. God may have created a single couple, but they did not stay that way long.

The strengths and supports of the extended family are just as vital today. We may no longer live in large physical families, but we can learn lessons from Scripture that will help us satisfy those needs formerly met by the extended family.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, December 16

Too Perfect a Wife?

LOGOS

Prov. 31:10-31

The devout Jewish husband quotes Proverbs 31:10-31 as part of the ritual of welcoming the Sabbath. But the passage is more than just a description of an ideal wife. It speaks on two levels: a surprisingly egalitarian perspective of the institution of human marriage, and a surprising spiritual lesson.

This acrostic poem¹ clearly reflects its patriarchal environment, but as we shall see, it transcends it. Kathleen M. O'Connor argues that the woman is unrealistic for her time. She charges that no woman could have held such a high place in society or brought honor to her husband, since ancient Israelite society viewed the man as bringing the woman honor.² But the passage actually reflects quite accurately the society of the time and how people of the time had to cooperate in the extended family to survive.

The capable woman is not a wife in the mold of a 1950s American television program. One could more correctly call her a corporate executive. A wealthy man of the time would have had a large extended family consisting of both relatives and servants and their families. His wife would be in charge of supervising this large and varied group of people. In addition, she managed several cottage industries. For example,

she was involved in the manufacture of clothing (see especially verse 24).

During a period of history when most people possessed only one or two changes of garment at a time, clothing was a valuable item. One could not go to a nearby shopping mall to pick up the latest style. Even the simplest garment was expensive and time-consuming to make. This explains the value Scripture places on clothing in such stories as Judges 14 and Jesus' concern for clothing the naked or His comment about moths eating one's garments.

The capable wife supervised the manufacture of a consumer good that was comparable in expense to the modern automobile. Beyond this, she also handled international trade (see verses 14 and 18) and real estate dealings (see verse 16). She also was active in community affairs, aiding the needy (see verse 20). As we have already seen, in the biblical world such help was the only thing that kept those without extended families from starving to death.

The wife's skills and efforts not only aided her family but, according to verse 23, allowed her husband to take a more active role in community affairs (the gate was the main arena for business, judicial, and other civil activities).

Although the wife in the poem is perhaps more successful than many of her contemporaries, everything she is described as

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

doing was within the normal range of an Israelite woman's responsibilities. While women in patriarchal times occupied roles that placed them somewhat behind the scenes, they were hardly passive. They had to be strong and assume great responsibility.

The Israelite housewife was not just a cook, baby-sitter, and general servant. She was more of an equal with her husband than we realize. The woman described here is a role model for even the most modern career woman.

But she is even more than that.

Dr. O'Connor sees the wife of chapter 31 as "a summary of the whole Book of Proverbs" because the book's central character is the Wisdom Woman herself.³ Wisdom personified as a woman is a major theme of Proverbs (see especially chapters 1 and 8).

O'Connor points out the virtues of the woman of this poem and the way she cares for her family. "Marry this woman. This is what is urged on the reader of the Book of Proverbs. Live your entire life in her shadow, as her child

and her beloved. Become a member of her household. If you do this, you will gain every human fulfillment."⁴

Wisdom is often used in the Old Testament and Intertestamental writings as an image of God and divine activity.⁵ The New Testament refers to Jesus as the wisdom of God in such passages as 1 Cor. 1:24. As Jesus did in Luke 15:8-10, Solomon in Prov. 31:10-31 is hinting at what God is like through the imagery of a woman. The "capable woman" shows through her life the kind of benefits God would like to bestow on us, the kinds of love and help the Godhead would like to shower upon us. And no greater honor could be given any woman than to be chosen to depict the divine.

1. An acrostic poem has each line beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet: aleph, beth, etc.

2. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 77.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 79.

5. See Virginia Ramey Mollenkott, *The Divine Feminine: The Biblical Imagery of God As Female* (New York: Crossroad, 1989), pp. 97-105.

Tuesday, December 17

Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 31:26

Most of us do not live in harsh physical environments comparable to the hills and deserts of ancient Palestine, but we struggle to survive in worlds just as demanding in other ways. The high-pressure, fast-paced ways of the late twentieth century can take their toll on us just as dramatically as the droughts, famines, and marauders of the past. We need one another just as much as did the subsistence farmers and herdsmen of the ancient world.

Although we may not live precariously from crop to crop, as did the villagers of the biblical world, other forces threaten us that we can survive only as we help one another. Modern individuals may think that they can be independent and self-sufficient, but they can't be, any more than could the people of the Old Testament.

Human life endures only because of continual acts of kindness. As survival depended on the unwritten law of hospitality in the ancient world, so we need the law of kindness today. Caring and helping one another is the fundamental principle behind God's creation. It is the fundamental characteristic of creation because it is a fundamental trait of the Creator's character.

Commenting on the virtuous woman's constant instruction of

her family in kindness, Ellen White observes about the source of that kindness: "The Lord Jesus is our only helper. Through His grace we shall learn to cultivate love, to educate ourselves to speak kindly and tenderly. Through His grace our cold, harsh manners will be transformed. The law of kindness will be upon our lips, and those who are under the precious influences of the Holy Spirit, will not feel that it is an evidence of weakness to weep with those who weep, to rejoice with them that rejoice. We are to cultivate heavenly excellences of character. We are to learn what it means to have good-will toward all men, a sincere desire to be as sunshine and not as shadow in the lives of others.

"My brethren, let your hearts become broken and contrite. Let expressions of sympathy and love, which will not blister the tongue, flow from your lips. Let others feel that warmth which love can create in the heart, and educate the professed disciples of Christ to correct the evils that have so long existed—selfishness, coldness, and hardheartedness. All these traits reveal the fact that Christ is not abiding in the soul."*

As God's people in the past could exist only in extended families, so His people today can survive only in the extended family of the church.

*Ellen G. White Comments on Proverbs 31:26, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 1164.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Why Is the Bible So Sexy?

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Prov. 18:22; 5:18-20

Many Christians are uncomfortable with the Old Testament's delight in the physical attractions of marriage. It's good to remember our Creator, but must we go overboard on certain aspects of His creation? We admire trees and animals, but let's not get carried away with our bodies.

The Revised Standard Version has the word *affection* in 5:19, which can be read from the Hebrew consonants (ancient biblical Hebrew manuscripts had no vowels, sometimes creating uncertainty as to which word is meant). However, the New Revised Standard Version has gone back to the traditional rendering of *breasts*. God created marriage to be enjoyed, not just to be an institution for the rearing of children and the transfer of property and power. Derek Kidner reminds us "that when marriage is viewed chiefly as a business arrangement, not only is God's bounty misunderstood, but human passion seeks (cf. verse 20) other outlets."¹

We can learn something about divine nature and character only through the marital relationship. The love and desire experienced in marriage hint at the bonds among the Godhead and of the Godhead toward us. Divine love incorporates intensities of emotion beyond our capacity to understand.

Because marriage and all its delights give us such a valuable insight into divinity, God is concerned that we do not pervert the relationship. A good marriage reveals something about God that can be learned in no other way; an adulterous relationship warps both us and our understanding of divine relationships.

The book of Proverbs is concerned with the practical. It offers advice and principles on how best to experience all the wonders and benefits of God's creation. But it is more than just useful wisdom. It points to Wisdom—a powerful biblical image for God. Proverbs 18:22, RSV, declares, "He who finds a wife finds a good thing, and obtains favor from the Lord." "The wording, especially in Heb., strikingly resembles that of 8:35 [the great Wisdom chapter where Wisdom symbolizes God Himself], and so suggests that, after wisdom itself, the best of God's blessings is a good wife. Proverbs 31:10 makes a similar comparison, putting her price, like wisdom's (8:11), above rubies."² A good wife is an insight into, and a representative of, God and divinity. God loves not only like a father but also like a wife and mother. This may be a startling, even disturbing, thought to some, but God is the source of *all* love.

1. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction & Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 71.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 130.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Thursday, December 19

The Family of God

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 12:46-50

The Old Testament is, as we have seen, concerned about protecting marriage because it is both the linchpin of society and a keystone in the image of God in humanity. Marriage protects us as individual human beings and brings us closer to divinity. It reflects God's concern for the other. Warped or debased, marriage turns the individual inward to self, the fundamental drive behind all sin.

Much of modern society is oriented to individuals instead of to groups. This rampant individualism has affected marriage as well as everything else. The ancients thought of marriage within the context of the extended family. The extended family was absolutely necessary for sheer physical survival. Today we do not worry as much about famine and producing our own food and other physical necessities.

But a growing number struggle with grave economic and emotional threats. In more and more families both parents have to work, and the breakdown of the family and other social institutions has deprived single-parent families of role models and sources of emotional help. Children are tossed from parent to

parent and finally abandoned altogether. A drug epidemic has created a whole class of orphans whose parents are physically alive but otherwise dead to them. These problems have crept into the church—the church that the New Testament says is to be the Christian's extended family.

The challenge today is to help the church live up to its role. This can be done in countless ways. For example, a high-school or college-age young person could befriend the child of a single parent and provide the companionship and role model he or she lacks. A person who is handy with tools could do simple repairs around the house or on a car that a senior citizen cannot. Just visiting an older person for a friendly chat is in the ancient tradition of the extended family. And older people can help fill the role of a grandparent to a young child.

Marriage is vital to the preservation of society and the church, but so is its context—the extended family. We can all be members of that extended family, helping one another, patterning—through the aid of the Holy Spirit—the character of God to one another. And as we do so, it will strengthen many marriages as it reduces the problems they face and fills them with the encouragement of God's love made visible.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Images of God

OPINION

Key Texts: Prov. 18:22; Isa. 62:5

We have heard much through the years about restoring the image of God in humanity. But what all is involved in it? Is it just overcoming temptation, as some seem to imply?

Psalm 15:1 asks God, "Who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live on your holy hill?" (NIV). That is, what do we have to be like to be compatible with God and comfortable in His presence? Psalm 15 dwells on relationships that reflect His character, His image. How do we discover what this image of God is that we are supposed to regain?

In a chapter the New Revised Standard Version labels as "The Vindication and Salvation of the Lord," the prophet says in Isaiah 62:5: "For as a young man marries a young woman, so shall your builder marry you, and as the bridegroom rejoices over the bride, so shall your God rejoice over you." What can we discover about God in the joy a bridegroom feels for his bride?

All human relationships should be a reflection of the character of God—a faint reflection perhaps, but still a reflection. Except for a few examples, such as the fatherhood of God, we have not spent much time exploring the im-

lications of the human relationships He has implanted in the human personality. Both the Old and New Testament employ marriage as a symbol of God's feelings for His people. Could aspects and implications of marriage reveal anything to us of that image of God that we must regain?

Scripture compares God's love for us to that of a mother. Could we learn even more about what God is like by studying motherhood? What about our inherent appreciation of joy, creativity, beauty, friendship, honor, even humor—could they show us more of the image of God?

If God is a person and we still reflect at least a little of His image, we can discover much of His character by considering the human personality. Yes, it is tarnished by sin, but as Ellen White often reminds us, it is not totally defaced. Once we start looking at human relationships through the guidance of the Holy Spirit and Scripture, we can let Him, like a master art restorer, remove the discoloration and dirt of sin and let the original image shine on the human canvas in all its glorious colors.

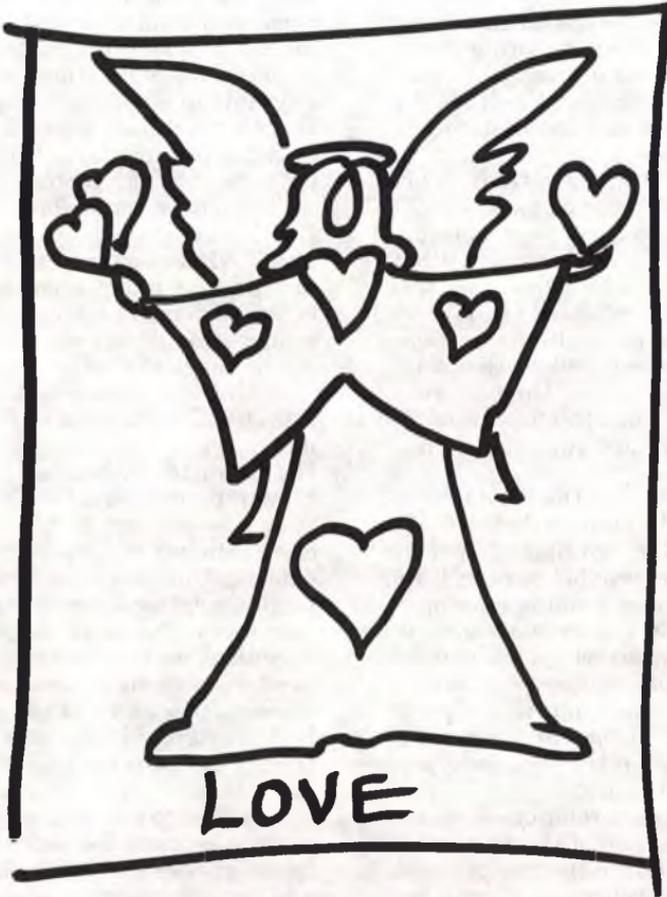
For that to happen, we must search Scripture for every illustration it provides of God's character and dealings with us, and at the same time listen to His voice as He points out insights in daily human experience.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Lesson 13, December 22-28

Success Is No Secret



“My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart” (Prov. 3:1, NIV).

Desperately Seeking Success

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Prov. 3:1; 6:16-19;
12:15; 22:6

Near Eastern thinkers from Mesopotamia to Egypt sought the secret of success almost as far back as we have written records. They attempted to find the will of the gods from the natural order, social relations, and political events, summarize them, then show how to apply these principles to daily life. By following these principles, one thought he could increase the likelihood of having a long and prosperous life.

From fourteenth- to twelfth-century-B.C. Mesopotamia, we have a document known as "Ludlul Bel Nemeqi" ("I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom"). The Assyrians of the sixth- to fifth-century B.C. produced "The Words of Ahiqar."

But we have the most examples from the ancient Egyptians. Their tombs have revealed the "Instruction of Ptahotep" (2700-2200 B.C.), "Instruction for Merikare" (2200-2040 B.C.), and the "Instruction of Amenemope" (1550-1069 B.C.).

The biblical counterpart to these types of writing is the group of books that scholars call "wisdom" literature. It includes the books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Wisdom material also appears among the psalms and elsewhere.

The ancient Israelites natu-

rally shared their world's interest in discovering the secrets of a successful life. They were most strongly influenced by Egyptian wisdom writings. After all, they had lived in Egypt for many centuries, and evidence indicates that when David and Solomon set up their royal courts, they imported Egyptian scribes and other cultural advisors.

Much of ancient wisdom literature is based upon common sense and intelligent observation. Biblical wisdom added something else—a special perspective—that is vital to God's people as they struggle to preserve their families and succeed in today's difficult world.

The ancients apparently thought that if they mechanically followed the principles in the wisdom writings, they would automatically achieve success. Sometimes Christians assume that applying the principles of the book of Proverbs will guarantee success. Many a Christian parent has claimed the promise, "Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it" (Prov. 22:6, NIV) only to be disappointed in later life. But they have forgotten that the Bible writers took these ancient principles and placed them in the only framework that will make them really work. Without this framework, even the best "wisdom" literature is only common sense, and we know how uncommonly ineffective that can be.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, December 23

Success Begins With Relationships

LOGOS

Prov. 6:16-19

The writer of Proverbs here uses a numerical pattern that is especially prominent in chapter 30. He begins, "There are six things the Lord hates, seven that are detestable to him" (Prov. 6:16, NIV). Perhaps such a numerical pattern was intended to make the sayings more interesting and easier to remember during a time when there were few written copies and more information was transmitted orally. Derek Kidner suggests that the numerical pattern was "a way of showing that the list, though specific, is not exhaustive."¹ That is, these are the kinds of thing that God dislikes in the fallen personality, but we must watch out for even more undesirable traits.

Employing a descriptive pattern seen elsewhere in the lament psalms and the Song of Songs,² the writer chooses his examples in a progression that moves from the top of the body to the bottom. The Hebrew mind was extremely concrete and used few abstractions. Thus the author used physical objects to stand for behavioral traits. Kidner observes that we could classify the traits as "one sin of attitude (17a), one of thought (18a: *imaginings*, AV, RV = *plans*, RSV), two of speech (lies unofficial, 17b, and of-

ficial, 19a), two of action (17c, 18b) and one of influence (19b)."³

But the most important thing about these representative examples is that they all involve relationships. Old Testament religion is primarily concerned with the relationships that God's people had with those about them. It was not individualistic as so much Christianity is today, but focused on the community of believers. Recognizing that this fact undergirded the book of Proverbs, Kathleen M. O'Connor comments, "Because Israel was a community-oriented culture, the goal of the sayings was to perfect the community, not just the individual. . . . What really matters . . . is the way one relates to the community. Relationships make life beautiful, challenge people at the core of their beings, and provide the most intense and surprising joy."⁴

The Hebrew mentality would not fully understand our total preoccupation with overcoming personal temptations. Instead they would ask whether we were also taking care of family and neighbor. Feeding and clothing the widow and the orphan would be as important as resisting the craving for chocolate or the latest style. The wrongness of appetite would stem at least in part from the fact that the glutton's lack of self-control denied others scarce food.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

The person who concerns himself or herself with others will soon discover that his or her life can be surprisingly successful both by the criteria of this world and that of the one to come. People quickly sense when we are concerned about them or are just trying to impress them with a facade, and they respond accordingly. None of us likes being fooled or manipulated. Even those who are good at pulling the proverbial wool over everyone's eyes usually eventually reveal their true nature, and they self-destruct.

"Proverbial wisdom presents an other-directed stance toward life as the essence of wisdom. Religious practices, prayer, formal worship have little place in its vision. To live intensely and to cope successfully, with life's dilemmas, live honestly, faithfully, encouraging and embracing the lives of others. This will make one happy, secure and blessed; any other course will lead to misery."⁵

Success cannot be found through some magical set of rules

or manual of social etiquette. This was the failing of the nonbiblical wisdom literature. It lacked the empowering aid of the wisdom that the book of Proverbs personifies through the image of a woman. When we have that wisdom, we have power from God—power to have those true relationships that do lead to true success. And, most important of all, we will have a relationship with God Himself.

This is the key to success that we must share with our children. Proverbs 3 is an admonition to remember the commandments, which really are the teachings of wisdom. "She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed" (Prov. 3:18, NIV).

1. Derek Kidner, *Proverbs: An Introduction & Commentary* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1964), p. 73.

2. *Harper's Bible Commentary*, James L. Mays, ed. (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 506.

3. Kidner, p. 73.

4. Kathleen M. O'Connor, *The Wisdom Literature* (Wilmington, Del.: Michael Glazier, 1988), p. 51.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 51, 52.

Tuesday, December 24

Foundation

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 3:1

"The question that should come home to each one of us is, Upon what foundation am I building? We have the privilege of striving for immortal life; and it is of the greatest importance that we dig deep, removing all the rubbish, and build on the solid rock, Christ Jesus. He is the sure foundation. 'Other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ.' 1 Cor. 3:11. In Him alone is our salvation. 'There is none other name under heaven given among men, whereby we must be saved' Acts 4:12.

"The foundation firmly laid, we need wisdom that we may know how to build. When Moses was about to erect the sanctuary in the wilderness, he was cautioned, 'See . . . that thou make all things according to the pattern showed to thee in the mount.' Heb. 8:5. In His law, God has given us the pattern. Our character-building is to be after 'the pattern showed to thee in the mount.' The law is the great standard of righteousness. It represents the character of God, and is the test of our loyalty to His government. And it is revealed to us, in all its beauty and excellence, in the life of Christ. . . .

"Thoroughness is necessary to success in the work of character-building. There must be an earnest purpose to carry out the plan of the Master-builder. The

timbers must be solid. No careless, unreliable work can be accepted, for this would ruin the building. The powers of the whole being are to be put into the work. It demands the strength and energy of manhood; there is no reserve to be wasted in unimportant matters. . . . There must be earnest, careful, persevering effort to break away from the customs, maxims, and associations of the world. Deep thought, earnest purpose, steadfast integrity, are essential.

"There must be no idleness. Life is an important thing, a sacred trust; and every moment should be wisely improved, for its results will be seen in eternity. God requires each one to do all the good possible. The talents which He has entrusted to our keeping are to be made the most of. He has placed them in our hands to be used in His name's honor and glory, and for the good of our fellow-men. . . .

"The Lord has precious promises in this life for those who keep His law. He says, 'My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments: for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart: so shalt thou find favor and good understanding in the sight of God and man.' Prov. 3:1-4."*

* *Counsels to Teachers*, pp. 61-63.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Real Wisdom

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Prov. 22:17–23:11

At least a thousand years before Christ, an Egyptian scribe recorded the "Instruction of Amenemope." "Give thy ears," its author said, "hear what is said / Give thy heart to understand them. / To put them in thy heart is worth while, [But] it is damaging to him who neglects them."¹

Sometime later, another writer began, "Incline your ear, and hear the words of the wise, and apply your mind to my knowledge; for it will be pleasant if you keep them within you" (Prov. 22:17, RSV).

Amenemope: "Guard thyself against robbing the oppressed / and against overbearing the disabled."

Proverbs: "Do not rob the poor, because he is poor, or crush the afflicted at the gate" (verse 22).

Amenemope: "Do not carry off the landmark at the boundaries of the arable land."

Proverbs: "Remove not the ancient landmark which your fathers have set" (verse 28).

Space permits only a few examples of the many parallels between the "Instruction of Amenemope" and the book of

Proverbs. The biblical author who declared, "Have I not written for you thirty sayings of admonition and knowledge?" (verse 20) may have known of the 30 chapters of Amenemope. We could cite parallels between Proverbs and other Egyptian instruction literature.²

All true wisdom ultimately comes from God, the author of all truth, but what makes the book of Proverbs inspired, unlike that of the Egyptian writings?

"The Egyptian literature, while certainly not ignoring religious aspects of life, has a social orientation. Proverbs, on the other hand, while not unconcerned about social graces, has an orientation toward deity, YHWH [Yahweh]. This Israelite orientation is . . . an elaboration of the stated conviction of the author that 'The fear of YHWH is the beginning of wisdom' (Prov. 9:10; see also 1:7)."³ Inspired wisdom is always God-centered.

1. James B. Pritchard, *The Ancient Near East: Volume 1, An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* (Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1958), pp. 237-243.

2. See the other examples in chapter 11.

3. John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context: A Survey of Parallels Between Biblical and Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 178.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Thursday, December 26

The Perfect Illustration

HOW-TO

Key Text: Heb. 1:1, 2

In last week's lesson we observed that the book of Proverbs closes with the "virtuous" or "capable" woman of Prov. 31:10-31 as an illustration of the charms of divine wisdom. The Bible writer used a human being—a woman—as a concrete symbol for God.

The Old Testament had to employ many indirect ways of communicating God's nature. But Heb. 1:1, 2 declares, "Long ago God spoke to our ancestors in many and various ways by the prophets, but in these last days he has spoken to us by a Son" (NRSV). A real person revealed what God is like.

As a capable woman offered clues to putting the principles of the book of Proverbs into daily practice, so the life of Jesus recorded in the Gospels demonstrates even more clearly how to live the wise sayings of this book.

The book of Proverbs, for example, has much to say about the necessity of discipline. But it is discipline as the capable woman would apply it in her love for her family. The Christian parent must discipline in the way that Jesus did.

For three years Jesus taught an unruly and undisciplined group of disciples, but He was never harsh or vindictive. Al-

though He had to let them learn the consequences of their actions, He always treated them with respect and dignity, softening the results of their mistakes whenever He could.

He wielded the rod with love, even toward Judas. Although He knew the disciple would betray Him, He did not angrily expose him; the other disciples had no idea why Judas left the upper room (see John 13:21-30). Jesus also kept reaching out to the disciple up to the very last possible moment. Sharing food with another as Jesus did with Judas (see verse 26) was an ancient custom of showing intimate friendship. Jesus was not exposing His traitor with the bread, but demonstrating His love for the man.

The way we rear our children, the manner in which we treat our neighbors and work associates—all the things that Proverbs speaks about—we must do the way that Jesus would if He were in our place.

The wisdom woman of Proverbs hinted at the nature of divinity, but as Jesus told the apostle Philip, "Whoever has seen me has seen the Father" (John 14:9, NRSV). When we study Jesus, we observe divinity much more clearly than we could have seen through the wisdom woman of the book of Proverbs. And because of His example, we know infinitely better how to live wisely and successfully.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Success Is Not Automatic

OPINION

Key Text: Prov. 22:6

A pastor once preached on Prov. 22:6, declaring that if this passage were followed faithfully, there was no excuse for anyone's children ever leaving the church. Every congregation has parents whose children have abandoned the Seventh-day Adventist faith, and this pastor's congregation was no exception. The sermon deepened the grief they already felt and intensified it into an almost overwhelming guilt.

Several members went to the pastor and suggested that perhaps he had come across too strong. After the delegation had talked with him some time, he said he would apologize, assuring them that he had not intended to add to their burdens. But at the conclusion of his apology, he added, "I still believe that if you obey Prov. 22:6, your children will never leave the church!"

God trained up Satan perfectly, yet he became a devil. Following wisdom mechanically does not guarantee unending results. Life does not work that way.

The Lord endowed His creation with free will and freedom. Even the most perfectly structured childhood will not ensure righteous adults. Each of us chooses to

accept or reject the moral and spiritual training we have received. Rules and regulations, although necessary, cannot of themselves lead to absolute results. We live in a universe of freedom, where good and evil struggle for victory. Whether it is rearing children or seeking success in a career, we must be prepared for disappointment and failure.

This does not mean that what Proverbs teaches is worthless, however. Wisdom is powerful—when we recognize its true source of power. The biblical authors put all these wise sayings in a special context. That context is a call for the reader to find true wisdom. And true wisdom is not just knowledge—it is a Person. Biblical wisdom is a relationship with God Himself.

Because God has given all His creation freedom, it can reject the power behind the principles of the book of Proverbs. Our children can choose to stray, our friends may refuse our overtures of friendship, success in this life may elude us no matter how carefully we may follow scriptural counsel. But if we have a proper relationship with divine Wisdom, we can cope. In the end, wisdom is not *what* we know, but *whom* we know. "Happy is the man who finds wisdom" (3:13, RSV).

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is an editor at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

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Scripture: Joel 1:1-2:11

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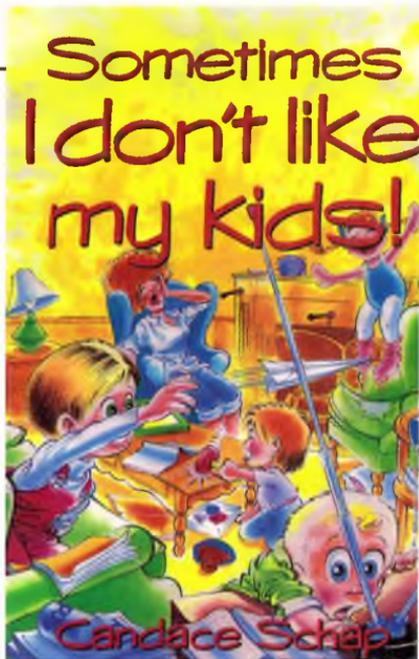
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