



A D V E N T I S T

October 30, 1997

Review

*When
We **All**
Get
Together*

A special issue on praise and worship

PLUS: WEEK OF PRAYER READINGS INSIDE

It's Quiet Out Here

Holland, Nebraska, Seventh-day Adventist Church

STORY AND PHOTOS BY ERIK STENBAKKEN

It's 9:15 a.m., and worship has already begun. The soft undulation of the preacher's voice is disturbed only by the rustling of leaves. It is proof of the unseen, ever-present wind.

It is always this way.

I was right about the town.

Holland, Nebraska, is small—so small that if listed alone in the phone book, it probably wouldn't take two pages. I was right about the building, too. It stands at the edge of town, where the cornfields start—a converted schoolhouse-once-fertilizer storage barn, a neat but unassuming building with circa 1970s carpet and plain wooden pews.

I was wrong about the people, however. I had misgivings about how I, an intruder bedecked with photo gear, would be greeted. But they welcomed me like a returning friend. I saw it in their eyes and felt it in their handshakes. They were genuine. I was welcome.

Bruce and Marylou Schlieder picked this church quite intentionally. "I like it when all the adults in church know my kids by name," says Bruce. "We all worship together. We have a sense of community."

He means it. An older church couple are working to raise their great-granddaughter alone. In case something should happen, Bruce and Marylou have offered to adopt the girl into their own family.

Sabbath school classes downstairs still promise sandbox adventures and memory verse recitals. Upstairs they study from the quarterly and *The Desire of Ages*, and the lesson leader still maintains that the King James Version is best.

There *are* some signs of change in Holland. Hovering mothers compare paint swatches and carpet samples. At potlucks there's even talk of opening up the church school again someday.

But in all likelihood, tomorrow's Holland will mirror today's Holland. And there will always be more garden tomatoes, macaroni, sliced Nuteena, and corn from just down the road.



OPENING HYMN: The Holland church has just one service, but they have it *before* Sabbath school because Pastor Stan Hagen has to drive some 30 miles to preach at another church.



SUPPLICATION: After a sharing/prayer request time, Pastor Hagen leads the congregation in prayer.



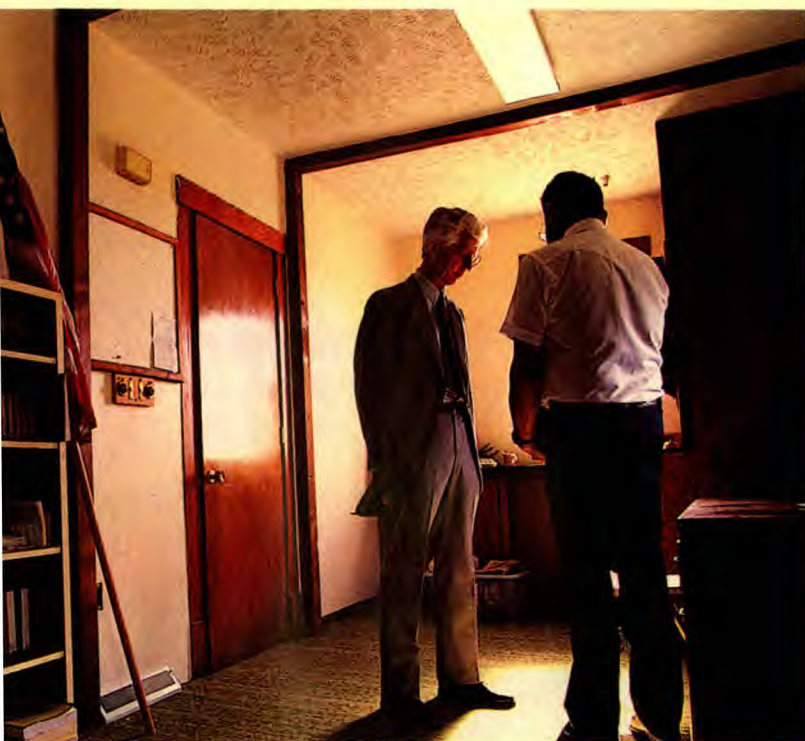
WAITING: Adam Suden.



KINDERGARTEN: As the class sings "Look Who's Come to Sabbath School," the eyes of Carolyn Benner are drawn to a felt board. Carolyn and her family have since moved to Angwin, California.



STUDY: Steve Chadwick leads a Sabbath school discussion about the "pearl of great price."



IN THE SHADOWS: Pastor Hagen and Arlyn Rexinger meet backstage before the 9:00 worship service. The Rexingers are one of Holland's founding families, many of whom helped purchase the building and property. A school/fellowship hall was added later.



I SPY: What Jennifer Suden is doing with her quarterly is exactly what children are *supposed* to do with their quarterlies (besides read them). Later in the day Jennifer was baptized at Pastor Hagen's other church, which has a baptistry.

*When We All
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The Passion and the Power

Patmos Chapel Seventh-day Adventist Church, Winter Park, Florida

STORY AND PHOTOS BY RICK MANN

The Patmos Adventist Church is like many in Florida—an unassuming structure in a neighborhood nestled just a few blocks from a busy highway. Out front a traditional black-and-silver sign proudly displays the denominational affiliation. Every Sabbath cars stream into the grassy parking lot as a deacon named Lee Linc waves to familiar faces and greets new ones—like mine.

“See those torn-down houses?” he asks me, pointing to an adjacent lot where several homes have just been demolished. “That’s where we’re expanding.”

A photographer on assignment, I had begun this Sabbath morning with a certain detachment. I was here to take pictures; my worship time would simply have to wait until next week at my home church. Or so I thought.

“Here, young man, take mine,” says the elder sitting next to me, offering his Sabbath school quarterly so I can follow along. “I’ll look on with this pretty lady,” he says, pointing to the woman beside him. It’s his wife.

By the time song service starts, I’ve nearly forgotten why I’m here. It’s difficult *not* to sing when the entire congregation is on their feet singing and shouting their victory in Jesus. I’m not sure when it happens, but sometime between the opening prayer and the closing hymn, I become more than a visiting photographer; I become a member of Patmos.

A passion for Jesus—that’s what the Patmos family has. Into every aspect of their worship service—every hymn, every scripture—they invite Christ to breathe life. It’s why their members return week after week—to praise a Saviour with such passion and power as to draw themselves closer to heaven, closer to God.

I got some pictures, but more important, I got a blessing. And I can’t wait to return.

WELCOME, SIR!
Retired from the Coast Guard, Lee Linc salutes arriving families. “People enjoy it,” he says.



EXALTATION: For Roger Mike, glorifying God through music comes naturally. At Patmos, Roger sings and plays the organ and piano regularly.



SPECIAL MUSIC: Backed up by the Patmos choir, Earl Mike sings with conviction.



MAKING THE POINT: Preaching can be hard work. Elder Robert Mike wipes his brow every few minutes. "It's worth it," he says. On this Sabbath Elder Mike gave Patmos a glimpse of the character and power of Jesus in a sermon about the woman at the well.



WEEKLY HIGH: With raised hands and voices, Belinda Bridges (left) and Ann Assent (right) join a lively song service.



"WHERE WAS SAUL BORN?" In classic boys versus girls format, children's chapel holds a quiz from the lesson quarterly.

*When We All
Get Together*

Abrazando Mucho

When We All
Get Together

Colombia Adventist University
campus church, Medellín,
Colombia

STORY AND PHOTOS BY DICK DUERKSEN

And ested in the foothills of Medellín, Colombia Adventist University (Universidad Nacional Adventista de Colombia) boasts beautiful buildings, luxuriant greenery, and ideal weather. And people. Students, staff, faculty, and community members form a joyful family of worshipers, a family that quickly takes all visitors into its arms.

I spoke for the university worship hour one Sabbath in July and was deeply impressed by the intensity of the fellowship. It was hard to take photos of individual members because they were always in groups—walking, talking, laughing, singing, praying, studying. One young girl was busy taking care of a younger sister. Two men were praying over a problem and then celebrating God's love with a solid *abrazo*. Groups clustered outside the auditorium discussing family challenges and theology. Even the Sabbath school classes were being "team taught."

Sabbath in Medellín is a very pleasant experience. Throughout the church, Colombian worship is filled with smiles. Little children smiled at me over the backs of pews; strangers smiled from the sidewalks and doorways; everywhere Christians were enjoying Sabbath and each other.

Worship for this church family encompasses much more than an hour or two on Sabbath mornings. It includes the Sabbath afternoon Pathfinder Club activities, study groups on the dormitory steps, songs in the cafeteria, and even conversations with the greeters at the church doors.

This is not a sleeping church, but a congregation of active believers who are busy challenging each other in Christian growth and fellowship.

If worship is "letting God know how valuable His life is to you," then this Colombian church family is crafting worship into an art.



STEPS TO CHRIST: The G. W. Chapman Auditorium serves as the current university sanctuary.



LESSON STUDY: Area adults and university students attend Sabbath school together.



BREATHER: Enjoying a Sabbath rest from their studies, university students stroll to church.



GOD OF THE YOUNG: Pathfinder Club is held every Sabbath afternoon following church and lunch, allowing parents to make one fewer trip each week.



SWEPT AWAY: Keeping the little ones happy throughout church takes a little creativity—and lots of love.



COLOMBIAN CUSTOM: Miguel Santos (right) and an Adventist brother in prayer and *abrazando*.

Riding the Grace Wave

Christ Advent Fellowship,
Berthoud, Colorado

STORY BY ANDY NASH;
PHOTOS BY ERIK STENBAKKEN

Step into the lobby of Grace Place, the weekend ministry of the year-old Christ Advent Fellowship (CAF), and you might wonder whether you're really in a fellowship of Adventists.

You won't find Sabbath school quarterlies or NET '98 tabloids or other Adventist literature—not even *Adventist Reviews* (the nerve!).

You will find people—long-lost Adventist people, rough-and-tough people, *young* people (including one teenager who ran away from home, but returned Friday night so he could go to church).

You'll find smiles and hugs and tears—a few on the way into the worship service, lots on the way out. *In short, you'll find people finding God.*

"We believe," Pastor Clay Peck tells his congregation on this frozen March morning, "that God has sent a wave for us to ride." Peck's point is punctuated with street surfer footage (borrowed from a familiar AT&T commercial)—then it's on to the growing "tradition" of a contemporary service: second-person praise singing (words projected), a short youth drama, and a sermon, not from Daniel or Revelation, but from Matthew.

You might have heard—CAF's relationship with the rest of Adventism has been as rocky as the mountains overlooking it. "It's a church in real flux," Mid-America Union president Charles Sandefur said this spring. (Technically, CAF is a company.) And though summer brought a relative calm, there remain issues—financial, theological—to be hammered out.

But at least with church officials, worship isn't one of them. "Worship isn't an issue anywhere in this conference," says Rocky Mountain Conference president James Brauer.

The fact is, for many Fort Collins-area Adventists who prefer contemporary worship, Grace Place is the place to be. "This church is the best thing to ever happen to us," says Loveland's Dallas Williams, who with his wife, Beth, left the Adventist Church for several years. "We used to make every excuse for not going to church. Now I don't care if we're sick—we wouldn't miss it. We invite every friend we know."



POP-UP CHURCH: At 6:45 a.m., in 5°F weather, the first equipment truck arrives. In three hours a portion of Berthoud High School will be transformed into Grace Place.

ACCEPTED: Owner of a Denver Harley shop, Ron Roti had sworn he'd never set foot in another Adventist church. "I had too many people telling me I had to come in a suit and that I was misrepresenting Jesus because I had long hair," he says. "But I can come here smiling and knowing that God loves me and that people accept me as I am." Here, Roti greets Rose Pauly, who was nearly raped and killed in her own home, but instead talked the intruder out of it and led him to Jesus.



HANDS TO HEAVEN: After the service, many members stick around for more praise singing.



*When We All
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HUDDLE: Before each service the worship team prays for themselves and their listeners. "The whole purpose of using contemporary praise music," says Brett Wilson, worship leader, "is to connect with the seeking heart. A lot of people have told me that they came to Grace Place because of the music, but kept coming back because the gospel is central and they love the message." Grace Place lists its target groups as "the burned, the bored, and the bypassed."



SERVE IT UP: Replete with sweet rolls and hot drink, a brunch is served before and after second service. "It makes people feel comfortable and helps them to get to know each other," says Carolee Thunquest, who handles the refreshments ministry. All Grace Place members are encouraged to discover their spiritual gifts through an eight-hour networking course (coordinated by Selene Peck)—as well as to join a weekly small group Bible study.



PASTOR: A well-prepared and engaging speaker, Clay Peck has that Sabbath's texts projected onto a screen. Peck has been criticized for downplaying Adventist distinctives, yet this sermon on Gethsemane referenced the great controversy ("war in heaven"), the state of the dead ("eternal separation"), Jesus' intercession for us ("He's pleading today"), even an Ellen White paraphrase ("We're going to study [the cross] throughout eternity").



WHERE IT'S WARM: About 550 people, most of them not yet members, usually attend second service (held in the Berthoud High School auditorium). On this Sabbath about 200 were at Ski Fest, an annual Adventist get-together in Winter Park.

1998 Devotional Books

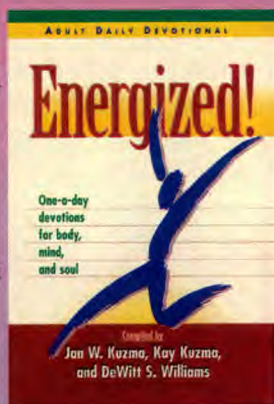
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Evening

Portraits of Jesus

George W. Brown looks at 365 titles, names, and offices applied to Jesus throughout the Bible. Each devotional reveals fresh insights into Christ's life, character, and ministry as the world's Redeemer.



Women

From the Heart

Thoughts of renewal, joy, and inspiration shared from the hearts of Christian women around the world. Rose Otis, editor. Hardcover. US\$14.99, Cdn\$21.49.



Juniors

Sunny Side Up

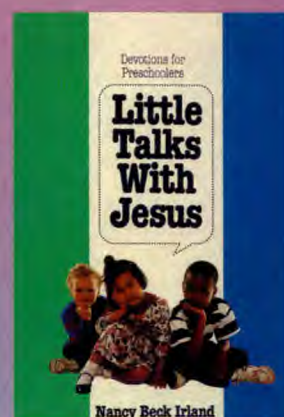
Sunny Side Up encourages kids to share the good news of the gospel and a true picture of Jesus—loving and full of joy—with everyone they meet. Each devotional offers a practical activity kids can use to make this happen. By Celeste Perrino Walker and Eric D. Stoffle. Paperback. US\$10.99, Cdn\$15.99.



Preschool

Little Talks With Jesus

What does Jesus look like? How old is God? Nancy Beck Irland's preschool devotionals meet the spiritual needs and interests of little children and help them get to know Jesus. Hardcover. US\$10.99, Cdn\$15.99.



Teens

My Father Owns This Place

Gary B. Swanson's upbeat message for teens is that because God owns the world, He'll always be there to help them. Stories provide insights into God's grace, what it means to trust Him, the power of prayer, living the Christian life, and sharing Christ with others. Paperback. US\$8.99, Cdn\$12.99.



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From left: David Smith, Lonnie Melashenko,
H.M.S. Richards Jr., John McLarty

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ADVENTIST Review

"Behold, I come quickly . . ."

Our mission is to uplift Jesus Christ through stories of His matchless love, news of His present workings, help for knowing Him better, and hope in His soon return.

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To Writers: We welcome unsolicited manuscripts. (Please query before submitting long articles.) Include address, telephone number, and Social Security number, where available. Address all editorial correspondence to 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600. Editorial office fax number: (301) 680-6638.

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When We All Get Together

WILLIAM G. JOHNSON

This issue marks a first for the *Adventist Review*.

For more than a century the church paper has produced a special issue each year for the Week of Prayer readings. In 1997 we have expanded the issue to 80 pages and placed the readings in the larger context of praise and worship.

Worship constitutes the Adventist message to the world. "Fear God . . . give glory to Him. . . . Worship Him," declares the first angel of Revelation 14 (verses 6, 7). The great vision that lies at the center of the Apocalypse—Revelation 12-14—sets out the agelong conflict between Christ and Satan and challenges the reader: Whom will you worship—Christ or the beast?

God has put eternity within our hearts. We have a hunger for Him that is satisfied only by the adoration we call worship. That activity is the highest experience of humanity. When we worship as Jesus said—"in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)—we stretch to the full height of our being.

I believe that God is calling Seventh-day Adventists to demonstrate true worship, not just to proclaim the worship of the Creator. That means we must first know God intimately, personally, as our best friend. Only as God becomes real in our everyday experience will our worship resound to His glory when we all get together.

Seventh-day Adventists can, by God's grace, model corporate worship in a manner unique among Christians. The Lord has made, is making, us into a remarkable people, a worldwide family drawn from every nation and tribe under heaven. No other body on earth is so diverse, so far-flung across more than 200 nations.

That diversity is a tremendous asset. When we all get together, we bring treasures from afar—the distinctive modes, energies, and spirit of our varied heritages. Our Creator-God, profligate with His blessings, has endowed each nation, kindred, tongue, and people with gifts peculiar to itself.

So inevitably Adventist worship varies from country to country, and within the countries. The photographs in this issue—all of Adventists, all taken by Adventists—reflect this variety.

But here's the miracle: With all the differences, we are one people. When we get together we worship the one God—in many voices, many colors, many ways.

Three people worked very hard to make this issue happen. On our editorial staff, Roy Adams edited the Week of Prayer readings, while Andy Nash spearheaded work on the praise and worship materials. At the Review and Herald, Melynie Tooley sold additional advertising to ensure financial viability. I am grateful for the efforts of these three.

You will find differences of opinion here on how Adventists should worship. We have included various viewpoints to be fair and to help members grow in understanding one another—not to arouse controversy. Our prayer for this banner issue is that every person who picks it up may be led to the psalmist's experience: "Worship the Lord with gladness; come before him with joyful songs" (Ps. 100:2, NIV).



When North America Gets Together

New survey data on worship reveal some interesting trends.

How satisfied are you with what happens on a typical Sabbath at your local church?

	Percent		
	Not at all	Somewhat	Very
With the Sabbath school program	6	42	52
With your Sabbath school class	5	31	64
With the personal ministries time	14	46	39
With the announcements	6	38	55
With the pastoral prayer	3	26	70
With the sermon	4	29	67
With the greeters	4	27	69
With the bulletin	3	26	71
With the warmth and fellowship	5	31	64

To what degree do you feel uplifted by praise and celebration during the typical Sabbath service at your local church?

	Percent
Never	7
Sometimes	25
Often	37
Always	31

Worship services at my church are consistently inspiring.

	Percent
Agree	71
Disagree	14
Uncertain	15

I would prefer to sing more contemporary Christian songs during the worship service.

	Percent
Agree	38
Disagree	32
Uncertain	29

Church members who would like to see the following changes in their local church Sabbath worship service:

	Percent
More reverence and silence	65
Interviews with members involved in interesting ministries	55
More opportunity for congregational praise	50
More opportunity for fellowship in the service	43
More opportunity to voice prayer requests	43
An opportunity to come forward and pray	31
Eliminate all announcements	14

Which category best describes the type of music generally used during Sabbath worship in your local church?

	Percent
Classical	9
Traditional	58
Gospel	27
Contemporary	5

The order of worship at my local church is

	Percent
Usually the same each week	58
Changed occasionally	35
Changed frequently	7

The atmosphere in the worship service in my local church can be best described as

	Percent
Formal	57
Celebration	29
Lifeless	10
Chaotic	4

Source: A random sample of 1,738 members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America to be published early next year in *Trends in Adventism*, by Monte Sahlin. The allowance for sampling error is 2 percentage points, plus or minus. A copy of the full report is available from the Center for Creative Ministry at 800-272-4664.

Must Great Minds Worship Alike?

*A look at the four major learning styles—
and how each can add richness to corporate worship*

BY W. EUGENE BREWER

I DIDN'T GET ANYTHING OUT OF THAT sermon," says Jack.

"You're kidding!" replies Marlene. "I bought the tape."

"But it was on Hur! I've never even heard of Hur."

"That's the point. Lots of Christians who serve God are almost anonymous, but like Hur, they are important to God's plan."

"Another thing! When church is over, I wish you wouldn't be in such a big hurry to leave."

"I feel silly just standing around looking for people to talk to."

"But that's the most important part!"¹

One elderly woman shares, "I come to this church because we stop after the sermon to hug each other. . . . That's the only time all week that I'm touched by another person. Often I feel as if God is in that touch."

"That's my least favorite time," another counters. "I'm uncomfortable when people I don't know very well come up and hug me."²

One Right Way?

Clearly, worship is a very personal thing. Today's society, perhaps more than ever, relates to religion uniquely. Many people feel, however, that their way is the *only* way. Can a worship service that makes one person shout for joy and another weep for joy be genuine for both? What did Jesus mean when He said we should worship Him "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24)?

Variety in worship must be seen as a blessing. As *The Message* paraphrases 1 Corinthians 12:6: "Each person is given something to do that shows who God is: Everyone gets in on it, everyone benefits. All kinds of things are handed out by the Spirit, and to all kinds of people! The variety is wonderful."

Controversy in many churches today regarding worship styles is well known. In many cases the controversy is more about relating to change than anything else. George Barna warns, "It will be increasingly difficult to convince the unchurched that our faith is pertinent to the twenty-first century if the tools of our trade are from the last century."³

Surely today's worship service planners face tremendous challenges for a better balanced appeal to a broader group of people. Most educators realize that a thorough understanding of natural learning styles and behaviors is a priceless benefit in developing diverse, adaptive methods to meet the needs of children, teens, parents, and seniors. Borrowing from that model, many churches have discovered that a study of those same learning styles has helped adapt worship to meet those critical needs as well.

The Four Learning Styles

In her book *About Learning*,⁴ Bernice McCarthy says we each have our own most comfortable style of learning. Many people perceive through concrete experience—sensing and feeling. Others learn primarily through abstract conceptualization—thinking. To help explain the characteristics of people who prefer different types of learning, McCarthy has

created names for the learning styles. We will use them here as we relate them to worship.

1. Imaginative learners need to ask and answer the question "Why?" before real learning can take place. Being feeling-directed, they may sense God's presence best during Communion or by a hug at the door. If a



ANDY NASH

song or story or drama makes them feel emotional, they are more likely to think they have worshiped powerfully.

These people enjoy share-and-prayer times (the garden of prayer experience), the weekly handshakes, and church activities that are open to everyone. They like a Sabbath school class in which the chairs are in a circle and appreciate a sanctuary decorated colorfully (banners, flowers, etc.). Regarding Jesus' admonition to worship "in spirit and in truth," this learner would wish to emphasize the Spirit more fully throughout the service, applauding Ellen White's statement "In all true teaching the personal element is essential."⁵

2. Analytic learners enjoy discovering abstract bits of information to put together into theories and ways for solving problems. They seek facts, want to know what the experts think, are thorough and industrious, and will reexamine the facts if situations perplex them. They need to learn something new in the sermon and feel God's presence during that teaching time, preferring less singing or preliminary creative activities than other types.

The *what* in learning is important



to them. They would relish hours of in-depth Bible study on praise rather than praising God in a group. These learners prefer chairs in a row and a Sabbath school teacher who wants to find "right" answers rather than engage in open-ended discussion. They want the sermon to have a clear outline (beginning, middle, end) and probably will take notes. They enjoy background information on songs and would prefer the music to go along with the sermon topic. They will also probably have the most trouble accepting drama and creative worship styles because of their comfort with formality and the no-surprise format. In the "spirit and truth" admonition, they want the emphasis on truth. When they have gained insights about God, they know they have worshiped.

3. Commonsense learners need to know how things work—they are the "practical" ones among us. They enjoy more hands-on experiences and may feel God's presence best when decorating the kindergarten Sabbath school room, building a church for a Maranatha project, washing the Communion utensils, or mowing the church yard. They want a sermon to challenge people to get involved, and most enjoy kneeling, raising hands, standing, bowing heads, and being involved in training sessions for various ministries. To them, if it's not used it's not learned.

Ellen White speaks of these practical Christians when she states: "It is the use

they make of knowledge that determines the value of their education. To spend a long time in study, with no effort to impart what is gained, often proves a hindrance rather than a help to real development."⁶

Every church needs these realistic and results-oriented members—but often they are overlooked because of their bottom-line, technology (rather than people)-oriented style. In high schools they are the most frequent dropouts. I wonder if perhaps they might not be the most common dropouts in churches as well. And yet we need them to get things done.

4. Dynamic learners often experience powerful worship at unexpected moments—such as when the choir sings

ANDY NASH



DICK DIERCKSEN



or a drama is enacted. Their hearts tell them that God does exist. They are often very artistic and appreciate excellence. Occasionally they enjoy some radically different types of Christian presentation or music.

Dynamic learners like variety in the church service, and worship God strongly through the element of surprise. After one creative worship ser-

vice a learner of this type stated, "God sat next to me at today's worship. I never felt Him so near."

These people might view their gifts as sharing the gospel with a friend. They say, "Now, if that is really true, then *what* are we going to do about it?" Dynamic learners are the dreamers, the creative planners, the futurists, the ones who see possibilities

where others swear none exist.

A Beautiful Blend

Ellen White reminds us: "There are no two leaves of a tree precisely alike, neither do all minds run in the same direction. But while this is so, there may be unity in diversity. . . . So it is in the design of God. He has a purpose in placing us where we must learn to live as individuals."⁷

How sad that even with all this counsel and Bible affirmation that we are "fearfully and wonderfully made" that so many churches today are still arguing and/or splitting up over styles of worship alone. Instead, picture a church in which the Sabbath morning worship programming seeks to honor each learning style, in which people can praise God together in their own way and feel good about it.

The real question is Haven't we matured enough in the Christian walk and in the gospel of Jesus Christ to allow differences of taste and worship styles within our own sanctuaries? Do we really want people leaving over music? over drama? over stylistic (non-doctrinal) change?

Instead, wise pastors will surround themselves with a variety of learning styles. Mature Christians will worship in congregations in which not everyone "thinks like I do." Committed members will *learn* to honor and fully appreciate one another as a unique creation of God: the imaginatives, the analytics, the commonsense types, and the dynamics. All are gifted; all are needed.

"When we decide we want to value differences," writes educator Pat Burke Guild, "we will make decisions that expand diversity rather than seek uniformity and inappropriate conformity."⁸

In conclusion, I am reminded of the story of the sun-weathered old man who had attended an all-day Christian seminar on learning styles. At the end of the final meeting he remained seated until everyone else had left. Then he stood up, walked angrily up to the facilitator, and with tears in his eyes, said, "Teacher! Iffen

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somebody'd a-tol' me when I was a kid that God made my mind right, I'd a-done something for my Jesus."⁹ ■

¹ Marlene LeFever, *Learning Styles: Reaching Everyone God Gave You to Teach* (Colorado Springs, Colo.: David C. Cook, Pub. Co., 1995), p. 181.

² *Ibid.*, p. 178.

³ George Barna, *The Frog in the Kettle* (Ventura, Calif.: Regal Books, 1990).

⁴ Bernice McCarthy, *About Learning* (Barrington, Ill.: Excel, Inc., 1996).

⁵ Ellen White, *Education*, p. 231.

⁶ ———, *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 402.

⁷ ———, in *Review and Herald*, July 4, 1899.

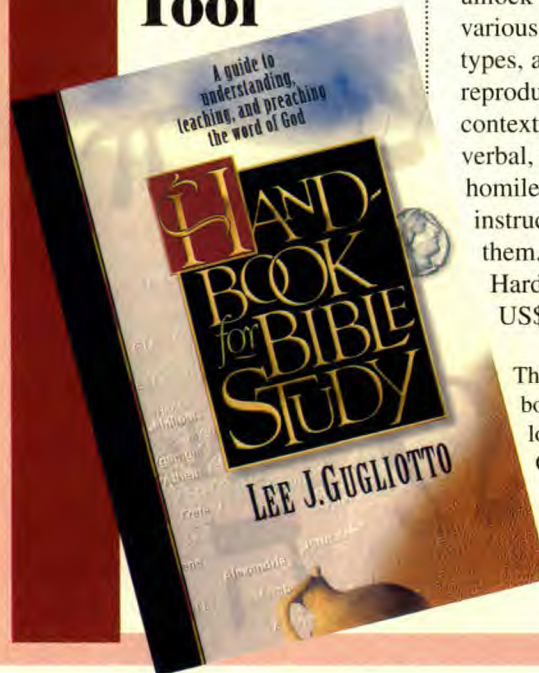
⁸ Pat Burke Guild and Stephen Garger, *Marching to Different Drummers* (Alexandria, Va.: ASCD, 1985).

⁹ LeFever, p. 1.

W. Eugene Brewer, Ph.D., is Florida Conference education superintendent. He frequently gives seminars about learning styles.



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History Lessons

Learning From Old Testament Worship

BY ANDY NASH

We need not all worship alike, but we all need to understand what worship is.

Though not a seminarian, I took several seminary classes at Andrews University. (My seminarian friends would steer me toward the "good ones"—a very pastoral thing to do.) One of my favorite classes was "Salvation: New Testament," taught by Jon Paulien.

What surprised me most about "Salvation: New Testament" was how little time we spent in the New Testament. Instead, Paulien guided us through the Old Testament, showing how almost everything pre-cross functioned as a model for most everything post-cross.

Timeless principles for worship, for example, can be found in Deuteronomy 26:3-11, where the Israelites are urged to retell how God delivered them "with a mighty hand and an outstretched arm" (verse 8, NIV).

The Old Testament life of faith and worship, said Paulien, could be boiled down to one thing: recounting the mighty acts of God.

For the Israelites, of course, the "mighty act of God" was

their exodus from Egypt. And when they recounted *that* exodus, they experienced *new* exoduses. In 2 Chronicles 20:1-23, for example, King Jehoshaphat opposes a "vast army" with a rather unorthodox strategy. First, he recounts the "power and might" with which God gave Canaan to the Israelites. Then he appoints "men to sing to the Lord and to praise him for the splendor of his holiness" (verse 21, NIV). The result? "As they began to sing and praise, the Lord set ambushes against the men of Ammon and Moab and Mount Seir who were invading Judah, and they were defeated" (verse 22, NIV).

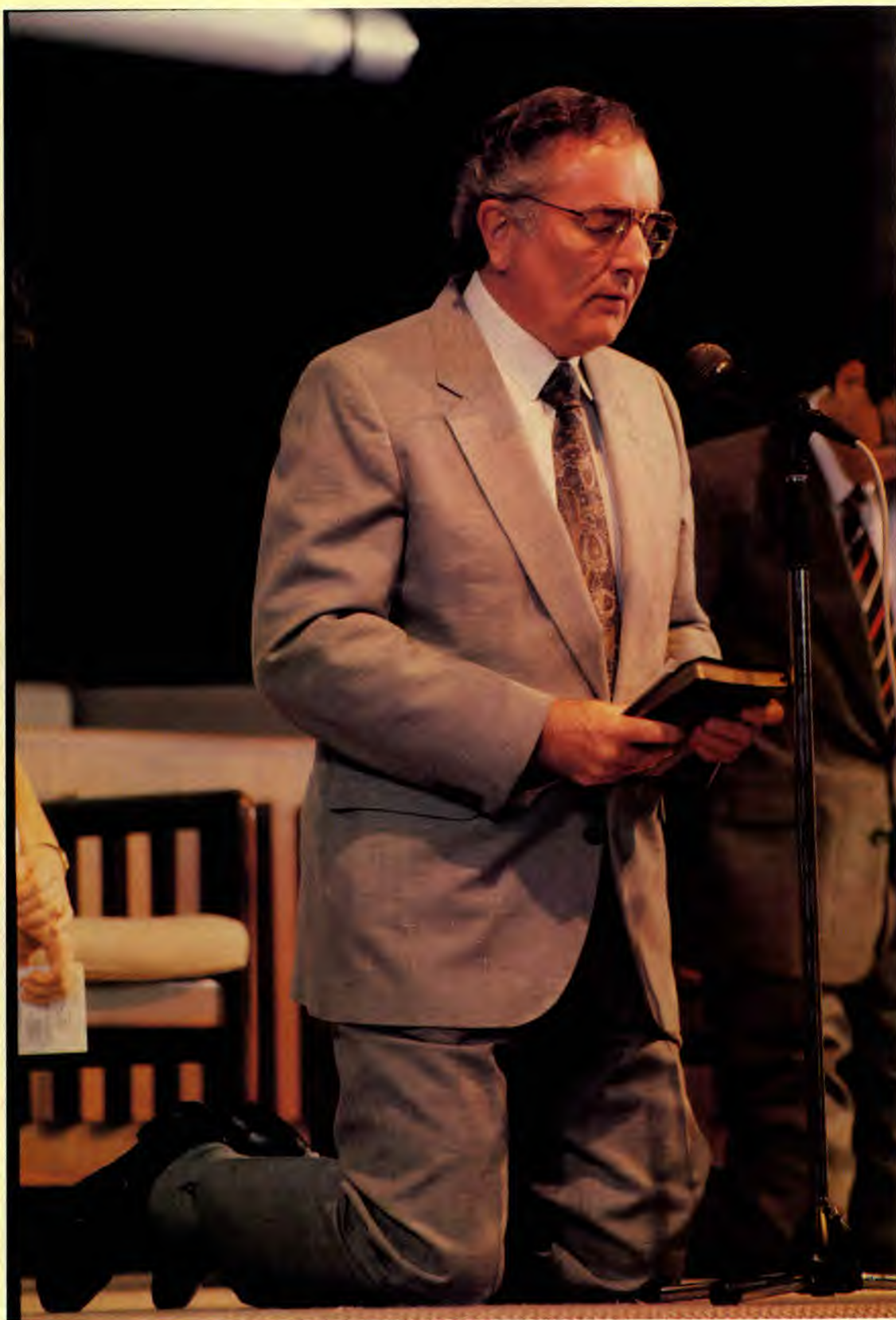
"Recounting the mighty acts of God," said Paulien, "brings the power of the original act."

Our worship, in its many wonderful forms, should be no different—except that we recount a different exodus, an exodus from sin through Jesus' death and resurrection. Telling what Jesus *did* for us—as Paul does in 1 Corinthians 15—means trusting what He'll *do* for us.

That's what true worship was and is. That's what it will always be: praising God for His saving power and experiencing that power again and again and again.

Andy Nash is an Adventist Review assistant editor.





WES TOLHURST

Paradigms of Worship

The secret is to get vertical.

BY CAROL PAWLUK

I GLANCED AROUND FOR familiar faces. Several rows ahead was Cathy, chatting enthusiastically as usual; to my left was Don, pulling his pencil and notebook out to get himself through the boring parts; in front of him was Professor Foster, head bowed in quiet meditation. All was normal.

We all come to church with a preconceived paradigm of how worship influences our sense of fulfillment or frustration. While this concept varies from person to person, here are three common paradigms of worship.

Paradigm 1

Probably the most typical paradigm is best depicted as a "program" style. We see the congregation as the *audience*, the pastor and others on the platform as the *performers*, and God as a bystander. This is not dissimilar to spectator sports. The audience sits back as critics of the performance. A good performance is rewarded with plentiful "amens," while a mediocre performance is ignored—people feeling free to chat, doodle, do crossword puzzles, or sleep. Attendance is based on a review of the billing. If a popular speaker is to perform or if something sounds unusually entertaining, you go. If it sounds boring, you either ditch or attend another church with a better billing.

While the pitfalls of this paradigm seem obvious, this is the typical mindset of not only the laity, but often the ministers as well. Special music is "performed"; the congregation is often called the "audience." Recently I heard a pastor refer to the platform as the "stage" and invited us to next week's "program." The sermons in this scenario are most often used for indoctrination or "edutainment." Considerable time may be spent coming up with something creative in hopes of drawing a larger crowd.

In this paradigm the success of worship rests largely upon the pastoral staff. If the sermon is passionate, the singing rousing, and the prayers eloquent, the congregation will agree that they have "worshiped." Often a large portion of time is dedicated to the social aspect of worship, and much lip service is given to issues that are social or political in scope. The focus is expectantly horizontal—person to person—as we "worship together."

Paradigm 2

This paradigm represents a shift in the model. The attitudes of leaders and laity are changed. The congregation are now the *performers*, God is the *audience*, and people up front are the *servants* or *facilitators*. People are at church to praise, glorify, and honor

God as He watches, accepts, and forgives. Worshipers acknowledge His superiority and majesty by giving gifts of thankfulness and praise.

We see examples of this in ancient Israel when the people brought their firstfruits and offerings of sacrifice to God, and in Eastern religions where people leave offerings of food to appease their gods. While the latter has negative connotations, the idea is certainly biblical. "Let all the neighboring lands bring gifts to the One to be feared," reads Psalm 76:11 (NIV). Leviticus is specific in its rules for presenting all sorts of offerings. The concept of bringing offerings and sacrifices to God, and of God accepting or rejecting them, is as old as the story of Cain and Abel.

In this situation the whole congregation is involved in the worshiping. They bring their gifts through song and words and praise. They offer only their best. The songs are carefully chosen, and worshipers are mindful that they sing to God. The spoken words, though not always eloquent by worldly standards, are simple and sincere. The worshipers are aware that they are unworthy to be in the presence of One so mighty and great, so words are few and reverently chosen.

Paradigm 3

This last paradigm is similar to the



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second, but reverses the roles. God is the *performer*, the congregation is the *audience*, and again, the people up front are the *servants* or *facilitators*. In this scenario the worshipers have come to “catch a glimpse of God”—to be reminded who God is. They expect to “see” God—through His Word, through His daily gifts, through His wondrous works and miracles. God speaks both audibly (through the spoken word) and inaudibly (through the Holy Spirit).

God is the invisible but permeating force. It is He whom they have come to see, to hear, to experience. The worship is full of His words, His deeds, His thoughts. The focus is on God, not the people up front.

The God/Human Encounter

Both paradigms 2 and 3 happen during a meaningful worship service. Both represent a vertical focus, not a horizontal one. Both center on a God/human encounter, not on a social/spiritual experience. It's the difference between a church and a spiritual club, between worshiping and talking about worship.

As the worshipers come into the presence of the Most High, they are humbled, awed, and inspired. A transformation occurs. Pride transforms into humility, concerns become insignificant, the selfish become selfless. In response, they want to offer to God all that they are, all that they have. Their best, though feeble, is presented, counting on the sufficiency of God's grace.

In the God/human encounter, social aspects—petty differences, diversity, individuality, prestige, hurts—are made trivial. The “things of earth will grow strangely dim in the light of His glory and grace.”

Biblical examples of mortals meeting with the Immortal are indicative of a typical response. Isaiah exclaimed, “Woe to me!” I cried. “I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips, and I live among a people of unclean lips, and my eyes have seen the King, the Lord Almighty” (Isa. 6:5, NIV). At the Transfiguration the disciples,

responding to a glimpse of God, "fell face down to the ground, terrified" (Matt. 17:6, NIV). David wrote: "In the council of the holy ones God is greatly feared; he is more awesome than all who surround him" (Ps. 89:7, NIV). And Habakkuk counseled: "The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him" (Hab. 2:20, NIV).

Worship services in which God meets humans will reflect this kind of awe and humility.

What's Left?

What, then, do the pastors and elders do to facilitate such a worship service? If it is God's responsibility to reach out to the worshiper, and the worshiper's responsibility to respond,

what is left for the worship leader?

Certainly much time and prayer are involved in the planning of the service.

Both paradigms 2 and 3 happen during a meaningful worship service.

Many people find it helpful if a certain theme or concept runs throughout the service. When we lead worship, we must be careful not to get in the way of worship, but instead to depend on God to be there doing His part.

Scriptures, thoughtfully chosen and simply presented, contain a power vital to the worship experience. Music should be quality and involve the best efforts of our sincere praise. Prayers should reflect the needs and thankful-

ness of the congregation and not become a chance to impress the audience with eloquence or cleverness.

How do we *truly* worship a God infinitely greater than we can imagine? We will probably not know until we see Him in His majesty as King of kings and Lord of lords. But in the meantime we

can "ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name. Bring an offering and come before him; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness" (1 Chron. 16:29, NIV). ■

Carol Pawluk is a wife, mother, and music teacher in College Place, Washington.



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I'm Not Going to Have Worship Anymore

BY MICHELLE NASH

I'M A SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST ACADEMY teacher, but in my classroom I'm not going to have worship anymore.

I might tell an inspirational story. A Bible text might appear on my blackboard, and sometimes you'll see my class in prayer. Often I'll ask how the lesson we're studying can be applied to a Christian's life.

But I'm not going to have worship. Not anymore.

Because *worship*, in its truest sense, is not a noun. It is not something you can "have"—like breakfast or an idea or fun. Worship is a verb. And the fact is that rarely (if ever) in my 25-plus years of teaching have I—let alone my students—actually worshiped during that time I used to call "worship."

Johnny made that point perfectly clear. I will never forget telling my ninth-grade English class to sit down and be quiet so we could have worship. Johnny glared at me and said, "I'm so sick of worship. Every morning and night in my house. Every class. I don't care if I ever hear that word again." The class became very quiet. Finally I looked the other way . . . and began worship. It wasn't a meaningful worship. Johnny knew it, and the class knew it. And I knew it.

In fact, it hadn't ever been worship. Because worship is an intimate act of showing love and devotion and awe to a mighty God and Saviour—and that doesn't happen just because someone says it's going to. Who can blame Johnny for having to pretend that something incredible is happening when it isn't?

A teacher who says that the class is now "going to have

worship" is actually teaching young people that worship is reading out of a book or saying a short prayer—a prelude perhaps to something more important. Something to check off in a lesson plan. Who ever asks "Did anyone really worship in this experience?"

Learning to Really Worship

About two years ago, in a church leadership seminar, I accidentally experienced true worship. I did not attend the meeting that morning with the plan of worshipping, and initially my attitude was that I did not pay a fee to have church! So I was rather provoked when the seminar leader said, "Put down your folders. Put away your pens and pencils and paper. Folks, we need to stop for a while and worship. Let's focus on God this morning—His goodness, His love, His mercy. Forget about how you are going to use the material you've learned when you get home. Forget about your jobs, your churches, your ministries. I am sensing that we need some quiet time together. Please just sit back and let the Holy Spirit come into this room, and for a few hours this morning let's worship together."

I looked around at the people in my group, and several looked uncomfortably at me. Reluctantly and suspiciously, I put down my notebook, syllabus, highlighter, pen, purse, and mental agenda. I forgot about my job, my bank balance, my children, and my personal concerns. And as I sang and heard a message about Jesus, and as I saw several friends and some strangers weeping, I felt the Holy Spirit. My heart was broken as I was taken before the throne of God. And in a quiet and noncharismatic arena of meditation and prayer, I

worshiped.

It wasn't Sabbath, and I was in jeans. But I can vividly remember that worship experience as though it were yesterday, and I would give anything to be in that same atmosphere of worship more often. Today I crave it. And I won't settle for anything less in my future worship experiences.

The truth is, interestingly, that in most churches worship needs to be taught. Most Christians just don't know how. I have attended churches all my life and have heard wonderful sermons and music; members have greeted me with love and kindness. But rarely can I say that in a church service I worshiped.*

I had to learn. That particular worship leader took the people before him into God's presence. He disarmed our self-righteous exteriors, allowed us the privilege of being vulnerable before God, and then led us in worship. But first *he* began to worship God. I sensed that he was genuinely praising and loving God. And partly because I couldn't help it, and partly because it felt so right, I worshiped too. God was there . . . and we were all moved by His presence. I remember wishing that it would never end.

Later we learned that in several rooms nearby people prayed and interceded that the Spirit might bless, that demons would not ruin the experience.

Though that worship service was somewhat spontaneous and very genuine, it was also quite carefully planned. All the music and scriptures



love (or mercy or power or whatever the theme is)."

And outside of church we parents and teachers might do well to avoid saying "Let's have worship" and instead say something like "I want to read something to you that I found very special." Or

and dialogue followed one theme: the goodness of God. It makes such sense that corporate worship needs a careful plan so that the worship itself can be uninterrupted and deeply meaningful.

Squeezing Worship Into the Worship Hour

Sometimes, of course, the design of the church service itself sabotages any chance for real worship. For example, have you ever been in a church in which service formalities crowd out any possible time for Bible study or worship? I'm talking announcements, offerings, taking out hymnals, putting away hymnals, standing-sitting-standing-sitting, voting, shaking hands, telling children's stories, taking children's offerings, making social promotions, leading doxologies, introducing, and so on. These things are fine in themselves, but too many of them threaten the worship experience.

How nice it would be to hear someone say, "Stop! Put away your bulletins, your wallets, your notes, your snacks, your nail files, your pencils, your songbooks, your waves and smiles and glad-handing. Because now we are going to worship. Think about the love of God while we sing these songs about His

"Let's talk together and pray to God." Or "In today's newspaper I found an item that I think showed a miracle of God, and I want to see what you think."

The very intimate act of worship cannot be ordered or assigned or demanded or scheduled. But when one experiences true worship, that person has touched heaven and, being changed, will seek it restlessly and crave it and share it and rejoice in it again and again. For God invites us to worship Him, not to "have" worship. It's an act, not an event; it is something to do, not a thing to own. There's a difference, and the difference is life-changing. ■

* The church I now attend (Forest Lake Seventh-day Adventist Church in Apopka, Florida) carefully plans its services with a worshipful atmosphere being of high priority. Themes, music, lighting, service order—all contribute to a congregation's ability to worship God in study, meditation, praise, and intimacy.

Michelle Nash teaches English at Forest Lake Academy in Apopka, Florida.





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ADVENTIST Review

READINGS FOR THE WEEK OF PRAYER

In Full Assurance

Practical approaches to
joyful Christian living

What Assurance!

A Message From the Officers of the General Conference

He was a failure as a Christian. He had known Christ, worked with Christ, performed miracles in Christ's name. But now he was a failure.

He hadn't expected it to be this way. "I'm your friend. I'll be there for you no matter what. I'll give my life for you," he had said with a touch of the dramatic.

Jesus had warned him. "I tell you the truth," Jesus answered, 'today—yes, tonight—before the rooster crows twice you yourself will disown me three times'" (Mark 14:30, NIV).

Even then Peter insisted emphatically, "Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you" (verse 31, NIV). And he meant it.

But he failed as a Christian. He didn't just embarrass the church. He didn't just break the rules. *He denied that he even knew Jesus.*

Peter knew that he had failed. Like Judas, he went out, away from Christ. But instead of hanging himself, he went out and wept bitterly, repenting. And trusting. Trusting that Jesus' love reached even a disgraceful failure, an unworthy sinner.

And he let Jesus change him. He didn't presume upon the grace of his Lord. He didn't make excuses for his miserable failure. No, he acknowledged his wrongdoing, he repented of his sins, and accepted not only Jesus' forgiveness but His cleansing as well.

But he couldn't have changed if he hadn't believed that Jesus still loved and accepted him. He knew this because he saw Jesus' eyes. Eyes of pain, eyes of disappointment, but most of all, eyes of forgiveness.

So he knew that Jesus would accept him again.

That there would be a place for him in the kingdom. That through Jesus he was redeemed, restored, renewed, ransomed, adopted into the heavenly family, invited to sit at Jesus' right hand. That when God looked at him, He saw not a miserable failure cowering in preparation for his punishment, but the triumphant Christ, resurrected, ascending, returning, reigning. Not because Peter *deserved* such treatment. But because Jesus loved to give it.

I'm a failure too. I've not cursed out my denial of knowing Jesus. But I've denied Him by my actions, my attitudes, my negligences, my treatment of "the least of these my brethren." Can I trust Him too? Or must I find some way to *prove* my worthiness before I enter His presence?

Do I dare to trust His love, accept His promise, believe the witness of His Spirit, and worship at Calvary?

Yes, oh, yes! I can trust Him, for His wounded hands have touched my sorrowing brow, and His parched lips have whispered, "Father, forgive him." His promise is true. His word is sure. And it is for me.

This week may we give up on ourselves and learn to trust Him wholly. Accept the gift. Here it is. It is called **Assurance in Christ**.



Philip Follett is a general vice president of the General Conference.



Philip Follett

The Joy of Salvation

ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

The emotion that bubbles in the heart of every Christian

I opened the door to my dormitory room at Andrews University, returning from a summer working at home. My roommate, Bob, sitting at the desk, turned to look my way, smiling from ear to ear. Then he blurted out, "She said yes!" His face said all the rest. When he had asked her "Will you marry me?" Marilyn's answer was yes. Before the sun went down that day at Andrews University, all the students knew Bob was engaged to be married. It was written all over his face.

As with Bob, the Lord wants His people to live not only a joyful, victorious life but also an abundant life radiant with joy and happiness. This truth appears as the Bible writers use words in transmitting

God's message. For example, when we look at the use of certain key words in the Gospels we find words for joy used 26 times in only those four books. Clearly God wants us to enjoy our walk with Him.

Why is that important? As His followers we want to talk about the things He talked about. Of course Jesus spoke of such things as sin, judgment, and sorrow, for they are part of life. But the *emphasis* from His lips and those of the apostles was *joy*. And this is the emphasis that should be ours as well.

Today there is a strange reluctance on the part of some Christians to connect the ideas of holiness and happiness in one package. For some reason

they feel that a dedicated Christian must be somber and serious at all times. Happiness seems something alien, in someway tainted by a spirit contrary to real love for God. From this viewpoint joy and Jesus do not belong in the same breath, and somehow to put them together compromises proper reverence for God.

But such ideas come from somewhere outside the Bible. Listen to these statements from the Word. "I will . . . make them joyful in My house of prayer" (Isa. 56:7, NKJV). And we read, "Let all those that put their trust in thee rejoice: let them ever shout for joy" (Ps. 5:11). Again the psalmist sings, "Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you?" (Ps. 85:6,

NIV). What attitude among Christians best reflects the life and ministry of Jesus? The Gospels tell us that even children came gladly to the Saviour, and that tells us a great deal about the atmosphere that surrounded His sunny face.

But was not our Lord a "man of sorrows and acquainted with grief"? Of course He was. There is in every Christian's life a part where our hearts are broken by the things that break the heart of God. Every Christian knows the agony of heart-wrenching guilt and the toll of tragedy. There comes to each of us a time to weep. Every Christian knows sadness as they watch people they love make destructive choices. But friendship with Jesus opens up the setting for a joyful journey, even when we walk a path littered with sorrows.

*At the cross
God stamps
"Forgiven" across
the stained pages
of our records.*



In His most famous sermon, which we call the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus talked about the formula for joy. Repeatedly He introduced His truths with "Happy are those who," then proceeded to describe how to find true joy. Here He was drawing from words of praise found often in the Hebrew Scriptures, where the expression is a powerful one that carries the idea "O the happinesses of . . ." From that powerful sermon it is clear that Jesus wants His people to seek and to find radiant joy in serving Him.

How can a judgment-bound generation live filled with joy? We find the answer in Psalm 98:4-9: "Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth, burst into jubilant song with music; make music to the Lord with the harp, with the harp and the sound of singing, with trumpets and the blast of the ram's horn—shout for joy before the Lord, the King. Let the sea resound, and everything in it, the world, and all who live in it. Let the rivers clap their hands, let the mountains sing together for joy; let them sing before the Lord." And why such jubilation? The verse continues: "For he comes to judge the earth. He will judge the world in righteousness and the peoples with equity" (NIV).

All the earth, even nature, is urged to shout for joy, because the Lord "comes to judge the earth"! But why should the coming judgment cause us to shout for joy? Because God's judgment means vindication, the lifting of charges against us. It means no more injustice, no more inequity. It means that God Himself stands vindicated throughout His universe. It means the reign of sin is ended. It

means harmony is restored between the Creator and all His creation. It means no more sorrow, death, sadness, and tears. If we cannot be joyful in the face of judgment, it can only mean that we do not see the Judge as our friend.

God's people—His church—should radiate a sense of inner spiritual joy to everyone they meet. Our faces should shout to our friends, neighbors, and co-workers, "I have absolute joy in my life because I trust and walk personally with my Lord." That kind of joy attracts people—men and women, boys and girls, teenagers, grandmothers and grandfathers, everyone—to our Lord.

For some people life and the church appear like fortresses to be protected from outside evils. While Christians do indeed exercise wise care, the biblical picture paints a people not so much bent on protecting as attracting. The fortress mentality is a defeat, not a victory. Jesus wants those who look at His people to see believers conspicuous by the radiant, irrepressible sense of joy that glows in them. That comes not from living in an ideal environment, but from an inner walk with God that rides above the harsh realities of everyday life.

The Scriptures speak of the experience of the people of Israel: "Then our mouth was filled with laughter, and our tongue with shouts of joy; then it was said among the nations, 'The Lord has done great things for them.' The Lord has done great things for us, and we rejoiced" (Ps. 126:2, 3, NRSV). Such joy can never be something we create; rather, it flows from recognizing what God is doing for us.

Can it be that we have painted the Father's face with such somber tones

that to many He seems no longer attractive? Have we been slow to acknowledge that the most conspicuous outward characteristic of the reborn Christian is joy? If this is the case, then we must change it. What is needed is not levity or any kind of superficial silliness. Real Christian worship is not telling jokes in church, for that is irreverence. But the Christian experience is a deep, irreplaceable joy that makes us attractive and brings a radiance to our countenances that cannot be dimmed by circumstances.

What is the source of this kind of joy? Several verses in Nehemiah 8 tell a story not frequently read. Israel was just at the point of turning from apostasy back to the service of God. Revival was in the air as they heard again the Word of God. "So they read in the book in the law of God distinctly, and gave the sense, and caused them to understand the reading. And Nehemiah, which is the Tirshatha, and Ezra the priest the scribe, and the Levites that taught the people, said unto all the people, This day is holy unto the Lord your God; mourn not, nor weep. For all the people wept, when they heard the words of the law. Then he said unto them, Go your way, eat the fat, and drink the sweet, and send portions unto them for whom nothing is prepared: for this day is holy unto our Lord: neither be ye sorry; for the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh. 8:8-10). The next verses tell us how the people rejoiced with great joy because they had heard the words of the Lord and understood that God accepted them.



All too often we are led to believe that it is circumstances that control us, bringing joy or sadness. But real joy flows from an intimate walk with our God. Our circumstances may change, bringing new factors into our lives, but nobody can take from us the ultimate satisfaction of knowing that we are beloved by the God who cares. Jesus came that we might have life and have it more abundantly. The evidence is seen in the joy it produces in His followers. Ellen White observed, "To honor Christ, to become like Him, to work for Him, is the life's highest ambition and its greatest joy" (*Education*, p. 297).

Paradoxically for the Christian, joy begins at the cross, at the scene of the most heinous crime in history. Can this become the birthplace of ultimate joy? Only a sovereign God could transform such an event of agony into the most significant event of all time. But for the Christian who has been touched by its healing power, we know it is true, for here we were set free.

The reason the cross brings joy is that from that point we are no longer condemned to slavery. The one honest, universal trait we bring to the cross is our guilt. That guilt hangs upon us as a burden, whispering into our ears during the night, shouting condemnation of our deeds and motives that we cannot deny, playing painful reruns across the screen of our minds. We stagger through life crippled by guilt, and the devil brings charges against us that are all too accurate. But the cross changes all that, for there God rewrites our history. At the cross He stamps

"Forgiven" across the stained pages of our records. It is more than drawing a line through the entry in some celestial journal. By means of a judicial act that we never shall fully understand, He makes it possible for us to stand before the universe as though we had never sinned! We call it grace—amazing grace. An old song says it best:

"At the cross, at the cross
where I first saw the light,
And the burden of my heart rolled
away,
It was there by faith I received my
sight,
And now I am happy all the day!"

Because of God's grace we can be happy—we can be joyful—every day.

Do you need to experience that kind of spiritual joy today? For the first time in your life you may want to give your life to Jesus, to ask that His sacrifice on Calvary be credited to your account. Or you may sense that you need a renewing touch of His forgiveness. If you are in either of these groups, I invite you right now to ask Him to roll away the burdens from your heart and give you the joy that comes from knowing total and complete forgiveness.

As we bask in the reality of sins forgiven and peace with God, we cry out, "Lord, change us from what we are by nature!" And He does just that. Not only does He pull up the weed; He promises to kill the root. Here is one of the most encouraging statements ever penned by the Lord's messenger, one that captures the heart and will not let go. We find it in *The Desire of Ages*, page 668:

"If we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so

blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. . . . When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us."

The great conflict between good and evil has sufficiently run its course, and soon God will step in to restore all the damage done by sin. For millennia God's people have looked forward to Christ's return, and next to Calvary it is the one dominant agenda in the courts of heaven. Jesus promises to take us home, not as friends alone, but as sons and daughters, heirs of the kingdom (Rom. 8:17). We have the privilege of experiencing the joy of salvation today, with its coming fulfillment in the kingdom of glory soon. It is true. We are totally dependent on the saving grace of our Lord, but we praise God that everything has been provided. The banquet is set, and we are soon to sit about the table of the Lord in eternity. True joy is contagious. Let's start an epidemic, radiating every day the joy that comes from our personal walk with our Lord. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. How can a correct understanding of the biblical concept of judgment bring joy to the Christian? And why do we not always face the prospect of judgment in an attitude of joy?
2. How can you reconcile the idea of a judgment-hour message with joy? How is it possible to convey to sinners the solemnity of the judgment in an attitude of joy?
3. What important idea do you take away from this reading that will enhance your future walk with God?

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.



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The Assurance of Salvation

Finding our anchorage in "the sure word of prophecy"

In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe" (Heb. 1:1, 2).*

The Bible is full of instances of God's attempts to communicate with us for the sake of our eternal salvation. Those attempts did not always have the desired effect, however, making it necessary to modify His method of communication (though not the content) again and again in order to reach us. Our opening text describes that process perfectly.

The important point is that after centuries of such communication, God effected the ultimate communication, the revelation through His Son.

But we cannot neglect God's attempt to reach us through the centuries, the record of which is contained in the Scriptures. If we are looking for assurance of salvation in Christ, we must start with the history of His fulfilled word. This, in fact, becomes the principal means by which we come to know Jesus and find assurance in Him. When we see that God has been faithful in the past, we can have the assurance today that whatever He promises, He will fulfill. And that includes His promise to save us, quite apart from our own feelings on the matter.

In this context, the words of 2 Peter 1:19 take on new significance: "And we have the word of the prophets made more certain," the text says, "and you will do well to pay attention to it, as to a light shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts."

When we link Hebrews 1:1, 2 (the passage we used above) with 2 Peter 1:19, it becomes abundantly clear how important God's word has been, how important it is,

and how important it will be for the plan of salvation.

The fact that God has spoken "to our forefathers through the prophets" convinces us that He still speaks to us through that same means today. The certainty of God's words must be indisputable. The prophets lived by it, and they admonish us to do the same.

The whole universe testifies of the power and the certainty of God's Word, thus giving us absolute confidence in His promise of salvation.

So God manifests Himself and His plan for us in at least three ways: (1) through His spoken word, (2) through His written Word, and (3) through His Word made flesh. Each of these manifestations testifies of God's saving grace. They complement each other, exhibiting an increasing intensity as humankind became more and more stubborn in its rejection of God's grace. That intensity reached its climax in Jesus Christ.

Let's look now at each of these revelations in turn.

First, the spoken word

By the spoken word we were assured of God's power, God's will to save, and His ability to carry out the plan of salvation. The power of His spoken word made it clear that there is nothing too hard for Him to do. God stands by His word. He cannot do otherwise. So that we today can possess "the hope of eternal life, which God, who does not lie, promised before the beginning of time" (Titus 1:2).

So before the written Word as we know it today, there was God's spoken word, so powerful that it needed no other confirmation. "Because God wanted to make the unchanging nature of his purpose very clear to the heirs of what was promised, he confirmed it with an oath" (Heb. 6:17). Oaths are taken by invoking the name of a person or thing higher than the one pronouncing it. But in the case of God, there was none higher.

It was this powerful (spoken) word that created the universe and all it contains. "By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm" (Ps. 33:6-9). "Let them praise the name of the Lord, for he commanded and they were created" (Ps. 148:5).

Skeptics cannot do away with the reality of the power of God's word. If humans can convert matter into energy through the process of nuclear reaction, why should it be thought impossible for God to do the reverse by creating matter through the energy of His word?

The whole universe testifies of the power and the certainty of God's word, thus giving us absolute confidence in His promise of salvation. The power of His spoken word is our guarantee of His promise in respect to our salvation.

Second, the written Word

From Genesis to Revelation the prevailing theme is that God wants to save humanity. The purpose of the written Word is for the benefit of posterity, to ensure that we who come afterward have access to the same word spoken long ago. The same arguments used to accept the spoken word can be used for the acceptance of the written Word. However, all arguments against and doubts about the certainty of salvation are lost when the written Word is read and understood.

God has been very clear in His communication. So much so that it is impossible for the honest seeking heart to misunderstand. When God communicates, whether verbally or in writing, it is as if an echo remains in our minds from His utterance. The psalmist expresses it in Psalm 62:11, 12 as follows: "God hath spoken once; twice have I heard this; that power belongeth unto God. Also unto thee, O Lord, belongeth mercy: for thou renderest to every man according to his work" (KJV).

The beauty of that passage is that there remains no doubt in the mind of

those who understand God's words. For those words, even if spoken just once, continue ringing in the ear, leading the hearer into an ever-increasing understanding of them, especially in the matter of God's mercy and love. Yes, "God hath spoken once," but we keep hearing the words again and again.

God's written Word and spoken word form the basis of our assurance of His saving grace. "The Lord is gracious and compassionate," the psalmist writes, "slow to anger and rich in love. The Lord is good to all; he has compassion on all he has made" (Ps. 145:8, 9). As one reads such words, one can only praise God for His grace and mercy, and at the same time feel fully assured of salvation in Him. We know that it is "because of the Lord's great love [that] we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail" (Lam. 3:22). The reading of His Word gives us assurance and helps us to believe that everything has been done for our salvation.

Third, the living Word

When all was said and written, God yet wanted to give the most vivid example of what it all meant. So He gave us Jesus, the ultimate divine revelation. The "Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us" (John 1:14). Again, it was to confirm to us His great intention of salvation.

The incarnation of Jesus is also part of this "sure word." He was promised prophetically, He was spoken about, and now He was manifested, a manifestation said to be made perfect forever.

Some understand that last clause to mean that after Jesus came, in addition to, and in fulfillment of, the word spoken and written, that there is nothing more to say. In other words, Jesus became the perfect manifestation of God's expressed will to save to the uttermost. "For the law appoints as high priests men who are weak; but the oath, which came after the law, appointed the Son, who has been made perfect forever" (Heb. 7:28).

The whole purpose of the word is to present Christ and make Him part of our lives in the process of salvation. Christ's total involvement in our salvation comes through clearly when we understand the meaning of John's statement that "the Word became flesh" (John 1:14). That Word was present "in the beginning," "was with God," and "was God. Through him all things were made. . . . In him was life, and that life was the light of men" (verses 1-4).

Jesus, then, is the ultimate manifestation of God's sure word of prophecy. If nothing else, this alone should give us full assurance in His promise of saving grace. "The grass withers," says the prophet Isaiah, "and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever" (Isa. 40:8).

We can believe, because God said it. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. If we have Jesus, why do we still need the written Word? Isn't Jesus enough?
2. The book of Hebrews refers to the revelation in Jesus as perfect. And the present writer interprets this to mean that the last word has been spoken and there is nothing more to say. Why then do Adventists, in particular, advocate that God has again spoken in our times through the gift of prophecy? How do you reconcile these concepts?
3. What would you say is the whole purpose of divine revelation?

* Unless noted otherwise, Scripture references in the article are from the New International Version.

Israel Leito is president of the Inter-American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Coral Gables, Florida.



The Assurance of God's Word

I remember the day I saw a Bible for the first time.

I was 14 years of age when I had my first encounter with the Word of God.

I had never seen a Bible before! I still remember the joy and enthusiasm my mother and I felt when that beautiful book was placed in our home. There was immediately a love relationship with the Word of God and with its Author. It was such a joy to read it, to investigate it, to research it, to study it. I would spend hours on Sabbath afternoons reviewing the beautiful stories and the messages and promises of assurance that nurtured my new faith.

I can relate to Jeremiah when he says: "When your words came, I ate them; they were my joy and my heart's delight, for I bear your name, O Lord God Almighty" (Jer. 15:16, NIV).

Christians Need to Look for the Word

Some versions of the Bible bring out the thought that the Word of God, like hidden treasures, must be *found*. One can find the precious gems of the Word only by digging deep. A casual look at a place where there are amethysts will not show the precious gems. One has to dig for the crystals. We may have many Bibles in our homes and libraries, but they will never bring us joy until we open and diligently study them.

Ellen G. White says that we "should study the words of God for ourselves" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 89). If we want to "become acquainted with the Saviour," she says, then we should "study the Holy Scriptures. Fill the whole heart with the words of God. They are the living water, quenching your burning thirst. They are the living bread from heaven" (*ibid.*, p. 88).

Is it possible that, like the desert, we are dry and arid because we have not taken time to study the Scriptures? Is it possible that we don't know the Saviour as we should because we have not read His book? Is it possible that we

are starving to death because we have not taken from the Bread of Life? Is it possible that we accept all sorts of theories and interpretations because we did not dig the Word for ourselves?

The study of God's Word is the sine qua non of the Christian life. That study must be done with prayer and reflection. As a matter of fact, Ellen White says: "Never should the Bible be studied without prayer" (*ibid.*, p. 91). The Lord is the author, and we must communicate with

Him so that through His Spirit He can communicate with us, make flow the precious promises, and give us the assurance we need to face life knowing that He is by our side.

Here is the testimony of blind Helen Keller, one of the best-known Christians of our time. After the American Bible Society had sent her a copy of the new braille Bible in 20 volumes, she said: "I sat beside them, caressing them with loving pride. For forty years I have loved the Word of God. I feel the blessed pages under my hand with

special thankfulness as a rod and a staff to keep firm my steps through the valley of the shadow of depression and world calamity. Truly the Bible—the teaching of our Saviour—is the only way out of the dark" (quoted in W. B. Knight, *3,000 Illustrations*, p. 40).

Christians Need to Feed on the Word

It is so sad to see people starving to death. Quite often we watch on our television screens or read in the newspapers reports of physical famine and starvation. However, the greatest tragedy of the world is spiritual famine. Hosea wrote: "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge" (Hosea 4:6).

It seems like a paradox. With the abundance of food and waste in many of the developing nations, people should not be starving anywhere. All we need to do is to take this food



to those who lack. Why is it so hard?

The same thing applies in the spiritual realm. So many people are dying without the knowledge of Jesus Christ, and we have the Bread of Life, Jesus Christ. As Christians we must face the responsibility of sharing this food with a world starving to death spiritually.

A beautiful robin came upon the scene as I was digging in my garden one day. I noticed after a while that he was following me. He did not seem afraid, only delighted that I had provided such an abundance of food for him. I think that as Christians we need to open the Word of God and make it possible for others to feed on it. Like my little robin friend, they will experience joy and happiness.

An important aspect of the study of God's Word is that, like bread, it must be masticated and digested. Thus we should study the Bible with great care, analyzing every text, discussing it with others, and meditating on it, so that it can really transform our lives.

Many of us are acquainted with the most fascinating story of the mutiny on the *Bounty*, that British ship that sailed from England in 1787 to the South Seas on a goodwill mission. After a lengthy stay in Tahiti, the sailors rebelled, putting Captain William Bligh out to sea in a small boat. Miraculously, he survived, got back to England, and then headed an expedition that caught up with 14 of the mutineers.

However, a small group of nine made their way to the island of Pitcairn. Once liquor started being produced on the island, it became a depraved place, with drinking and murder the order of the day. Only one man, Alexander Smith (who later changed his name to John Adams), survived, accompanied by 11 women and 23 children. Then came a miracle. Among the possessions of a dead sailor Adams found a Bible. As he read and studied this marvelous Book and taught it to the women and children, a transformation occurred. Later, when the island was found, it was

discovered that a godly group of people were living there in peace and prosperity.

"In 1876 James White and J. N. Loughborough sent literature to Pitcairn. Ten years later John I. Tay, a Seventh-day Adventist ship's carpenter, spent five weeks on Pitcairn and persuaded the islanders to keep the seventh-day Sabbath. . . . During a three-week stay, E. H. Gates and J. A. Read baptized and organized a church of 82 members and a Sabbath school of 114 members (Dec. 6, 1890)" (*Seventh-day Adventist Encyclopedia* [1996], vol. 11, p. 355). The Word of God had transformed the entire group.

Christians Will Find Joy in the Word

As we look deeper into Jeremiah's experience, we find that even though he was known as the weeping prophet, having passed through so many adverse situations, he found joy when he found and "ate" the Word of God.

Without the companionship of a wife, and rejected by his own people, the prophet found comfort in the Word of God. And so may we. Jesus' wish for His followers is expressed in John 15:11: "That my joy might remain in you, and that your joy might be full."

Oswald Chambers says: "The joy of Jesus was the absolute self-surrender and self-sacrifice of Himself to His Father, the joy of doing that which the Father sent Him to do. . . . The first thing that will hinder this joy is the captious irritation of thinking out circumstances. The cares of this world, said Jesus, will choke God's word" (*My Utmost for His Highest*, p. 244).

The psalmist says: "The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes" (Ps. 19:8, NIV). "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Ps. 119:105, NIV).

And Paul gives us a good reason why we should have the Word in our hearts: "Let the Word of Christ dwell in you richly as you teach and admonish one another with all

wisdom, and as you sing psalms, hymns and spiritual songs with gratitude in your hearts to God" (Col. 3:16, NIV).

John 1:1 suggests once more the source of the Word: "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. He was with God in the beginning" (NIV). The appeal is that we should let the Word live within us. When Christ is part of our lives, there will be a zest for life and endless energy for service to others and for further search of His Word.

Adventist Christians should be the happiest people in the world because they have confidence and trust in the Word of God. Let us look for His Word with perseverance. Let us feed on the Word with gusto. Let us rejoice in the salvation offered to us by Jesus, our Saviour. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. The author of this reading drew a parallel between physical starvation and spiritual starvation. You may want to flesh out these parallels in greater detail. How are the two situations alike? How are they different?

2. We hear about the reaction to the Bible by people such as Helen Keller, individuals in totalitarian countries, and even people such as our author, upon seeing the Bible for the first time. In what ways has its ready availability where you are affected your appreciation for the Bible?

3. Relate an experience in which you found particular strength, courage, or comfort in some portion of the Word of God. What was the scripture that ministered to you?

Leo Ranzolin is a general vice president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.



The Assurance of God's Promises

It flows from every page of the Bible.

The day we brought home a bicycle—a gift that we had promised to our young son—is still vivid in my mind. His wide eyes filled with excitement, and his unbridled grin made us parents swell with emotion. There was nothing we would rather do, no place we would rather be, no greater joy we could imagine, than to be able to endow our boy with this gift. As he climbed onto that bike and rode around, there were tears of joy in my eyes.

It was then that the real meaning of Matthew 7:11 dawned on me. "If ye then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father which is in heaven give good things to them that ask Him."

Usually promises are made out of love and concern of one person toward another. God's promises are an evidence of His love.

The Scriptures are abundant with promises, and some people have made efforts to count them. It is said that John Loughborough, one of our pioneers who preached till his death at 92, read through the Bible at least 70 times. In the flyleaf of one of His Bibles, written in his own handwriting, is this note: "Total of 5,891 promises in the Bible."

Oh, that each of us would search out those promises as did this pioneer!

Every promise of God finds its affirmation in Jesus. In the words of Paul, "all the promises of God in [Christ] are yea, and in him Amen, unto the glory of God" (2 Cor. 1:20).

Let us now, in a few broad strokes, review some of the most important promises of the Word.

1. The Promise of a Saviour

The unconditional love of God has staggered the

minds of people all through history. Through all His promises the Lord says, "I love you." He not only says it; He shows it. He showed His love to our first parents by giving them a second chance after they fell, and in the promise of a Redeemer, the Bible's very first promise: "I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel" (Gen. 3:15, NIV).

The fulfillment of that promise came when a baby was born in Bethlehem thousands of years later. The Saviour came to die for us "while we were yet sinners" (Rom. 5:8).

2. The Promise of Safety

Again and again God has shown His love through His promises. He flung the rainbow across the sky after the Flood as a promise that He would never bring a similar destruction upon the earth again. "The bow shall be seen in the cloud," God said, "and I will remember my covenant" (Gen. 9:14, 15).

The Bible tells of another rainbow as well—a rainbow in heaven. "Behold, a throne was set in heaven, and one sat on the throne . . . and there was a rainbow round about the throne" (Rev. 4:2, 3). "The rainbow of promise encircling the throne on high is an everlasting testimony that 'God so loved the world, that he gave his only-begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life' (John 3:16). It testifies to the universe that God will never forsake His people in their struggle with evil" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 493).

The story is told about a man who dreamed that he was walking with the Lord along the beach. Across the sky flashed scenes from his life. For each scene he noticed two sets of footprints in the sand, one belonging to him and the other to the Lord.

When the last scene of his life flashed before him, he



looked back at the footprints in the sand and noticed that many times along the path of his life there was only one set of footprints. He also noticed that it happened at the very lowest and saddest times of his life.

This really bothered him, and he questioned the Lord about it. "Lord, You said that once I decided to follow You, You'd walk with me all the way. But I have noticed that during the most troublesome times in my life, there is only one set of footprints. I don't understand why when I needed You most You would leave me."

The Lord replied, "My precious, precious child, I love you, and I would never leave you. During your times of trial and suffering, when you saw only one set of footprints, it was then that I carried you."

The words of the song "God Hath Not Promised" tell it all beautifully:

God has not promised us a bed of roses, it says—

"But God hath promised strength for the day,

Rest for the labor, light for the way,
Grace for the trials, help from above,
Unfailing kindness, undying love."

3. The Promise of Forgiveness

One of the most precious promises of God has to do with the forgiveness of sin. "As far as the east is from the west," says the psalmist, "so far has he removed our transgression from us" (Ps. 103:12, NIV). "If we confess our sins," John says, "he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

What assurance! The righteousness of Christ makes the penitent sinner acceptable to God. However sinful have been our lives, if we believe in Jesus as our personal Saviour, we stand before God in the spotless robe of Christ's righteousness.

4. The Promise of the Spirit

Before His death on the cross, Christ offered the most essential and complete gift to His disciples: "I will pray the Father, and he shall give you

another Comforter, that he may abide with you for ever; even the Spirit of truth" (John 14:16, 17).

Mrs. White writes: "This promise belongs to us now as surely as it belonged to the disciples. . . . Let every church member kneel before God, and pray earnestly for the impartation of the Spirit" (*Review and Herald*, June 10, 1902). Once we are born again, it is the Holy Spirit who helps to stimulate new thoughts, new attitudes, and a new agenda for our lives.

*There is a
rainbow in heaven
for all of us.*

5. The Promise of the Second Coming

One of the most glorious promises given in the Bible is that of Christ's second coming to culminate the great work of redemption. "From the day when the first pair turned their sorrowing steps from Eden, the children of faith have waited the coming of the Promised One to break the destroyer's power and bring them again to the lost Paradise. Holy men of old looked forward to the advent of the Messiah in glory, as the consummation of their hope" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 299).

When the Saviour was about to be separated from His disciples, He comforted them in their sorrow with the assurance that He would come again: "Let not your heart be troubled. . . . In my Father's house are many mansions. . . . I go to prepare a place for you. And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and receive you unto myself" (John 14:1-3).

The angels who lingered at Olivet while Christ ascended repeated to the disciples the promise of Christ's return:

"This same Jesus, which is taken up from you into heaven, shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

The coming of the Lord has been in all ages the hope of His true followers. The Saviour's parting promise upon Olivet that He would come again lighted up the future for His disciples, filling their hearts with joy and hope that sorrow could not quench nor trials dim. Though His coming seems delayed, He will come. Let us be ready for Him always.

A Promise to Meet All Our Needs

Christ admonishes us to seek His kingdom first and promises that "all these things shall be added unto you" (Luke 12:31). He wants to satisfy our souls. He promises to withhold "no good thing . . . from those who walk uprightly" (Ps. 84:11). All we need is a childlike simplicity that will lead us to tell the

Lord all our wants, and a belief that according to His riches and goodness and love He will satisfy them. If you will ask anything in my name, He says, "I will do it" (John 13:14).

God wants our cup to overflow. As we wait for the coming of our Lord, may the gifts of love—the promises of God—sustain us.

Questions for Discussion

1. What is the relation between the character of God and His promises?
2. Discuss each of the promises listed in the reading. Which means most to you personally?
3. What particular Bible promises have especially encouraged you over the years? Share the reason(s) with your discussion group. ■

Prema Gaikwad teaches in the graduate school of education and is the head of the Department of Elementary Education at Spicer Memorial College, Pune, India.



Miracles

The assurance of God's power to guarantee our salvation

Miracles still happen. They still attract attention. And although people in our times may seem skeptical and reluctant to believe in biblical miracles, the extraordinary and miraculous are fashionable, as vividly illustrated in popular films, television shows, and commercials. Fictitious or real miracles attract and impress people.

They also raise questions: Are they possible? Can you believe them? Ultimately, miracles raise the issue of faith.

Generally speaking, something "miraculous" is the opposite of what we consider "everyday." Being something extraordinary, something that creates awe, surprise, or amazement, a miracle has the potential of making a deep impression. That, in fact, is why they happen in the Bible and in the life of God's true believers. True miracles in the life of faith bring a message about God. They are seen and are therefore believed. The issue is not faith, but the power of God.

The biblical pattern is to see miracles as evidence of the unique power of God and as saving acts that reveal His divine character, eliciting amazement and praise, gratitude and trust, faith and proclamation. As they are seen and recognized as acts of God, His saving miracles establish faith and assurance among His people. They remember His miracles, they rejoice and praise Him for them, and they proclaim them to the world.

Jesus Christ—The Greatest Miracle Ever

The great saving event in the New Testament is the miraculous story of Jesus Christ—His divine origin, His incarnation, His righteous life, His atoning death, His authority as the risen Saviour, His ascension and high-priestly ministry in heaven, and the promise of His soon second coming.

The New Testament makes it clear that God has testified to His salvation in Christ "by signs, wonders and various

miracles" (Heb. 2:4).^{*} By manifesting His power, God has accredited Jesus Christ. In His sermon on the day of Pentecost, the apostle Peter says that "Jesus of Nazareth was a man accredited by God to you by miracles, wonders and signs, which God did among you through him, as you yourselves know" (Acts 2:22).

The miracles performed by Jesus authorized Him as Son of God, the promised Messiah. He performed them to help the people believe in Him. He said: "The miracles I do in my Father's name speak for me" (John 10:25).

Christ's performance of miracles was closely linked to people's faith. As He visited His hometown, Jesus "did not do many miracles there because of their lack of faith" (Matt. 13:58). The Gospel of Mark says that "he could not do any miracles there, except lay His hands on a few sick people and heal them" (Mark

6:5). But where there was faith, the wonders and miracles performed by Jesus resulted in conversions to God, surrender in Jesus as Messiah, and joy and praise (Luke 19:37).

Early Christian Miracles

Christ authorized His disciples to use God's power in signs and miracles. As for Moses and the prophets, this would provide them with divine authority. Paul speaks about "signs, wonders and miracles" as "the things that mark an apostle" (2 Cor. 12:12).

The power of signs and miracles in the Christian church is a spiritual gift that accompanies the proclamation of the gospel of Jesus Christ. The apostle Paul says that his ministry to the Gentiles was carried out "by the power of signs and miracles, through the power of the Spirit" (Rom. 15:19).

And in his summary of the spiritual gifts, Paul includes "workers of miracles" among those whom God has appointed in the church (1 Cor. 12:28).

The gifts of healing and of working miracles were closely connected. In 1 Corinthians 12:9, 10 Paul groups the three

*Nothing can
change the fact
that the greatest
miracle of all
still happens
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heart is changed.*

gifts of faith, healing, and miraculous powers together, letting the gift of faith stand first. This is the spiritual gift of the faith that can move mountains, the gift that enables God to do that which is impossible for humans but possible for Him. This gift of faith is exercised in the gift of working miracles.

Thus miracles in the early church testified to the power of God and supported the proclamation of the gospel.

Miracles Today

As I fellowship with believers in many different countries and cultures, the miraculous working of the Spirit of God strikes me. Wouldn't it be a tremendous blessing if the 1997 Week of Prayer services gave ample time for each of us to hear and tell about the miracles God is accomplishing by His Spirit in ourselves?

The nature of miracles changes in time, because our opinions of what constitutes a miracle changes. In our time, through technology so many things that once were miracles are now happening every day. But nothing can change the fact that the greatest miracle of all still happens when a human heart is changed. Heaven rejoices with us when the Holy Spirit brings a human heart to confess sin and acknowledge Jesus as Lord and Saviour.

As I try to grasp the overwhelming evidence of God's power, I see in my mind the Croatian soldier who was

hiding out during the civil war in the former Yugoslavia, firing his machine gun from the windows of the Adventist church building in Derwenta, Bosnia, which was totally destroyed. While waiting for an opportunity to escape, he found some magazines and began to read.

Seventh-day Adventist church in Riga, Latvia, had been used by the KGB as an entertainment hall for 45 years. One of the young pastors on the platform had once served the KGB, but he was now a new man, miraculously changed. As the candidates stepped into the baptistry,

the union president, who had been persecuted all his life by the Soviet authorities, whispered their stories to me. Each of them was a miraculous testimony to the power of God.

One of them had a criminal record. In fact, many prisoners in the town had experienced the miracle of receiving the Holy Spirit. Thus the Riga Prison Seventh-day Adventist Church was born in 1996 with 56 members. Prison officials witnessed the miracle: "We see a clear change in their lives when people become Seventh-day Adventist Christians."

A young woman from Lithuania told the following amazing story of her conversion: "My family was not a happy family, and my

parents were often quarreling. My father was a heavy smoker. But four years ago something happened that totally changed our life.

"One morning my father suffered terrible pain in his stomach. After surgery he felt better and returned home, but because of complications he had to stay in bed for two more months.

"At that time an American evangelist commenced an evangelistic campaign in our town. My mother and



Children's drawings of God the Creator were still hanging on the destroyed wall of the Sabbath school. What this young soldier found in that deserted church was the powerful Word of God. It changed his life. As he returned home, he began to look for a Seventh-day Adventist church, where he accepted Jesus as Lord and Saviour through baptism.

I also see the miracle of a very special baptismal ceremony. The

I attended every night, and when he called for baptism, we decided to follow Jesus.

"Father first laughed at us. But when he saw we were serious, he forbade us to go. But since he was in bed, he could not stop us. In order to prove us wrong, he took two Lithuanian Bibles and a Russian Bible and began to look for errors in our faith, but the more he studied, the clearer he saw that we had found the truth. Six months later he invited our pastor to come and visit him. He had many questions at first, but slowly he became ready to make a decision.

"God planned everything perfectly. Through my father's illness He made it possible for my mother and me to discover the good news. At the same time He made it necessary for my father to stop smoking and begin studying the Word.

"Now my father is baptized and is one of the most active church members. God has brought peace to our home. The sound of quarreling is gone. I have experienced the fulfillment of the words of Jesus: 'Come unto me, all who are weary, and I will give you rest.'"

This young woman became the interpreter for many later evangelists in Lithuania, and many have been led to the Saviour through the sound of her voice.

The Gift of Faith in Jesus

Notwithstanding all that we have said so far, however, Jesus called for a faith that was not founded on signs. "Unless you people see miraculous signs and wonders," Jesus said, "you will never believe" (John 4:48). Jesus knew that signs will not convince the heart that lacks faith, since faith is not an intellectual conclusion, but a spiritual gift. "Everyone who has will be given more" (Matt. 25:29).

Human beings cannot survive without a miracle of salvation. We are lost; we will die and lose everything we have and are; we will be separated from the ones we love; and there is no hope, no resurrection, no eternal life, unless Jesus Christ is risen and unless we put

all our faith in Him. Jesus is the incomparably miraculous sign of the grace of God! "He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life" (1 John 5:12).

God filled Christ with all His fullness, with all His glory and power—because of Christ's attitude of humility: "Being in very nature God, [He] did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. . . . Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name" (Phil. 2:6-9).

The ultimate condition for assurance in Christ is that we are filled with the power of God. How? By having the mind and attitude of Christ. His spirit of humility opens up the outpouring of the blessings of heaven into our hearts.

Finally, Christ offers Himself to us. That is the greatest miracle of all—and it happens all the time! He is the solution to all our problems. Will we receive Him? When we do, the blessings of heaven will be poured out in our hearts.

Miracles and the Seventh-day Adventist Church

The name "Seventh-day Adventist Christian" draws attention to the God of miracles. It refers to a people who are (1) celebrating the miracle of Creation through the Sabbath blessing; (2) confessing Jesus Christ as Lord and Saviour, founded on the miracles of His incarnation, atoning death, resurrection, ascension, and heavenly mediatorial ministry; and (3) preparing for the miracle of Christ's second coming.

All this focuses on God and His power and ability to bring His plan to fulfillment. He shares His power with His servants. In a particular way all power in heaven and earth has been awarded to the risen Saviour. He shares it with His disciples. The gift of faith and miraculous power has been promised us through the Holy Spirit. He shares it with His church.

In order to receive these gifts, we need to say yes to Jesus. God's greatest miracle is that in Jesus He has always said yes to us. "For no matter how many promises God has made, they are 'Yes' in Christ. And so through him the 'Amen' is spoken by us to the glory of God. . . . He anointed us, set his seal of ownership on us, and put his Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come" (2 Cor. 1:20-22).

Our God is a God of miracles. To become part of God's miraculous sphere of activity, all we need to say is yes to Christ. No one can say that unless they have received the Holy Spirit, God's seal of ownership on us. Thus assurance of salvation in Christ is ours as we receive His Spirit in our hearts as a deposit, guaranteeing what is to come.

My personal prayer is that we will all experience the miracle Paul prayed for: "May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in Him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit" (Rom. 15:13). ■

Questions for Discussion

1. How would you define a miracle? What difference (if any) do you see between the amazing accomplishments of modern technology and miracles as defined in Scripture?

2. What are the benefits of miracles? What are their drawbacks? How do we keep from becoming either too skeptical or too gullible on this question?

3. What examples of miracles in your personal life can you share with your discussion group?

* Unless noted otherwise, scripture references in this article are from the New International Version.

Bertil Wiklander is president of the Trans-European Division of Seventh-day Adventists, St. Albans, England.



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ADVENTIST
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Reconciled

The assurance of our joy in Christ

But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us. Much more then, being now justified by his blood, we shall be saved from wrath through him.

For if, when we were enemies, we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, we shall be saved by his life" (Rom. 5:8-10).

In the beginning God created human beings in His own image, in His own likeness (Gen. 1:26), and gave them dominion over the whole creation. They were "in perfect harmony with the nature and the law of God; the principles of righteousness" were upon them (*The Great Controversy*, p. 467). For a period they enjoyed direct communion with their Maker.

But they yielded to sin, and immediately feeling the guilt and shame of their act, hid from Him in whose presence they'd once found their delight (see Gen. 3:8).

With sin came death, a calamity that "passed upon all men, for that all have sinned" (Rom. 5:12; cf. Gen. 2:17; 3:19; Rom. 6:23). To fulfill the demands of God's holy law, God, in love, gave His only begotten Son, "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16). Christ, the eternal Son of God, paid the penalty of sin so as to reconcile us to God.

When Adam and Eve fell into sin, God not only went in search of them (Gen. 3:9); He also immediately promised their restoration. He pledged to introduce a supernatural enmity between Satan and humanity, between the seed of the devil and that of the woman (verse 15). It was a pronouncement of hope, a promise of the coming Redeemer.

The promise was fulfilled when "God sent not his son into the world to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved" (John 3:17). "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself" (2 Cor. 5:19). Through Christ's reconciliation the relationship between God and humanity was restored. It was through Christ's merits that humans once again came into harmony with

their Maker. Thus the sinner is led back to God, not alone, but through Jesus Christ.

God had every right to let humanity perish, but He took the initiative in restoring the broken relationship between humanity and Himself because of His love. "But God commendeth his love toward us, in that, while we were yet sinners, Christ died for us" (Rom. 5:8). We had made ourselves His enemies, but "we were reconciled to God by the death of his Son." Having been reconciled, "we shall be saved by his life" (verse 10).

It took Christ's life as well as His death to bridge the gap that sin had created. "Man had become so degraded by sin that it was impossible for him, in himself, to come into harmony with Him

whose nature is purity and goodness. But Christ, after having redeemed man from the condemnation of the law, could impart divine power to unite with human effort. Thus by repentance toward God and faith in Christ the fallen children of Adam might once more become 'sons of God' (1 John 3:2)" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 64).

Adam's rebellion brought sin, condemnation, and death to all. Christ reversed the downward trend. "Through His death, Christ broke the dominion of sin, terminated the spiritual captivity, removed the condemnation and curse of the law, and made eternal life available to all repentant sinners. . . . In His great love, He subjected Himself to the divine judgment on sin and became humanity's representative" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe*, p. 113). He made Himself "to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (2 Cor. 5:21).

Christ's atoning ministry affects not only the human race, but the entire universe. It pleased God, through Christ, "having made peace through the blood of his cross, by him, to reconcile all things unto himself; . . . whether they be things in earth, or things in heaven" (Col. 1:20).

But for reconciliation to be effective, there must first be a conviction of sin. We must accept that we are sinners

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because we have transgressed the law (see 1 John 3:4). Our character must be tested against God's great standard of righteousness in order for us to see our guilt. The law, like a mirror, shows the perfection of a righteous character and enables us to discern the defects of our own.

But while the law reveals to us our sins, it provides no remedy. It is only the gospel of Christ that can free us from the condemnation or the defilement of sin. But we must exercise repentance toward God, whose law has been transgressed. We must have faith in Christ, in His atoning sacrifice, before we can obtain the remission of sins that are past. We then become partakers of the divine nature, and having received the spirit of adoption, we are now children of God (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 468).

Thus Christ's death ratified God's ownership of humanity. Paul said, "Know ye not that . . . ye are not your own? For ye are bought with a price" (1 Cor. 6:19, 20; see also 1 Cor. 7:23).

But while the price is paid, reconciliation cannot be consummated if the sinner does not accept the gift. Reconciliation becomes effective only when forgiveness is accepted. Luke records the story of the prodigal son, who was reconciled with his father only after he accepted his father's love and forgiveness (Luke 15:11-24). The publican was justified only when he accepted that he was a sinner and asked mercy from God (Luke 18:13, 14). Only those who accept by faith that God has reconciled the world to Himself in Christ and who submit to Him will be justified and have peace with God (Rom. 5:1).

A justified person will love God because they have been reconciled to God. Loving God is the product of being saved by the blood of Jesus Christ. The test of every person's profession that they love God is their attitude toward God's law. "If ye love me," Christ says, "keep my commandments. . . . He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that

loveth me: and he that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him, and will manifest myself to him" (John 14:15-21). But "he that saith, I know him, and keepeth not his commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him" (1 John 2:4).

One of Christ's last commands to His disciples was to "love one another" as He had loved them (John 13:34). If we have in any way grieved or wounded others, it is our duty to confess our fault and seek reconciliation. This is an essential preparation, that we may come before God in faith to ask His blessings. It is equally essential that "bitterness and animosity . . . be banished from the soul if we would be in harmony with heaven" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 310).

"If there is disunion among those who claim to believe the truth," Ellen White says, "the world will conclude that this people cannot be of God, because they are working against one another. When we are one with Christ, we shall be united among ourselves" (*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 139).

"Christ's influence is to be felt in our world through His believing children. He who is converted is to exert the same kind of an influence which through God's instrumentality was made effectual in his conversion. All our work in this world is to be done in harmony and love and unity. We are to keep the example of Christ ever before us, walking in His footsteps" (*Selected Messages*, book 3, p. 15).

The center of Christ's prayer to the Father is "that they may be one, even as we are one" (John 17:22).

"Harmony and union existing among men of varied dispositions is the strongest witness that can be borne that God has sent His Son into the world to save sinners. It is our privilege to bear this witness. But, in order to do this, we must place ourselves under Christ's command. Our characters must be molded in harmony with His character, our wills must be surrendered to His will. Then we shall work together without a thought of collision" (*Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 242, 243).

If we accept Christ, we become new creatures; our old self has passed

away. All things have become new (see 2 Cor. 5:17). When this mighty change has taken place in ourselves, then we have "passed from death unto life, from sin unto holiness, from transgression and rebellion to obedience and loyalty. The old life of alienation from God has ended; the new life of reconciliation, of faith and love, has begun" (*The Great Controversy*, p. 468). "The more we understand God's grace in the light of the cross, the less self-righteousness we will feel and the more we will realize how blessed we are" (*Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 116). "Gratitude, praise, and joy arise, obedience becomes a delight, the study of His Word a joy, and the mind a ready dwelling place of the Holy Spirit" (*ibid.*).

The amazing love revealed in God's ministry of reconciliation through Jesus Christ will motivate all who have been reconciled to God to share the gospel with others. When we have experienced it ourselves, we cannot keep secret the fact that God will not count sin against those who accept Christ's sacrifice for sins. To us is committed "the word of reconciliation" (2 Cor. 5:19). "We are ambassadors for Christ" (verse 20). We are to pass on to others the moving gospel invitation: "Be ye reconciled to God. For he hath made him to be sin for us, who knew no sin; that we might be made the righteousness of God in him" (verses 20, 21). ■

Questions for Discussion

1. Why the need for reconciliation? Was God mad at us? How would you explain this biblical teaching?
2. How should the biblical doctrine of reconciliation be translated into our practical, everyday lives?

Abelardo M. Era is president of Mountain View College, Bukidnon, Philippines.

Joy

It comes from a life of prayer and service.

Joy is the hallmark of the Christian. He has promised joy—fullness of joy, in His presence, and delights and pleasures forevermore.

One of the firstfruits of the Holy Spirit is joy—the joy of our salvation. What a wonderful God we serve. Of all people on earth, the Christian, who has salvation, forgiveness, hope, eternal life—and who walks in the light—has joy, Christ's joy.

Let's look at this reality of joy as we explore three avenues of reaching and experiencing more and more of that precious commodity that comes with the presence of the Holy Spirit—joy so rare, so precious, so evasive.

Through God's Eyes of Love

One simple way to get started is by what I call "prayer walking." The effectiveness of this method is that it sensitizes us to the needs of others. It involves actually walking down a few city blocks with a friend or two, each one taking a turn to pray both aloud and silently for those living or working or going to school in that particular place. Ask the Lord to do something special for them, to open their hearts and minds to the reality of who He is and who they are. Pray that they will see their need for salvation.

Through Our Love for God

Prayer, our greatest gift, our most powerful weapon, is also the beginning place for deep joy. Our teenagers are experiencing this in a wonderful way as they see what total dependence on God can do. It's not at all unusual at teen prayer conferences and at other times and places to see little knots and clumps of young people praying together, praying for each other, for their church leaders, for their parents, for their faculty, for their family. To hear them gives us a new compassion for the lost. He who is not willing that any for whom we're praying should perish wants to provide His Holy Spirit for real blessings.

Our attitude should be that represented in that old song we used to sing:

"Out in the highways and byways of life
Many are weary and sad;

Carry the sunshine where darkness is rife,
Making the sorrowing glad."

Last year 200 teenagers from around the Columbia Union Conference (in the United States) met over a long weekend for prayer, Bible study, and ministry. On the closing night they prayed together—as they had done before—long into the night, because they had found that there is Someone there, listening, loving, answering.

No wonder Jesus told us to have the faith of a child. I believe that if He were here today, He would look at our young people and remind us again of the importance of their simple faith and trust in an unfailing God. Young people willing to take God at His word. Jesus would say, "Be like that."



A group of three teens and two adults visiting Reykjavik, Iceland, for a prayer and ministry conference were invited to a public high school, where the three teens would speak to students. Warmly welcomed, they were requested, however, not to proselytize, though they were free to answer any questions put to them by students.

God blessed and honored our young people's faith and that of their many friends and families at home who were praying. They visited classrooms in which entire class periods were turned over to them. I just sat at the back of the classroom and prayed, watching God work through John Westerbrook, 16, from Paradise, California, as he spoke and fielded questions with remarkable candor and wisdom. God used this young basketball player, not only because of his sports ability (which deeply impressed the Icelandic teens) but also because of his love for Jesus and his dependence on Him, because of his openness about prayer and his joy in leading others to Christ.

As a result of these classroom encounters, a good number of non-Christians from that particular school enthusiastically attended the prayer conference at one of our churches in the city. Greg Howell, a student at Spring Valley Academy in Ohio, attended the prayer conference in England, following the one in Iceland. His life changed, as did those of his friends. They went back home willing

and ready to be used in witnessing to their friends and families. God had more than surprised them with His daily power and His answers to their prayers. Baptisms among their friends have followed, and opportunities for reaching others have become something that they now expect. They find joy watching God work for them as they pray for wisdom, love, and boldness.

Greg works in food service at the Kettering Medical Center in Ohio while studying at the local academy. Because he had been praying for the Holy Spirit to lead and use him, he was impressed to contact one of the women with whom he works and offer to pray for her. He knew that she was experiencing some special family stress at that time, and his offer was accepted gratefully. Because of his prayers, she attended NET '96 and has been attending church services.

E. M. Bounds, that great Christian writer and prayer warrior, wrote the following: "The Holy Spirit will give the praying saint the brightness of an immortal hope, the music of a deathless song." In His baptism and communion with the heart, He will give sweeter and more enlarged visions of heaven until the taste for other things will fade, and other visions will grow dim and distant. He will put notes of other worlds in human hearts until all earth's music is discord and songless."

In prayer we can pour out our love for God, our confessions, our gratitude, and our needs, wants, and petitions; and we can ask Him to do something very specific and special in the lives of others. Nearly all the prayers of Scripture were prayers for others. God gives us glimpses of the needs of others—not for criticism, which is destructive both to critic and to victim. Rather He calls us to intercede, to ask Him to do what only He can do in the lives of those in need. A wonderful song says it well:

"When I pray, I will pray for you,
For you need His love and His care."

Through God's Love for Us

God's Word is the source of our joy, because it is there we meet Him and receive His instruction, cleansing, and blessings to our heart personally. It is there that we find a revelation of His love. Adults and youth are discovering that there are new and

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exciting ways to get into the Word to find personal messages and guidance. As they take a passage, reading it carefully with prayer, the Holy Spirit interprets the meaning. Someone has said, "Isn't it amazing that something that David said thousands of years ago is exactly what I need right now?" Yes, God's Word is living, because God is alive.

As you study even a very familiar passage of Scripture, put yourself into the scene. Observe, interpret, ask questions about what is going on and how it all relates to your life. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you what the personal applications are for you personally. Ask for courage to live by the new light and strength received. Through Scripture God becomes our dearest, closest friend.

There are such powerful promises of God's nearness. He has promised us His presence. He has promised to be our shepherd. He has promised to provide for our needs, whether they be spiritual, mental, physical, social,

professional, or financial. No wonder we are amazed and filled with joy and love in His presence!

By His Love Through Us

The Holy Spirit is given for our joy, peace, and happiness, but also for ministry. Simply praying and studying the Scriptures may bring us joy and a new relationship with Christ. But unless it all results in ministry to others, we can become complacent and stagnant. God's purpose for us is that we be useful in this world. He wants us to know Him, to discover what He is about in the world, and to join Him in His work.

In all three of God's great gifts—prayer, Bible study, and ministry—we may find fulfillment and true joy in partnership with the King of kings and Lord of lords. As the Holy Spirit empowers and leads, ministry will not be something we do from 2:00-4:00 p.m. on a Sabbath afternoon. Rather it will become a sweet and beautiful way of life.

It is in seeing people around us now whom we have met through these experiences, as well as in the expectation of meeting in eternity those whom we have loved for Christ here, that we can ever know true joy. ■

Questions for Discussion

1. How can we make prayer a primary part of our witnessing strategy—personally and corporately?
2. What examples of the prayer dynamic can we find in Scripture? Which biblical prayer example has had the greatest impact on your life personally?

Ruthie Jacobsen served for most of her career in nursing administration and nursing education. She is now the coordinator of prayer ministries for the North American Division of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

Calvary

The ultimate assurance of God's intention to save and to keep

Jesus our Advocate presents an effectual plea in behalf of all who by repentance and faith have committed the keeping of their souls to Him. He pleads their cause and vanquishes their accuser by the mighty arguments of Calvary. His perfect obedience to God's law, even unto the death of the cross, has given Him all power in heaven and in earth, and He claims of His Father mercy and reconciliation for guilty man. To the accuser of His people He declares: "The Lord rebuke thee, O Satan." These are the purchase of my blood, brands plucked from the burning." Those who rely upon Him in faith receive the comforting assurance: "Behold, I have caused thine iniquity to pass from thee, and I will clothe thee with change of raiment."

All that have put on the robe of Christ's righteousness will stand before Him as chosen and faithful and true. Satan has no power to pluck them out of the hand of Christ. Not one soul that in penitence and faith has claimed His protection will Christ permit to pass under the enemy's power. His word is pledged: "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me."

The promise given to Joshua is made to all: "If thou wilt keep my charge, . . . I will give thee places to walk among these that stand by." Angels of God will walk on either side of them, even in this world, and they will stand at last among the angels that surround the throne of God. . . . We cannot answer the charges of Satan against us. Christ alone can make an effectual plea in our behalf. He is able to silence the accuser with arguments founded not upon our merits, but on His own.¹

Jesus Our Saviour

It was to redeem us that Jesus lived and suffered and died. He became "a Man of Sorrows," that we might be made partakers of everlasting joy. God permitted His beloved Son,

full of grace and truth, to come from a world of indescribable glory, to a world marred and blighted with sin, darkened with the shadow of death and the curse. He

permitted Him to leave the bosom of His love, the adoration of the angels, to suffer shame, insult, humiliation, hatred, and death. "The chastisement of our peace was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed" (Isa. 53:5).

Behold Him in the wilderness, in Gethsemane, upon the cross! The spotless Son of God took upon Himself the burden of sin. He who had been one with God felt in His soul the awful separation that sin makes between God and man. This wrung from His lips the anguished cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46). It was the burden of sin, the sense of its terrible enormity, of its

separation of the soul from God—it was this that broke the heart of the Son of God.²

Let the mind awaken to gratitude that through Christ Jesus, the Father is faithful to fulfill the promise to forgive all sin. His mercy and His love are forever an assurance as we look upon Christ uplifted upon the cross of Calvary. Will we individually rise to the appreciation as far as we have capacity to comprehend the truth, that God Jehovah loves and forgives us if we believe in and love Jesus?³

Is He my Saviour? Can I lay hold upon His merits this very hour? Can I commit the keeping of my soul to Jesus Christ today? Yes. How? What assurance have I? I point you to Christ of Calvary. Can you stand under the shadow of the cross and there talk your crosses, your darkness, your wicked feelings? Can you do it? Dare you do it? You never dare to do it when standing under the shadow of the cross, because all that infinite sacrifice was made to make me love God. It was made that I might reflect the image of God in Jesus Christ. Well then, when all this sacrifice has been made for me, shall I let everybody know that it amounts to something? Shall I let the world know that Jesus, the precious Saviour, has made all this infinite

*The light shining
from the cross of
Calvary should
make us the
happiest people on
the earth.*

sacrifice that He might be formed within, the hope of glory, and that I might rejoice in His love?⁴

The Cross Is Everything

I point you to the cross of Calvary. The cross is everything to us. It is the pledge of our salvation, the pledge that we shall receive the crown of glory that fadeth not away. It is to be our support in every trial, our refuge in every sorrow. It is the assurance to us that the Father loves us, and has given His Son for us. It is the assurance to us that our joy may be full.⁵

None but the Son of God could accomplish our redemption; for only He who was in the bosom of the Father could declare Him. Only He who knew the height and depth of the love of God could make it manifest. Nothing less than the infinite sacrifice made by Christ in behalf of fallen man could express the Father's love to lost humanity.⁶

The price paid for our redemption, the infinite sacrifice of our heavenly Father in giving His Son to die for us, should give us exalted conceptions of what we may become through Christ. As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father's love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration and reverence; and, failing to find suitable language in which to express the greatness and tenderness of this love, he called upon the world to behold it. "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of

God" (1 John 3:1). What a value this places upon man! Through transgression the sons of man become subjects of Satan. Through faith in the atoning sacrifice of Christ the sons of Adam may become the sons of God. By assuming human nature, Christ elevates humanity. Fallen men are

forgiveness blended with equity and justice, and the more clearly we discern innumerable evidences of a love that is infinite and a tender pity surpassing a mother's yearning sympathy for her wayward child.⁷

Through the imputed righteousness of Christ, the sinner may feel that he is

pardoned, and may know that the law no more condemns him, because he is in harmony with all its precepts. It is his privilege to count himself innocent when he reads and thinks of the retribution that will fall upon the unbelieving and sinful. By faith he lays hold of the righteousness of Christ. . . . Knowing himself to be a sinner, a transgressor of the holy law of God, he looks to the perfect obedience of Christ, to His death upon Calvary for the sins of the world; and he has the assurance that he is justified by faith in the merit and sacrifice of Christ. He realizes that the law was obeyed in his behalf by the Son of God, and that the penalty of transgression cannot fall upon the believing sinner. The active obedience of Christ clothes the believing sinner with the righteousness that meets the demands of the law.⁸

Ample provision has been made that the people of God may attain perfection of character. The apostle says, "This is the will of God, even your sanctification." Let every individual draw for himself from the inexhaustible source of all moral and intellectual power, in order that he may work the works of righteousness. Through the cross of Calvary every facility is furnished whereby man may be in union with his fellowmen, and in harmony with Christ in God. The Father says that He will love those who believe that Christ died for them,



placed where, through connection with Christ, they may indeed become worthy of the name "sons of God."

Such love is without a parallel. Children of the heavenly King! Precious promise! Theme for the most profound meditation! The matchless love of God for a world that did not love Him! The thought has a subduing power upon the soul and brings the mind into captivity to the will of God. The more we study the divine character in the light of the cross, the more we see mercy, tenderness, and

even as He loves His only begotten Son. The cross of Christ is the assurance that we may be complete in Him. "God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." In Christ is excellence, in Him is intellectual greatness and moral efficiency.⁹

Sharing Calvary's Good News

God in Christ is daily beseeching men to be reconciled to God. With outstretched arms He is ready to receive and welcome not only the sinner but the prodigal. His dying love, manifested on Calvary, is the sinner's assurance of acceptance, peace, and love. Teach these things in the simplest form, that the sin-darkened soul may see the light shining from the cross of Calvary.¹⁰

The Saviour desires your joy to be full, therefore He tells you to abide in Him and He will abide in you. Open the door of your heart, and let in Jesus and the bright rays of His righteousness. He loves us with a love that is inexpressible, and if at any time you begin to fear that you will be lost, that Jesus does not love you, look to Calvary. Do you want a clearer expression of His love than that which the Father has bestowed upon us, in that He has given us in His Son? The light shining from the cross of Calvary should make us the happiest people on the earth.

Now I ask you, dear brethren and sisters, why should we not love Him? He exclaims, "What could have been done more to my vineyard, that I have not done in it?" If we had to work out our salvation in our own strength, we might be discouraged, and give up the warfare; but now He says, "I am with you always, even unto the end of the world." When He has given us such an assurance of His care, should we not respond to it by giving Him our confidence? If you have been in the habit of murmuring, complaining, and finding fault, you must cease, for you are showing the satanic side of your character. If you neglect your own

soul, and begin to find fault and pick flaws in others, you are doing Satan's work. But if you are talking of the love of Jesus, and are trying to bless those around you with your influence, you are a blessing and not a curse, you are bringing yourself into close relationship to Jesus.¹¹

No taint of self-seeking is to mar our service. "Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24). Lift Him up, the Man of Calvary. Lift Him up by living faith in God, that your prayers may prevail. Do we realize how near Jesus will come to us? He is speaking to us individually. He will reveal Himself to everyone who is willing to be clothed with the robe of His righteousness. He declares, "I the Lord thy God will hold thy right hand" (Isa. 41:13). Let us place ourselves where He can hold us by the hand, where we can hear Him saying with assurance and authority, "I am he that liveth, and was dead; and, behold, I am alive forevermore" (Rev. 1:18).¹²

All heaven is actively engaged in the work of preparing a people for the second coming of Christ to our world, and "we are laborers together with God." The end of all things is at hand. Now is our opportunity to work. "The night cometh, in which no man can work." We should proclaim Christ and Him crucified, thus preparing the way for His second appearing.

Lift Him up, the Man of Calvary. Place yourselves where you may receive heavenly inspiration and be able to point the weary, the heavy-laden, the brokenhearted, the perplexed soul, to Jesus, the source of all spiritual strength. Be faithful minutemen, to show forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvelous light. With pen and voice proclaim that Jesus lives to make intercession for us. Unite with the great Master-worker, follow the self-denying Redeemer through His pilgrimage of love on earth. The same Jesus that walked with His disciples, that taught them upon earth, that toiled and suffered in His human nature, is with us in His divine power. He is at our right hand

to help in every emergency.

Let us lift up Jesus, and reveal the Bible foundation for our faith. We are all to proclaim the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus. Jesus came to magnify the law, and make it honorable. He died to exalt the law of God, testifying of its changeless character; and as we proclaim God's law, we may look unto Jesus and be comforted with the assurance, "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world."¹³

¹ *Lift Him Up*, p. 234.

² *Steps to Christ*, p. 13.

³ *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 106.

⁴ *Sermons and Talks*, vol. 1, p. 208.

⁵ *Signs of the Times*, Apr. 11, 1892.

⁶ *Steps to Christ*, p. 14.

⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁸ *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 240.

⁹ *Review and Herald*, Nov. 30, 1897.

¹⁰ *Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, p. 639.

¹¹ *Review and Herald*, Aug. 5, 1890.

¹² *Counsels on Health*, p. 253.

¹³ *Review and Herald*, Jan. 24, 1893.

Questions for Discussion

1. In what practical ways do the Old Testament passages cited at the beginning of the article enhance your personal sense of assurance?

2. Based on the present reading, what would you say should be the absolute source of our assurance? What role, if any, do we ourselves play in bringing about that sense of assurance?

3. What is our responsibility to others in view of the cross? How does Mrs. White articulate that responsibility?

Ellen G. White was one of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her work continues to be a prophetic voice within it.



Assurance in Christ

VIRGINIA SMITH



Introduction for Teachers

The theme for this Week of Prayer is assurance in Christ. We recount the story of Joseph, because it illustrates reasons for having confidence in salvation through Christ. The inspiration for this retelling comes from the book *God Sent a Man*, by Carlyle B. Haynes.

To help you make the Week of Prayer meaningful for the children, we include lesson sections for each day in the series:

Visual aids

A visual aid introduces each segment of the story. Provide a world map or a map of the Middle East so the children know the part of the world in which Joseph lived. If you use felt pictures to illustrate the stories, have the children place the pictures on the board.

Introduction

The introduction for each segment has been designed to help the children connect what they already know to the story. This will make the story relevant to their thinking. It also helps you discover how much they already know. Keep the introduction brief. Each day there is a reminder to follow up on the assignment you gave the children the day before.

Story

The key to learning is participation. Children lose interest if their only task is listening. We have incorporated questions for you to ask. Each one of them should be answered by the children. **Do not answer your own questions.** Even if the children don't

answer immediately, force yourself to wait for them to respond. Listen to the children. If you do all the talking, you give them the message that they have no responsibility to think.

Children are accustomed to questions with only one right answer. Beware of jumping to the conclusion that a child's answer is "wrong." If you don't understand how the child's response applies to the question, ask the child to explain it to you. Often they have a logical idea underlying their response. As the children learn they can safely share their ideas, they will respond with fresh insights that enrich your own understanding.

If the children get into a good discussion on the topic of assurance of salvation, it is more important for you to listen to their questions and thoughts than finish a story.

Application

Some people have enormous amounts of Bible knowledge, but no assurance of salvation, no personal relationship with Christ. Applying Bible information to one's life is the crucial part of Bible study. The application suggested for each day has been designed to guide the children's minds to personal meaning.

Decision

A decision question is provided for each day. Feel free to use a different question if it would better fit your group. You may want to ask the children questions and discuss their answers with them. You may need to talk personally to a child who did not respond, as a misconception or hurt may be behind their decision not to answer. Have a child volunteer to pray as well as an adult.

Understanding

Ask the children, "What was the most important idea you learned in this story?" Pay attention to what they say, to become aware of any misunderstandings. Their responses will help you understand the need for feedback from children in order to know what they think you taught them.

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of some part of the story. This will help them think about what they have learned. If they have misunderstandings, the picture may make that obvious so you can gently help them revise their thinking. At the end of the week, help children combine their own pictures into a personal book of Joseph's life.

Assignment

An assignment is provided to help the children continue thinking about the story lesson. Adjust the assignment to fit your group of children. Be sure to ask for a report the next day.

NOTE: In each day's segment, instructions for teachers are in italics.

SABBATH

We Are Safe in God's Care

Genesis 35:27

Visual aids

Bring one of your own family pictures or an article that reminds you of something your parents or grandparents told you.

Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

Show what you brought and briefly (two minutes maximum) tell your story.

What has your mom or dad, or one of your grandparents, taught you? Allow time for answers. During this Week of Prayer we're going to be thinking about the story of Joseph in the Bible. His father and grandfather taught him important lessons that are for you and me as well as for him. Can you guess what any of those lessons might be? Listen to the children's ideas.

Story

Who can tell me something about Joseph? What was his father's name? Who was his grandfather? How many brothers did he have? Do you have any idea when he lived? Listen carefully to the children's answers, because they will let you know how much detail to include in the story. If only one or two children are knowledgeable and the others are not, help them tell the story in brief to the others.

Joseph had a big family. Do you think they lived in a big house? What kind of house do you think they lived in? Yes, they lived in tents and took care of animals. When the animals ate all the grass nearby, they moved to a different place. Joseph was a boy when his family moved to Hebron, where his grandfather Isaac lived.

Joseph loved to hear the stories that his father Jacob and grandfather Isaac told. Hearing their stories was like having family worship at your house and listening to Bible stories. Do you know why they were alike? Listen to their ideas. Isaac and Jacob taught Joseph about God—the same stories you and your family read in the Bible.

Why didn't Joseph's family read the stories from the Bible? Let children answer. Because the Bible had not been written. More than 200 years later Moses wrote the first books of the Bible. So Joseph learned about the true God by listening to his father and grandfather.

Grandfather Isaac told how

God had asked his father, Abraham, to leave his hometown. God did not tell Abraham where he was going. Great-grandfather Abraham trusted God enough to follow wherever He led. Several times God talked personally to great-grandfather and told him his family would have a wonderful future. Do you know your great-grandfather's name? and where he lived?

Grandfather Isaac saw the friendship between God and his father, Abraham, so he grew up trusting God's plans for the future and teaching his son Jacob about God. As Jacob grew older, he also learned to trust God to lead him and his family. God talked to Jacob personally. So Joseph learned the stories and knew that God would take care of them. And in the future, God would have them live with Him for ever and ever.

Application

Did you know that you are part of Abraham's family? In Romans 4:16 the Bible tells us that everyone who trusts God is part of Abraham's family. So the stories little Joseph heard are about your family too, and you too can depend on God to take care of you now. You can be sure God has planned a wonderful future for you that will last forever.

Decision

How many of you want to trust God like Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph did? Let's pray and tell our heavenly Father that we trust Him and thank Him for loving us and planning a good future for us.



Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story? See the Introduction for Teachers.

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of little Joseph listening to his grandfather tell a story. See the Introduction for Teachers.

Assignment

I want you to talk to your mother and daddy, or the adult who cares for you, and share what you learned in this story. Tell them that now you know you are part of Abraham's family, because you love and trust God like Abraham did. Tell them God has a good plan for your future in this life and forever. Then ask them to tell you a story about how God has led them. Tomorrow you can share the story with us.

Have the children practice telling each other what they learned so they will be prepared to share the lesson with their parents.

SUNDAY

God Knows the Future

Genesis 37:1-22

Visual aids

Provide supplies to draw pictures of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph, with names to be written under each one.

Introduction

Who has a story you heard from your parents about how God helped your family? Let them tell their stories, but keep them brief. Have the children draw a picture of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph and write their names. Give help as needed. Ask the children to tell you what they have learned about these people. Help the children make the family connections by thinking about their own father, grandfathers,

and great-grandfathers. If they are coloring, ask if they remember the special coat Joseph received. Have them color his coat with different colors.

Story

Even though God had chosen Abraham's family to be His special people, Joseph grew up with relatives who had problems. Joseph's mother died during the birth of little brother Benjamin. Maybe that was one reason father Jacob gave extra time and attention to Joseph and Benjamin. Their mother, Rachel, had also been Jacob's first choice as a wife. Joseph would have been Jacob's first son if Rachel's father had not tricked Jacob into marrying her older sister, Leah, before he married Rachel. So you see, this was a mixed-up family. If you sometimes feel like your family is mixed-up, you can be sure that God understands and loves families with problems.

One father, one grandfather, three stepmothers, 12 brothers, at least one sister, and many helpers—all these people did not always get along with each other. Just as you and I make mistakes, Joseph and his family made mistakes too. Perhaps Jacob shouldn't have given Joseph that colorful coat. When they saw the fancy coat, Joseph's 10 older brothers believed their father considered Joseph more important than they. They took care of animals. But Joseph was treated like a prince. It made them angry. Back in those ancient days, the oldest son was the most important. And 10 of them were older than Joseph! Because of that coat, the older brothers hated Joseph.

God still loved them even though they were not perfect. Are you perfect? Does God love you? *Pay close attention to how the children respond. Assure them of God's love.*

Do you know what the word "prophecy" means? *Listen to their ideas.* Prophecy is knowing about something before it happens. Only God knows what will happen in the future, but sometimes God tells His people about the future. God told many secrets to His friend, great-grandfather Abraham. He said that Abraham would be the father of a great nation (Gen. 12:2), that his family would live in Canaan (Gen. 12:7), and that he

would have a son (Gen. 15:3-5). God also told Jacob about the future (Gen. 28:11-15). Both Abraham and Jacob shared these secrets with their family, so Joseph and his brothers knew that God had plans for them.

Now, in a dream God gave Joseph a hint about what would happen to him in the future. We all dream every night, but few of our dreams mean anything. But once in a while God sends a message to someone in a dream.

One night Joseph dreamed that he and his brothers were gathering grain into bundles in the field. Suddenly Joseph's bundle of grain stood up straight, and his brothers' bundles leaned over as though bowing to Joseph's bundle. What a strange dream! What could it mean? Joseph told his brothers about it. In anger they asked him if he expected to rule over them. In their minds, that idea went right along with the coat that showed he would someday rule the family. The dream made them hate him more than ever.

God sent Joseph another dream; again he shared it with his family. In this second dream the sun and moon and 11 stars all bowed to him. His brothers looked at him and thought, *Just you wait!* But father Jacob remembered that dream.

Just as God had given prophetic messages to great-grandfather Abraham and to father Jacob, now Joseph himself had received prophetic messages.

One day Jacob sent Joseph to check on his brothers, who were out herding the animals. They looked mean when they saw him in the beautiful coat coming toward them. They planned to get even. They ripped off his coat. Some of the brothers wanted to kill him, but Reuben, the oldest, wanted to save Joseph. He persuaded the others to put Joseph into a cistern (a hole carved in a rock for storing water). Reuben thought he would finish his work, then later sneak back, pull Joseph out, and send him home.

After Reuben left, a caravan of traders came riding by on their camels. They were going to Egypt to sell things. Judah, the fourth brother, also wanted to save Joseph's life. Not knowing about Reuben's plans, he thought these traders would save

Joseph as well as pay them money. Within minutes Joseph was headed for a faraway land to work as a slave.

What good would God's prophecies do him now?

Application

Why do you think God still loves people even when they make mistakes? Why do you think God lets bad things happen to people, like letting Joseph be sold as a slave? *Listen carefully to what the children say. Pray for wisdom to respond appropriately to their concerns.* In Romans 8:28 the Bible tells us that God works out something good for everyone who loves Him. Joseph loved God. So even though something sad happened to Joseph, we know that God will take care of him. When you love God and something sad happens to your family, will God take care of you? You can be sure He will work out a wonderful future. The Bible promises Jesus will come again and take us to live with Him in heaven.

Decision

Raise your hand if you want to love and trust God as Joseph did. Let's pray and thank our heavenly Father for making good plans for our lives and letting us know about the future. *Prayer.*

Understanding

What important idea did you learn in this story?

Activity

Have the children make a cover for their book about Joseph's life. Add the picture they drew during the introduction.

Assignment

Ask your family to tell you stories about your grandfather and great-grandfather. Does your family remember how God helped your grandparents and great-grandparents in the past? Maybe tomorrow you will have an interesting story to share with us.

We Can Believe God's Word

Genesis 37:25-36

Visual aids

Have enough cloth for blindfolds for half the number of children. Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

Who has a story to tell about your grandfather or great-grandfather? Let them briefly tell their stories. Divide the children into equal-sized groups. Hand blindfolds to one group. Each of them chooses one person from the other group as a partner and ties a blindfold on them. If there is an extra child, you tie the blindfold on him/her and be the partner. Instruct the partners to walk around, with the "seeing" one telling the "blind" one which way to turn and when to step up or down. Then discuss "trust" with the children. The blindfolded partner had to trust the companion to keep him/her safe. In our story about Joseph we have come to the part where he has been sold into slavery in a foreign land. What should Joseph do? Whom should he trust?

Story

Show these places on the map. Joseph was sold to the traders at a place called Dothan, north of Shechem. It was about 60 miles north of Hebron, where his father and grandfather lived. The traders were headed south to Egypt. Probably by the second or third day Joseph could see the hills where his family lived. He must have felt sad to think that they were so close, but his family didn't know that and could not help him. The traders had tied Joseph so he could not escape. What should he do? Listen to the children. He could trust in God, couldn't he?

As the days went by, he probably walked a lot, or maybe he rode on a camel. He had lots of time to think. What do you suppose he thought about? Let children suggest ideas. I think he



reviewed in his mind what he knew about the future. His father expected him to be somebody special because he gave him that coat. God had said that his family would have a great future. God had given him dreams that he would be respected by his family. Now he had to choose whether to trust God to work out His plans.

He remembered that great-grandfather Abraham had been called to leave his home. And God took care of him just as He said He would.

Joseph remembered the time his father, Jacob, ran away from home because his brother wanted to kill him. It was Jacob's fault. He had made a mistake. Nighttime came, and he had no place to sleep except on the ground. He had to use a rock for a pillow. While he slept, he had a dream that a stairway reached from earth all the way up to heaven. Angels walked up and down the stairs. And at the top of the stairs God talked to Jacob, told him about the future, and promised to take care of him. When Jacob woke up, he trusted that God would do just what He said in the dream. And God did. Many years went by; God cared for Jacob and brought him back to live in Hebron, near his father.

Do you think Joseph decided to trust God's word as his father had? Yes, he decided that he would not worry about what would happen to him in Egypt. Every day he would pray and remember that God

would work out a good future for him.

When the traders arrived in Egypt, they took Joseph to a slave market and sold him. Could God take care of him even in a slave market? Yes, God sent one of the most important men in Egypt to buy Joseph. He was the man responsible for guarding the king of Egypt. What was his name? Yes, Potiphar. Potiphar took Joseph home to work in his beautiful big mansion.

Joseph trusted God's word that he would someday be important, so how do you suppose he did his work? Did he make other people do his work for him? Did he care whether Potiphar's house was clean or not? Listen to children's ideas. Every day Joseph asked God to help him do his best so he would be ready to do the work God was preparing for him in the future. Potiphar noticed what a good worker Joseph was and put him in charge of everything in the house.

Application

Why did Joseph trust God's word? Have children suggest answers, but lead them to think of his family experiences where God had fulfilled what He said, and Joseph's dreams about the future. Does God have a special future planned for you as well? Lead children to discuss the fact that God has a plan for every life, plus He plans to take us, together with our parents (if they choose to go), to heaven to live with Him as His children. Just imagine! You are a son or daughter of the King of the universe. Have you asked God to help you do your work well so you will be ready for the harder work He wants you to do when you grow up?

Decision

Do you want to do your work well so you will be ready for what God has planned for you in the future? Let's pray about that now. We can trust the word of our powerful heavenly Father. Prayer.

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of Joseph being sold as a slave or working in Potiphar's house.

Assignment

All of you are princes and princesses, aren't you? I want you to go home and look at your bedroom. Does your bedroom look as clean as a prince's or princess' bedroom? Pray and ask Jesus to help you trust Him as Joseph did, so you can clean your room carefully. Remember that God has a wonderful future planned for you. You can tell us what happened when we get together for the next part of Joseph's story.

TUESDAY

We Can Depend on God's Promises

Genesis 40

Visual aids

Bring something that would remind children of a jail, such as handcuffs. Provide drawing supplies plus small pieces of paper and pencils.

Introduction

How many of you cleaned your bedroom so it is clean enough for a prince or princess? Give affirmation and assure those who haven't done it that they can continue to work on it. Have you ever had to wait for something? Let children briefly tell their stories. Has someone been mean to you while you were waiting? Show children the visual aids and ask them what they remind them of. When they mention jail, ask them what kind of people should be in jail. Would it be fair for good people to get put in jail? What can you tell me about Joseph's being put in jail?

Story

Joseph worked for Potiphar for 10 years. That was a long time to wait for his dreams to come true, wasn't it? How old was he when he went to Egypt? (17) So how old was he after working for Potiphar? (27) Let's read what the Bible says about Joseph during these years (Gen. 39:2-6). Was Joseph a good worker? Was he faithful to God? Did Potiphar like Joseph? How did Joseph look? It sounds like everything was

going great for Joseph, right?

What had Joseph learned while he was working for Potiphar? Give hints to generate the following answers: *the Egyptian language as spoken by high government officials; how to live in a palace instead of a tent; how to dress, eat, and behave like a wealthy government official.* He also learned how powerful Potiphar was. Back in those days high government officials could kill people if they didn't like them. That's not good, but that's the way Egypt was back then. Was it important for Joseph to understand how the government did things? Does God put us where we will learn what we will need to know?

Now, Satan really caused Joseph a lot of trouble. Potiphar's wife noticed the handsome Joseph. She invited him to sin with her. But she was the wife of his boss. She could get him in trouble with Potiphar by telling lies about him. What should he do? Let's read what Joseph said to her (Gen. 39:9). Is it more important for us to agree with people or to do what God wants us to do?

Joseph made a good choice, didn't he? But what happened to him when he made that good choice? He got thrown in jail! Let's read Psalm 105:18 to find out. Joseph, who made the right choice, was hurt by bad people. Why didn't Potiphar kill Joseph when his wife lied? Maybe he didn't really believe his wife's lies. Maybe he thought Joseph had done the right thing.

Now Joseph waited in prison. Do you think he lay on his prison cot and cried and did nothing while he waited? (Gen. 39:20-23). He worked hard while he waited. When you and I have to wait for something, we will feel happier if we work while we wait. God blessed Joseph, and he was put in charge of everything in the prison. What was Joseph waiting for? God had promised him a good future, hadn't He? Could Joseph depend on God's promises?

After Joseph had been in prison for about a year, two government officials came in as prisoners. One of them had baked the bread that the king ate. And the other one had protected the king's cup, pouring drinks for the king and tasting the drinks to be sure that nobody tried to poison the king. But now the

king was mad at these men and made them prisoners.

One morning Joseph came to see them and found both the baker and the cupbearer looking sad. They said they had dreamed strange dreams. But they didn't know what they meant. Read what Joseph said to them in Genesis 40:8. *If there is time and the children are interested, go through both dreams. Otherwise, just say that what Joseph said came true.*

When the cupbearer heard that he would be let out of prison he promised Joseph he would try to help him get out of prison (Gen. 40:23).

Two years went by. Joseph waited in prison. Do you think it was easy to wait all that time? Did he get mad and stop doing his work? Do you think he felt God had forgotten him? What helped him have faith that he could depend on God's promises? *If needed, give hints so the children mention the blessings Joseph received in the prison or his family stories.* He didn't know it yet, but something exciting was about to happen.

Application

Have you ever been promised something by someone and they forgot to do it? Listen to their stories. People sometimes forget their promises, don't they? But does God forget? Why do you think God sometimes waits a long time to fulfill His promises? Accept all answers, but guide children to understand that God knows the best time for something to happen.

Decision

How many of you want to believe God's promises as Joseph did? Let's pray and ask Jesus to help us. Prayer.

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of Joseph in prison for their book.

Assignment

What could you do at home to help someone in your family? Hand out small pieces of paper for the task to be written

down. Assist those who cannot write. I want you to take this paper that shows the promise you made. Ask Jesus to help you do a good job. While you work, I want you to think about Joseph and how you are preparing for the future as he did. Tomorrow come back and tell us what happened.

WEDNESDAY

Does God Perform Miracles?

Genesis 41

Visual aids

Equipment: Two glasses, salt, two fresh eggs. Provide drawing supplies. **Preparation:** Mix plenty of salt (about 10 heaping teaspoons) into a half glass of water. Fill the second glass half full of fresh water. Practice this experiment ahead of time.

Introduction

Who wants to tell about doing the task that you wrote down? Listen to their stories. Show children the "miracle" you have brought. Don't tell the children there is any difference between the two waters. Try floating an egg in each glass, the glass with salt water and the glass with freshwater. The egg will float in the salt water because it is more dense than the fresh water. But the egg will sink in the fresh water because it is less dense than salt water. Don't explain yet, but let the children discuss how it works.

Now lift the eggs out of the glasses, hold a spoon down in the saltwater glass above the level of the salt water, and slowly pour the fresh water into the salt water, letting the water flow over the spoon. Don't mix the liquids. Gently lower the egg into the water. It should float on the salt water and look as if it is suspended in the middle of the glass. Ask the children if they know what "miracle" means. Finally show them how this "miracle" works. Help them to grasp that something seems miraculous when we don't understand it. Nothing is a miracle to God, because He understands everything.

In our story today something

happens that seems like a miracle, but God was in control.

Story

You could have the children role-play this segment of the story as you tell it. The king of Egypt had a bad night. Strange dreams bothered him. The dreams differed from each other, but seemed similar. What could they mean? In the morning the dreams were clear in his mind, and troubling. He called the magicians and wise men together and told them all the details of the dreams. They couldn't help him. Why do you think they couldn't tell the king what the dreams meant? Whom do you think God wanted to have interpret the dreams?

The king paid these people to understand the meaning of puzzles and dreams, and they didn't help him. His cupbearer stood there beside him. As the cupbearer saw the king's anger, he remembered when he'd had a dream too. Who had told him what the dream meant? Now the cupbearer told the king about the Hebrew slave who worked in the prison. He could interpret dreams.

"Bring him here," the king said. Servants hurried to get Joseph. What did Joseph need to do to be ready to talk to the king? (Gen. 41:14). When you woke up this morning, were you ready to talk to _____? Use the name of the head of state in your country.

Who had prepared Joseph for this moment? Each day he had done the work he was given to do, depending on God to guide his life. And God had guided his life, so he had learned all the things he would need when he went before the king. He knew the right way to dress and talk and act. But how would he know what to say? (Gen. 41:15, 16). Who would tell Joseph what to say?

God told Joseph what to say. Joseph told the king that God had revealed to him what He was going to do. *Go through the details of the dreams if you have time and the children are interested.* God would send seven good years. Lots of food would grow, and the animals would be fat. Then seven . . . years would come when no food would grow, and the animals would not be able to find anything to eat. Joseph even told the king what he should do to

protect his people during the bad years.

Would the king of Egypt believe what a slave said? (Gen. 41:37-43).

Where was Joseph when he woke up that morning? What happened by the end of the day? (Gen. 41:45). What two things did the king give him? Does all of this sound like a miracle? Miracles are events we can't understand. And we surely can't understand how in one morning Joseph went from being a prisoner to being prime minister of Egypt. Was it a miracle to God? No, because God had been guiding Joseph, putting him in just the right places. Now God saw that it was just the right time for Joseph to be put in charge of saving food so people would not starve when the bad years came. How old was Joseph when this happened? Read Genesis 41:46 to find out.

Joseph was really busy, organizing the work, traveling through the country, supervising the collection of food to be saved for the seven bad years. Besides all that, during the good years he and his wife had two baby boys. Do you remember their names? (Gen. 41:50-52).

If you could be big brother Manasseh or little brother Ephraim, what would you most like to do with your daddy, Joseph? *Accept any answers they give. Suggest if they can't think of answers: ride in the chariot (Gen. 41:43), travel around the country, play on the piles of grain, stay home with Mommy, swim in the Nile River, ride boats on the Nile River, visit the king, visit a pyramid.*

Joseph saved food for millions of people. The Bible says he saved huge piles of it, like the sands of the sea (Gen. 41:49). He saved so much food that the arithmetic system of Egypt didn't have enough numbers or words to describe how much.

Application

Did God have a plan for Joseph's life? Did Joseph faithfully do his work every day while he waited for God's plan to work out? Does God have a plan for your life? Do you know what it is? What should you do while you wait to find out about God's plan for you?

Decision

Come and stand by me if you want to

live for Jesus each day as you wait to find out what plan He has for your life. Let's hold hands in a circle as we pray and ask Jesus to be with us and help us be faithful each day. *Prayer.*

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

Have the children draw a picture of Joseph as prime minister with his two little boys.

Assignment

Tell your family what you learned about miracles and about Joseph. Ask them if they have any idea what God's plan is for your life. Ask them how they discovered God's plan for their lives. Tomorrow you can share with us what you learned.

THURSDAY

The Family Together as Friends

Genesis 43-45

Visual aids

Bring pictures of the same person as a youth and as an adult (if possible, someone the children know). Have a few children help you set up a simple cross. You will need tape, pencils, and small pieces of paper. Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

Do you have something you want to share with us that you learned from talking with your family? Now I want you to look at these pictures. Do you know who this person is? And who is the person in the other picture? *Give them hints until they figure out that the pictures are the same person.* Do people look the same as they grow older? Have



you seen pictures of your parents as children? In our story Joseph is now prime minister. Do you think he looked the same as he did at 17?

Story

The seven wonderful years passed. Joseph had the mountains of grain ready. Just as God had said, the seven terrible years came. Farmers in Egypt and other countries planted, but their plants shriveled up and died. Families ran out of food. Can you think of a family in Canaan worried about having food to eat? They lived about 200 miles (332 kilometers) north of Egypt. Let's look at the map. Yes, it was Jacob's family.

Do you think they had been happy during the 22 years after Joseph left? Grandfather Isaac had died. Jacob was sad. Do you think Joseph's being gone made the brothers happy? Did you ever do something wrong and try to keep it a secret? How did it make you feel?

The animals got hungry, and the family ran out of food. Someone told Jacob they could buy food in Egypt. So he told his sons to go buy food. Let's read Genesis 42:1 and find out what they did. Why did they keep looking at each other? Now let's read verses 3-5. Finally the 10 older brothers did go to Egypt.

In Genesis 42:6-9 we find what happened when they arrived. How could Joseph recognize them, yet they not recognize him? Had Joseph changed more than they had? What did Joseph remember when the brothers bowed down to ask him to sell them grain?

Joseph asked his brothers questions. Whom did Joseph want to find out

about? Then he accused them of being spies and put them in prison for three days. Why did he do that? Was he mad and trying to get even? Let's read what happened next in Genesis 42:18-24.

Instead of using the following five paragraphs, depending on your group of children, you may want to have the children role-play the story or read Genesis 42:25 through Genesis 45. Ask questions to be sure the children understand what is happening.

So Joseph sent all of them home but one brother. He put Simeon back in prison to ensure that little brother Benjamin would come on the next trip. Nine sad brothers went home to tell their father what had happened. Jacob thought he had now lost two sons, both Joseph and Simeon. He was determined that Benjamin not go to Egypt. Does it sound like Benjamin was now the favorite son?

Time went by, and food ran short again. Jacob told the older brothers to go buy more. They refused to go without Benjamin, and finally Jacob agreed.

When Joseph saw his 10 brothers, he told his servant to take them to his palace and prepare a feast. What happened?

The next morning they left for home with food for their families. Just when they got outside the city, Joseph's servant caught up with them and accused them of stealing Joseph's special cup. Where did they find the cup? Now they had a chance to get rid of another brother who was their father's favorite. Were they happy about it? What had happened to the brothers since they sold Joseph? During the years that they kept that awful secret, God gave them time to change. Were they willing to hurt their father again?

Judah, the fourth brother, made a speech to Joseph, pleading for Benjamin to go home to their father.

Now Joseph couldn't control his feelings anymore. What did he do? Did Joseph blame the brothers for the mean things they had done? Read verses 7 and 8. Who did Joseph say had sent him to

Egypt, and why? Do you think God is in control of your life and where you live?

Joseph enjoyed the happiest day he had had for a long time—together again with his family. Now they were friends. Joseph told his brothers to hurry back and bring the whole family to live in Egypt, where they would have food during the years of famine. What did Joseph tell them as they left?

Application

Have you ever heard the word “reconciled”? Do you know what it means? It means that people who had problems between them have become friends. Joseph and his brothers were reconciled, weren’t they? Have you disliked someone and finally ended up being friends with them? It feels good to be reconciled, doesn’t it? Somebody has reconciled you and me to God. Who is it? Let’s read Colossians 1:21-23. Can you say this with me?

1. We all used to hate and disobey God.
2. Jesus died to reconcile us to God, to help us see Him as our friend.
3. God will introduce us in heaven as holy, perfect people.
4. Our part is to depend on God while we wait for Jesus to come.

Do you know what we just talked about? It is called the gospel. When you hear someone talk about the gospel, you will know what it is. Let’s say it again.

Decision

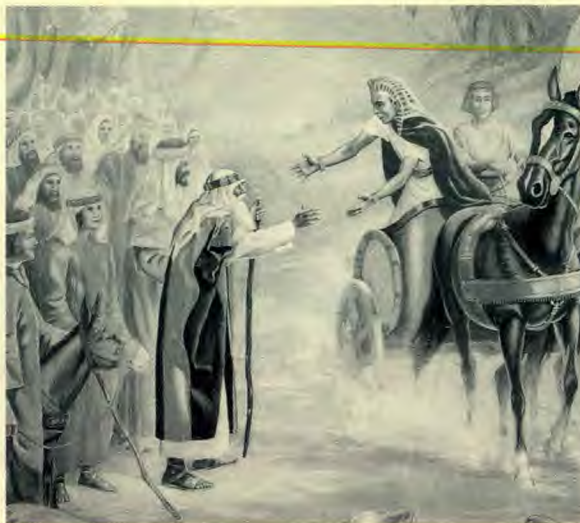
What does Joseph’s story teach you to do if someone is mean to you? Should you try to get even with that person? Would you like Jesus to help you be like Joseph and forgive people who are mean to you? If so, come and stand here with me while we pray and ask God to give us a kind and forgiving spirit. *Prayer.*

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

To add to the book they are making, have the children draw pictures of Joseph telling his brothers who he is.



Assignment

I want you to think of someone you need to forgive. Crumple one of these pieces of paper to show that you want Jesus to help you forgive them. Don’t write anything on it, because this is just between you and Jesus. Then tape the crumpled paper to the cross, because it was Jesus on the cross who forgave you, reconciled you to God, and made it possible for you to forgive others. When you go home tonight, I want you to pray that God will help you find ways to be friends with that person you forgave, just as God is friends with you even though you sometimes make mistakes and need to be forgiven.

FRIDAY

We Can Be Sure of the Holy Spirit’s Help

Genesis 39:3-6, 23; 41:38-41

Visual aid

Bring a green plant and an oil lamp.
Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

Are you happy because you forgave someone? Show the children the green plant and ask them what it needs to have the

power to grow. There are several answers, but when water is mentioned, emphasize it. Show the oil lamp and ask what it needs to have the power to give light. The Bible uses both water and oil to represent Someone important. Do you know who He is? In today’s part of our story about Joseph we will talk about how Joseph had the power to be God’s representative.

Story

What made Joseph’s brothers happy as they hurried home? How do you think they felt about telling Jacob that Joseph was a ruler in Egypt? What did Jacob think when he heard the news? (Gen. 45:25-28).

The first night that Jacob was on the way to Egypt, God spoke to him. Read what happened in Genesis 46:1-4. Can you find the city on the map where Jacob camped? God repeated the promises He had given to Abraham and Isaac. Why hadn’t God told Jacob about Joseph during all those long years? What would Jacob have done if he had known that Joseph had been sold as a slave in Egypt? Only God knew the right time for Joseph and his family to be together again. Jacob, Joseph, and the brothers had to wait for God’s timing.

Was it God’s plan for Jacob’s family to live in Egypt? (Gen. 15:13, 14).

Jacob became very old, and before he died he called together his 12 sons and told something special about each one. When he told about Joseph, Jacob revealed how Joseph became such a powerful witness for God. Even though his brothers attacked him and others tried to hurt him, Joseph remained faithful to God, doing his work day by day, showing the kind of God he worshiped.

What was it that gave the plant power to grow? What was it that gave the lamp power to be a light? Who do the water and oil represent in the Bible? Do you think this same power was the secret of Joseph’s success?

In Genesis 49:24, 25 we find that Jacob repeats the secret of Joseph’s power in four different ways:

1. Because of the hand of the Mighty One.

2. Because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.

3. Because of your father's God.

4. Because of the Almighty.

Do you think Jacob was happy to see how powerfully God had worked in Joseph's life? Potiphar had discovered Joseph's secret. The warden in the prison discovered the secret of Joseph's power (Gen. 39:23). Pharaoh, the Egyptian king, discovered the secret.

God was the secret of Joseph's ability to do everything well. God sends His Holy Spirit to work in the lives of people who love Him and follow His guidance. All the people who knew Joseph knew that the God he served was a mighty God. So God could accomplish great things through him.

Application

When we study Joseph's life, we find that God's Holy Spirit helped him wait, work hard, and be willing to suffer rather than be unfaithful to God. Is God willing to send His Holy Spirit to work in our lives like He did for Joseph? Is there anything we need to do to have the Holy Spirit working in our lives? What evidence have you seen of the Holy Spirit working in someone's life?

Decision

If you want God's Holy Spirit to work in your life, raise your hand. Let's pray that Jesus will help us be faithful so God's Spirit will work in us as He did in Joseph. *Prayer.*

Understanding

What was the most important idea you learned in this story?

Activity

Have the children add to their books by drawing a picture of Joseph greeting Jacob as his family arrived in Egypt.

Assignment

When you go home, talk to your parents about God's Holy Spirit. Ask them where they have seen Him working. Then ask them to pray with you that the Holy Spirit will work in you and your family so people will know you worship a mighty God.

SECOND SABBATH

Calvary: The Ultimate Security

Genesis 45:7, 8; 50:15-21

Visual aid

Provide drawing supplies.

Introduction

What did you learn about the Holy Spirit from talking with your family? *Let children talk briefly about what they learned. Hand out paper and pencils and ask the children to draw a picture of a time they were saved from danger or a problem. When they finish the pictures, have them explain their picture stories. After each story, have the children repeat Psalm 121:2 from the New International Version: "My help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth." Make a transition to the story by saying the following to the children:* In the last part of our story we will talk about Joseph saving his family and how his story reminds us of Someone who has saved you and me.

Story

This final part of the story is taken from Patriarchs and Prophets, pages 239, 240.

For 17 years Joseph lived happily with his family in Egypt. What would have happened to Joseph's family if he had not become ruler of Egypt?

After father Jacob died, the 10 older brothers feared that Joseph would now get even with them for the bad things they had done. We can read about it in Genesis 50:15-21. Did Jacob leave the instructions the brothers said he did? Why did they say that? What did Joseph say God intended to do by sending him to Egypt? God sent Joseph to Egypt to save lives. Do you and I need to be saved? Who saved us? God sent His Son, Jesus, to save us, didn't He?

All through his life Joseph believed God. He never doubted God's prophecies. The story of Joseph's life encourages us to believe also. But we have a better reason to believe in God's word. Because Jesus

died on the cross, we know how much God loves us and wants to live with us forever. This gives us assurance.

Today I want you to think about the ways that Joseph and Jesus were alike. Envious brothers sold Joseph to ensure his dreams could not come true. What did envious people do to Jesus? They thought if they killed Jesus, He could not become king. What happened? In both cases God used their wicked actions to make His plans happen.

By slavery in Egypt Joseph saved his family. What did Jesus go through to save you and me? Does that mean the wicked people were doing what God wanted them to do? No, God is never happy when people sin, because He knows that sin hurts. But God is so powerful that His plans will happen even if wicked people try to stop them.

Joseph was sold by his own brothers. Who sold Jesus?

Joseph was lied about and punished for something he did not do. What about Jesus?

Joseph forgave his brothers who had done wrong. What about Jesus?

Application

We started this week by saying that the stories Joseph heard were for you and me as well as for him. Do you think Joseph's life story is told in the Bible for you? Now that we have finished his story, what part of it did you like most? What did you learn from that? How does it help you feel closer to your Saviour, Jesus?

Decision

Do you love Jesus for saving you? Let's gather in a circle and kneel as we pray and thank Jesus for being our Saviour and Friend. We can thank Him for the story of Joseph, which helps us understand Jesus better. *Prayer.*

Activity

Have children complete and admire their Joseph books.

Virginia Smith is director of Children's Ministries of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists in Silver Spring, Maryland.



In Full Assurance

A Message From the President

Let us draw near with a true heart in *full assurance of faith*, having our hearts sprinkled from an evil conscience, and our bodies washed with pure water" (Heb. 10:22).

Of all people, Seventh-day Adventists should know what it means to have this "full assurance of faith."

Why? Because that verse itself was written in the context of Christ as our great high priest, an area where the Adventist Church has been particularly blessed with great light.

According to Hebrews, we can have this full assurance because we have a High Priest who is our representative,



One who has paved the way into the heavenly sanctuary and is there to "appear in the presence of God for us" (Heb. 9:24).

The chasm between humanity and God, caused by sin, has been bridged by Jesus Christ. The barrier between God and humanity has been breached. By His perfect sacrifice, Jesus, the God-man, has made a new and living way for us to have access to

God in the heavenly sanctuary (see Heb. 10:19-22).

The key to our full assurance in faith is that Jesus has already "obtained eternal redemption for us" (Heb. 9:12). By His death on Calvary He paid the penalty for our sins, and now He stands in our stead in the heavenly sanctuary, pleading the merits of His perfect righteousness in our behalf. Not because we deserve anything but death, but because of His great love and mercy. At the cross Jesus bore the wrath of God's righteous indignation against sin so that we never have to. Instead, we can have access to God in the heavenly sanctuary because of the eternal redemption that Jesus has already obtained in our behalf.

Talk about assurance!

Accepting Christ *by faith*, we know that our hope does not come from what we have done, but from what Christ has done for us. "Therefore being justified by faith," Paul said, "we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ: by whom also we *have access by faith* into this grace

wherein we stand, and rejoice in hope of the glory of God" (Rom. 5:1, 2).

To a discouraged sister in Christ Ellen White penned one of her most beautiful statements on assurance: "The message from God to me for you is 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37). If you have nothing else to plead before God but this one promise from your Lord and Saviour, you have the assurance that you will never, never be turned away. It may seem to you that you are hanging upon a single promise, but appropriate that one promise, and it will open to you the whole treasure house of the riches of the grace of Christ. Cling to that promise and you are safe. 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' *Present this assurance to Jesus, and you are as safe as though inside the city of God*" (Manuscript Releases, vol. 10, p. 175; italics supplied).

So as we contemplate the theme of this year's Week of Prayer, let us keep our eyes fixed upon Jesus, not only as our sacrifice, but as our high priest, knowing that our hope of salvation, our full assurance in faith, rests upon Him who "ever liveth to make intercession" for us (Heb. 7:25).

At this critical time let us use every resource provided for our spiritual enrichment (including the *Adventist Review*, through which these readings come to you)* to help us on our Christian journey. If we keep our focus on Jesus, grasping the promises by faith, we will, by His grace, never fail of eternal life.

Sincerely your brother,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, reading "Robert S. Folkenberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.

* For information on how to subscribe, see the ad on page 39.



The Good Samaritan Sculpture in the center of the campus represents the philosophy of Loma Linda University and Medical Center in their efforts to be channels for God's grace to a hurting world.

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In the past several years, Loma Linda University and Medical Center have had the privilege of bringing healing, health, and wholeness to humanity in the following places:

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Tanzania
Uganda
Zambia
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Romania
Slovakia
Spain
Turkey

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Sri Lanka
Thailand
Vietnam

Trans-European Division

Denmark
Ireland
Israel
Kuwait
Lebanon
Norway
Poland
Saudi Arabia
Sudan
United Arab Emirates



MARLENE GILLEROTH



SHAWN WEAY

Music to His Ears

Just how should the halls come alive?

BY STEVE CASE

WHEN WE ALL
get to heaven,
What a day of
rejoicing that will
be!

When we all see Jesus,
We'll sing and shout the victory!"¹

But what shall we do in the meantime? How do we "sing and shout" the smaller victories this side of heaven, especially when it comes to a mixed group of people called a church congregation? If people listen to whatever they choose when they are on their own, regardless of church instruction or admonition, what should we do when the congregation comes together to worship on Sabbath? Whose music will we utilize when we seek to praise God as a group?

What the Bible Says

Ideally we use the music of heaven to praise God as a congregation. But what does *that* sound like? What does Scripture reveal to us concerning God's music? A text written to a congregation regarding group music states, "Speak to one another with psalms, hymns and spiritual songs. Sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" (Eph. 5:19, NIV; cf. Col. 3:16).

The term *psalms* refers to the Old

Testament Psalter and other newer psalms. "Hymns" are praises to God composed by believers and sung by the whole group. In pagan circles hymns had been sung to eulogize a god or cultic hero. Christians followed this same practice, but exalted the name of Christ or God as their hero. The term *spiritual songs* simply refers to any other type of religious music, with or without musical instruments or accompaniment, and even includes spontaneous singing in the Spirit or meditation. To "sing and make music in your heart to the Lord" is to utilize music with the proper motivation of worship to God.²

This hardly defines or limits the sound of appropriate music for a congregation. A modern paraphrase might read "Sing Scripture songs, current praise songs, contemporary songs that exalt Jesus rather than the gods of the age, and use any kind of music that enhances the congregation's worship provided that you are worshiping God from your heart."

The book of Psalms provides us with a hymnal of 150 songs. We have the lyrics, but we don't have the music. Some consider this unfortunate. If we had the music, we would know what music God desires or requires for appropriate worship. In actuality, it might be God's intention to keep the music unknown. If we had the musical scores, we might think they provided

the only sound God approved. We would limit acceptable music to a minor key, antiphonal chants with a typical range of six tones, no set rhythm, and no deliberate harmony.³

The last psalm, while not providing the style of music, at least provides us with the type of musical instruments recommended to praise Jehovah, such as trumpet, harp, lyre, tambourine, strings, flute, and cymbals (Ps. 150). It would be misleading to make a direct link from the Old Testament instruments to contemporary ones.⁴ But it's interesting to take the musical instruments of Psalm 150 and compare them with those of Nebuchadnezzar's Babylonian orchestra in Daniel 3. The reader can note the similarities and differences. Evidently the fact that some musical instruments were utilized for evil or pagan worship didn't prevent the same instruments from being used to praise God. Elements absent in the worship of the golden image in Daniel 3 but present in Psalm 150 to praise Yahweh include strings (are you thinking of violins or guitars?), cymbals, resounding cymbals, and dancing.

The Bible simply isn't clear on what the music of heaven sounds like, or what our music on earth should sound like in our praise to God. Feeble attempts to identify the sound usually color the presenter as someone whose

mind had already been made up and who then looks for verses of Scripture that could be ripped out of context to provide authority for one's preconceived opinion.⁵

What About Our Church?

Rarely do the lyrics of a song create tension. It is usually the music that divides individuals within a group. I have at least three different recordings of the hymn "All Creatures of Our God and King." One is by the London Philharmonic Choir and Orchestra, another is by Scott Wesley Brown, and the third is an African tribal song by First Call, with an antiphonal English translation. All three musical styles could be used in worship. Which one would be appropriate worship for your church? It probably depends on the individual tastes of the members of the group in the culture in which you worship.

And culture is not simply a geographical phenomenon. I've played

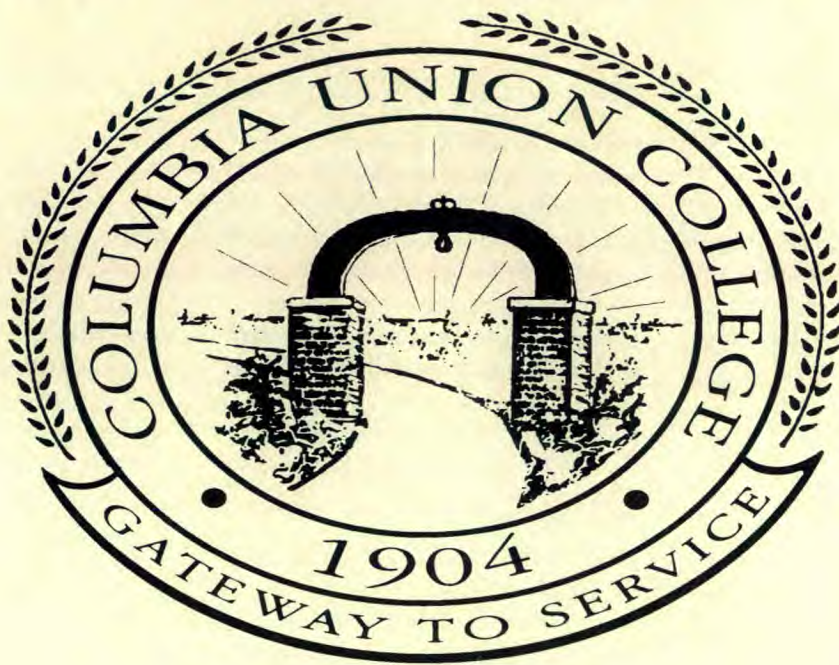
"Variations on a Hymn," by GLAD, to groups of people with various ages present. This song presents a set of religious lyrics to popular tunes from various decades of musical styles in North America. It's amazing to watch the responses of people. The styles that predate individuals create a smile or a smirk. Styles from one's adolescence or young adult years (during which most people's musical tastes become fixated) enrapture the people as they participate from their inner selves. Styles that are newer than one's own time period create silence or distress.

This is also demonstrated at most camp meetings. Those responsible for youth programming must choose between musical groups that reach young people but might offend adults or musical groups that adults condone but fail to reach young people. Most opt for the latter, because adults tend to fill the youth meeting area (for a variety of reasons), squeezing the youth outside where they can talk to

their friends and make new ones. When program planners target the youth in selecting musical groups, some adults are certain to object because they consider such music inappropriate (translation: "I don't like it as an adult") or satanic (translation: "This style came after my teen years").

This is not an attempt to make light of a very serious situation. When a group comes together to worship God, music is a wonderful medium to communicate worship because it involves mind and heart, rendering it more appropriate for wholesome worship (see Matt. 22:37 and Deut. 6:5). But for music to be a gift of praise to God, it must be perceived by the giver as valuable.⁶ If the music seems mundane or heartless, it would hardly be a gift worthy to give to God. This might provide one reason some no longer attend our worship services: the music offered to God isn't a gift they'd give to a friend or relative, much less to God!

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We categorize various styles of music as either appropriate or inappropriate for worship. Since congregational music is for the worship of God, this might explain why some are so agitated with Adventist churches that include music outside of the hymnal. It is certainly not the music *they* would give as praise to God. Ironically, God hasn't yet made such a differentiation regarding styles of music, at least not in special revelation.

Don't Get So Emotional

I've been in a number of conversations regarding music, especially contemporary Christian music, but almost always find the conversations to be polarizing—or fruitless at best. Perhaps it's because we attempt to persuade with cognitive argumentation an element (music) that is affective. In other words, we argue brain-to-brain when the issue is really heart-to-heart. Because it's an emotional issue, many

of the "reasons" are presented or received irrationally.

While some consider music to be a universal language, it is universal in that music reaches and expresses emotions in every culture, not that a particular style of music touches the same emotion cross-culturally. That's why some churches utilize one style of music in their praise to God, while other churches select a different style. Both groups are presenting their heart and soul to God with a style of music appropriate for them.

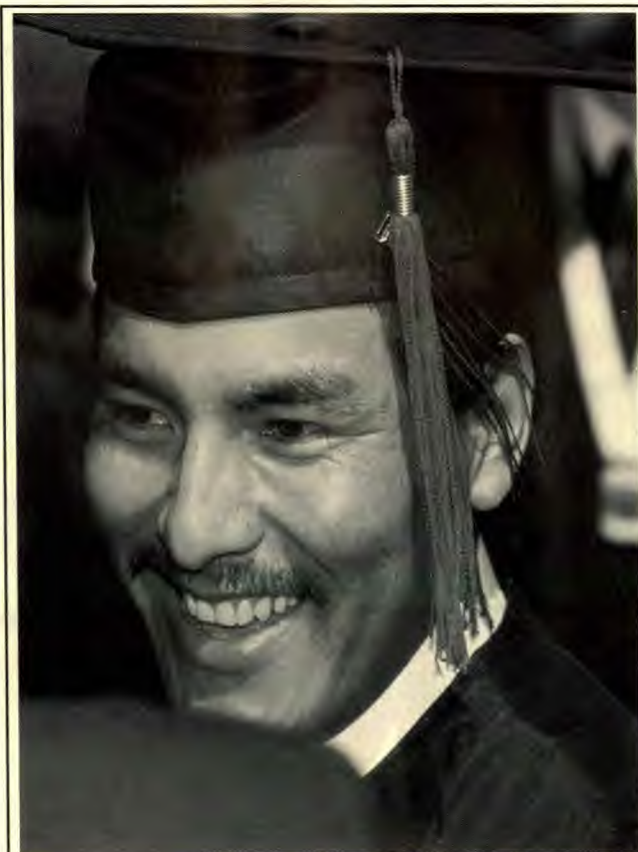
In general, Seventh-day Adventists tend to be cognitively oriented, with a distrust or disregard for the affective. We are more apt to refer to a text of Scripture as our source of authority rather than as the still small voice of the Holy Spirit impressing us. Music rarely forms the core of our worship. It is used to prepare the heart for the spoken word, which is geared to our thinking more than to our feeling.

Some criticize music with a "rock beat" because it bypasses the mind to work directly on the body (emotions). We would expect cognitively oriented people to be alarmed by such a possibility. We deny our emotions rather than incorporating them into our worship. This becomes comical when we try to use cognitive reasoning to explain behaviors motivated by our emotions. Shouldn't our worship music include our mind *and* our emotions? Emotionless music might be a form of godliness that denies its power.

A Hierarchy for Congregational Music

When it comes to congregational music, the following hierarchy has been presented, from best to worst.

1. Meaningful, moving experience.
2. Pleasant experience.
3. Mechanical, thoughtless participation.
4. Dull, boring, meaningless.



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5. Unpleasant or offensive.⁷

In which level would you rate the music in your congregation? While we seek the top level, too often we find ourselves worshipping in the lower levels. If your congregational music is mechanical, thoughtless participation (level 3), at least it's not dull, boring, meaningless (level 4), or even worse, unpleasant or offensive (level 5). However, on any given week the various songs employed might place the congregation at different levels for different songs or various members of the congregation in different levels for the same song.

It's unlikely that an entire congregation will be in the same level for each musical portion of worship. In most cases, the larger the congregation, the greater the diversity and the less likely all members will be in the higher levels of the hierarchy.

What Shall We Do?

In places where several Adventist churches are within driving distance to afford a choice, each church tends to develop its own style or ministry, including its worship service. In such settings people select an Adventist congregation they can associate with best, including the music utilized in worship. Some churches even provide multiple or alternate worship experiences to enable a greater diversity of people to experience pleasant and even meaningful worship.

Some Adventists are so weary of worshipping with dull, boring, and meaningless music (level 4) because influential members of the congregation consider their choice of worship music to be unpleasant or offensive (level 5) that they now attend concerts for a meaningful, moving worship experience rather than their church. Congregations would do well to stretch their parameters of musical styles. This should be done gradually, in a way similar to introducing new foods to an infant. The context needs to be set, and members need to see how powerfully personal taste erro-

Shouldn't our worship music include our mind and our emotions?

neously colors what we believe God would accept.

The styles of music your specific congregation employs for its worship experience probably are set by a few people—the pastor, the choir director (if the church has a choir), or the music committee—acting on behalf of the entire congregation. Other interested individuals can and should make their requests known to these congregational music power brokers.

We would do well to place the emphasis on the motivation of our music and worship, and to welcome and accept the gifts of praise offered by sincere hearts. That's what God does. ■

¹ Chorus from Eliza E. Hewitt, "When We All Get to Heaven," *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal* (Hagerstown, Md.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1985).

² See *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1957), vol. 6, p. 1035. See also *Expositor's Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Pub. House, 1978), vol. 11, pp. 72, 73; *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1962), vol. 2, pp. 667, 668.

³ Eugene F. Durand, "Guidelines for Music—1," *Adventist Review*, Sept. 5, 1991, referring to Helen G. Grauman's *Music in My Bible* (Mountain View, Calif.: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., 1956).

⁴ "Musical Instruments of the Ancient Hebrews," *The Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 29.

⁵ Examples of this are Bill Gothard's "Ten Scriptural Reasons Why the 'Rock Beat' Is Evil in Any Form" and Al Menconi's "Dear Mr. Gothard: A Commonsense Response to Bill Gothard's Criticisms of Today's Christian Music."

⁶ Mark 12:41-44 and John 4:21-24 provide the essence of this and should not be confused with Genesis 4:2-5.

⁷ Robert H. Mitchell, *Ministry and Music* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1978), p. 19.

Steve Case, Ph.D., is president of Piece of the Pie Ministries, Carmichael, California.



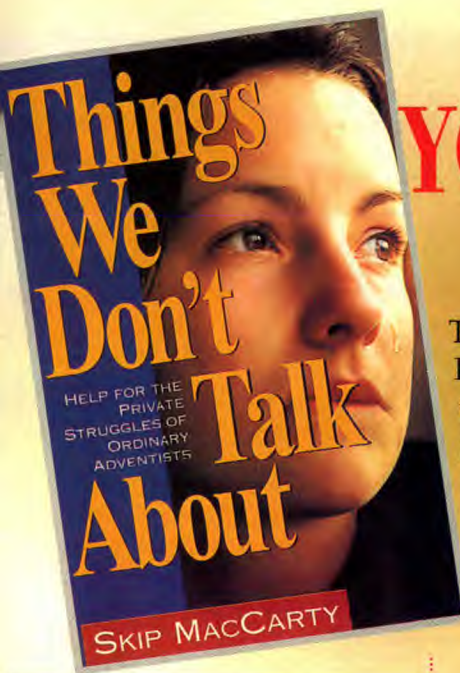
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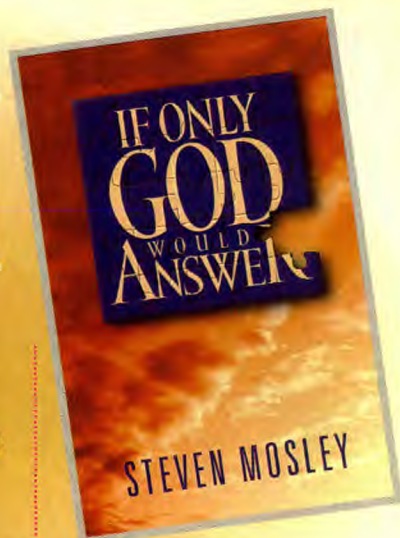


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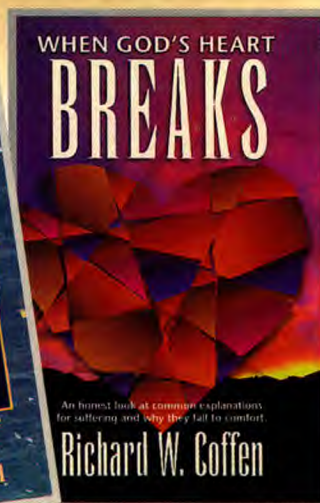
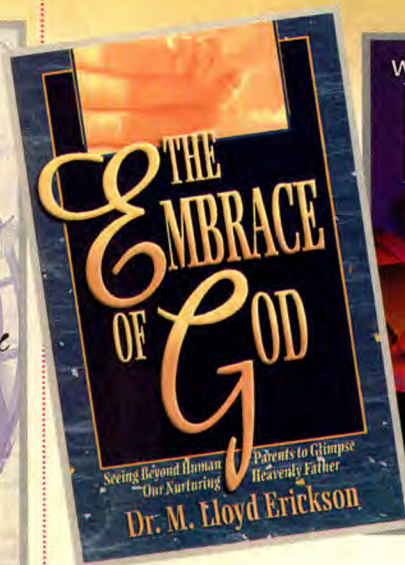
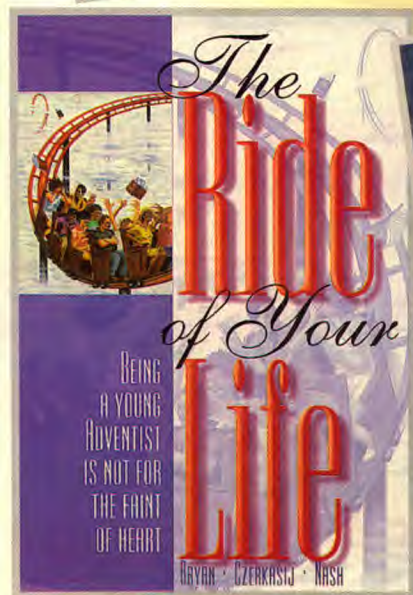


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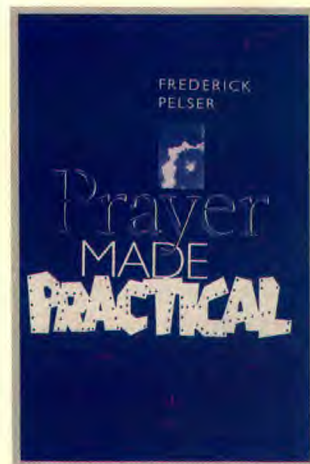


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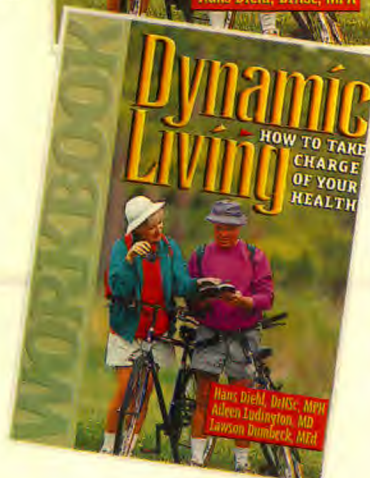
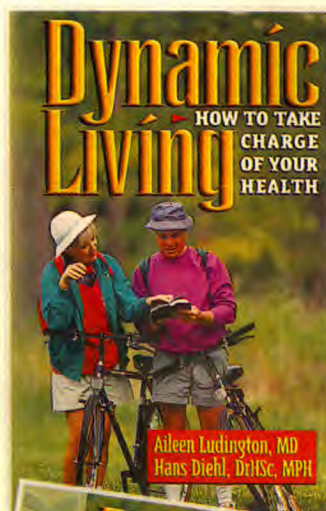
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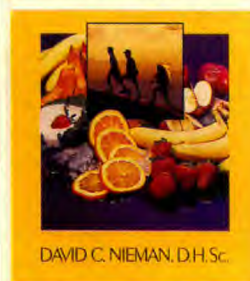
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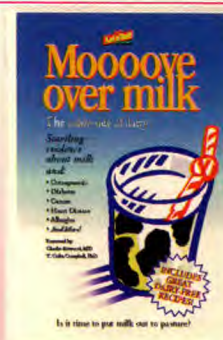
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Set Free to Worship

Escaping the bondage of "having it our own way"

BY DALE MARTIN AND RICHARD O'FILL

THERE IS A GROWING CONVICTION IN the Adventist Church that we ought to be more intentional in our efforts to reach the unsaved and the unchurched. Tethered to this need is the reality that true worship is, more often than not, missing in many of our churches. In the context of the three angels' messages, which clearly outline true and false worship, we must think biblically as we implement ways to worship God "in spirit and in truth" (John 4:24). The challenge that confronts us is to reach

out to the unsaved and the unchurched, yet not jeopardize the integrity of the good news. We must especially avoid methodologies that could ultimately mislead those for whom we are working.

Confronting Darkness With Darkness

The unchurched or unbelieving person comes to us with ideologies that Scripture calls "darkness." Jesus makes it clear in John 3:19 that the world "loved darkness" (NIV). The biblical way to deal with darkness is to confront it



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incomplete. Wouldn't it be more biblical to add "holy" and "committed to truth" to the list of church objectives?

Finding Appropriate Music

A discussion of holiness in worship invariably brings us to music. Relevance, user-friendliness, and some Christian content are often the only criteria used when selecting worship music. If Martin Luther is correct—that music is the

"handmaiden to theology"—then we should use great care in choosing music to worship our holy God.

The Psalms are inspired illustrations of appropriate worship music content, being almost perfectly balanced among three categories: praise to God, correction, and teaching. What a contrast to

lovingly with light. Creating a church environment that makes ideologies of darkness feel comfortable is to confront, as it were, darkness with darkness. There is a real danger that, in trying to reach the "lost," we find ourselves incorporating into the church concepts and perspectives incompatible with the truth and purity that the gospel represents.

We often hear that the church is a hospital for sinners, but it must be borne in mind that a hospital is where the sick go to get well. According to the metaphor, the church is a place where one goes as part of the getting-well process. Persons satisfied with themselves the way they are may not feel comfortable with the gospel call to repent (to change, to get well). Also, much is said these days about the church being an accepting place, but there is a real danger that the word "accepting" may be confused with "status quo." A person who loves "the world" and "the things that are in the world" (1 John 2:15) may not feel comfortable in the church. It is even likely that many of the unconverted's felt needs are diametrically opposed to what salvation is all about.

Worship in Holiness

The trend to design worship to meet the needs of the worshiper may also frustrate true worship. Worship is not about the worshiper, but about

the One being worshiped. It may sound strange, but if worship is adoring, honoring, and in the ultimate sense, obeying God, a person not born again could hardly be a worshiper in "spirit and in truth." This is undoubtedly why the call to the world in Revelation 14 is first a call to "fear God, and give glory to him" (verse 7). Therefore, those who fear and give glory to Him are those who worship Him. Psalm 29:2 underscores the point of worship: "Give unto the Lord the glory due unto his name; worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness."

Unfortunately, holiness often becomes an option in a user-friendly environment in which meeting the needs of the worshiper is paramount. More and more we hear the call for the church to be "loving," "accepting," and "forgiving." This list is not wrong, just

DICK DUERSEN



the shallow, mostly emotional content of much contemporary Christian music, where correction and teaching are virtually nonexistent. Much of the emphasis in contemporary Christian music is on the first category: praise. Chuck King, minister of music and worship at the Wheaton College church, recently stated "that those



who major in the contemporary music style know that God is 'awesome' and 'majestic,' but they don't have a clue why." Their God, he said, "becomes narrow and shallow."¹

Some who advocate the use of contemporary Christian music in the church are often heard saying that the message of the song is all that matters, that the music itself is amoral. If the music is amoral, then at least three questions must be asked:

First, why do platinum-selling secular artists not believe that? Paul McCartney, originally of the Beatles and a solo artist since the 1970s, told the *Washington Post*: "The message is not in the lyrics, but in the music." Few people have had the kind of influence McCartney has had on contemporary music, and if he is right, then music is hardly amoral. It's little wonder, then, that philosopher Allan Bloom, in his best-seller *The Closing of the American Mind*, wrote that rock is characterized by "antinomianism" (without law) and that "young people know that rock is the beat of sexual intercourse."² To be fair, the kind of raucous music that McCartney and Bloom are describing isn't yet being advocated in most Adventist churches, but there are disturbing trends in that direction. Promoting the gospel message of our holy God through an unholy medium can only be called profanity.

Second, should music that reminds

the listener and participant of the secular songs of the day be introduced into the church?

It's time to put to rest the tired apocryphal story that Martin Luther used the "tavern tunes" of his day. Of the

melodies in Luther's 37 chorales, 15 were composed by him, 13 came from Latin hymns, four were from German religious folk songs, two had originally been religious pilgrim songs, two were from unknown origin, and only one came directly from a secular folk song.³ This one song appeared in Luther's first hymnal in 1535, but was replaced by an original tune in his 1539 hymnal. Historians believe that Luther discarded the secular tune because people associated it with its previous lyrics.⁴

Luther's goal was to replace the

world's music, not duplicate it. He used four-part harmony because he wanted to attract the worshiper away from secular songs.⁵

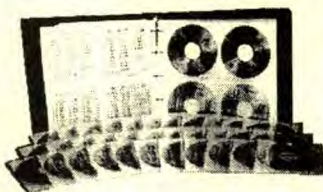
Interestingly, until the nineteenth century, church music had a major influence on all genres of music. Today, however, we find just the opposite. The culture of a secular and godless age frequently appears to be the driving force behind contemporary Christian music.

Third, shouldn't the collected wisdom of the people of God have a role in guiding the local congregation in its choices of appropriate worship music?

As members of a progressive movement, Seventh-day Adventists have the opportunity every five years to revisit and, if necessary, revise the language of the *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*. And as the *Church Manual* reads today, both persons and congregations are discouraged from using musical forms that borrow heavily from secular culture: "Great care should be exercised in the choice of music. Any melody partaking of the nature of jazz, rock, or related hybrid forms . . . will be shunned by persons of true culture."⁵

A person attuned to the sounds of secular culture may be bored when he or she goes to church and hears strains of "A Mighty Fortress" on the

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
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Which God Will We Worship?

We who seek to worship God "in spirit and in truth" must find our foundation again in Scripture. In Matthew 24 Jesus said that in the last days there would be many who would come in His name; not all who say they have been sent by God truly speak for Him. Adventist Christians will continue to face a fundamental issue about whether they are really worshiping the God of heaven or a pleasing substitute.

If our worship is being designed for the unconverted, or even for the believer, and not specifically centered in God alone, then we could unknowingly end up out of contact with the One who is our real life.

It has been rightly said that as indi-

viduals and as a corporate church, we can rise no higher than our concept of God.

Worship practices of all kinds must be constantly evaluated by prayer and the study of God's Word.

Drama, for example, is often a dubious carrier of the Word. While much of the Old Testament sanctuary service was inherently dramatic (a fact captured in the antiphonies and processional hymns of the Psalms), much contemporary Christian drama falls



short of conveying the majesty and grandeur of the God who is supposed to be the object of His people's worship. While widely popular in some churches today, this worship vehicle often contributes to the quest of the unconverted heart to "bring God down to our level." According to David



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Wells, of Gordon Cowell Seminary, much contemporary Christian drama is being employed as "a substitute for the Word of God."⁷

The early Church Fathers used a Latin adage we would do well to hear today: *Lex orandi, lex credendi* ("As the man worships, that is how he believes").

The struggle over what constitutes appropriate worship in the Adventist Church today is proving painful and protracted, and has come at a time when God's people should be pressing together rather than pursuing separate agendas. Those who argue for user-friendly churches frequently critique those who hold other viewpoints of inflexibility and unwillingness to compromise. If, however, worship is truly a moral issue—patterned by Scripture, informed by Scripture, and yes, even reformed by Scripture—then its format must be God-centered, not built on the changeable foundation of human preferences.

Contemporary efforts to make worship user-friendly are hardly the first. In 1 Kings 12:28, 29 we discover that Jeroboam was only trying to make worship more relevant and accessible to the people when he set up the golden calves in Dan and Bethel. The consequence of this sin ultimately brought about the destruction of Israel as a nation.

In the Christian Era Constantine took the lead in making Christian worship relevant to the people of the Roman Empire, Christians and non-Christians alike. Of course, he had to change the day of worship to do it.

On our knees, with our Bibles open before us, we will find little use for worship experiences that do not grow from a deep and abiding God-centeredness. As all of us repent of the desire to "have it our way," we'll be set free to worship Him "in spirit and in truth." ■

¹ Chuck King, seminar at Covenant College, Chattanooga, Tenn., June 1997.

² Allan Bloom, *The Closing of the American Mind*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), pp. 73, 77.

³ W. B. Squire, "Luther," *Grove's Dictionary of Music and Musicians* (New York: St. Martin's

Press, 1955), vol. 3, p. 255.

⁴ Ulrich S. Leupold, "Learning From Luther," *Journal of Church Music*, 7 (July/August 1966): 3; Paul Nettl, "Luther and Music," trans. Best/Wood (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1958), p. 48.

⁵ Friedrich Blume, *Protestant Church Music* (New York: W. W. Norton and Co., 1974), p. 10.

⁶ *Seventh-day Adventist Church Manual*, 15th ed., p. 153.

⁷ David Wells, in private conversation with Dale Martin.

Dale Martin is pastor of the Kenhorst Boulevard Seventh-day Adventist Church, Reading, Pennsylvania; Richard O'Ffill is director of Florida Conference Adult Ministries.



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In Spirit and Truth

Global Mission: helping them worship their Father—
in their own language

BY GARY KRAUSE

An adulterous woman from Samaria thirsts for truth and cries out to Jesus, "You Jews claim that the place where we must worship is in Jerusalem" (John 4:20, NIV).

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth" (John 4:23, NIV).

Buddhists in Sri Lanka, now becoming Seventh-day Adventists, cry out, "Must we worship in a church with doors and four walls?"



SRI LANKA

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Some Western Adventists cry out, "We want to worship our Lord with organ and piano and the singing of hymns."

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Other Western Adventists cry out, "We want to worship our Lord with guitars and the singing of praise songs."



SENEGAL

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

A new Adventist congregation established by Global Mission in West Africa cries out, "Your hymns don't move our hearts. Let us sing to the Lord in our language, with our melodies and our rhythms."

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

Muslims who, through Global Mission initiatives, now keep the Sabbath and look forward to the second coming of their newfound Saviour cry out, "Must we wear shoes when we worship?"

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."



MYANMAR

A young Global Mission pioneer in Haryana, north India, cries out, "May I translate the sacred Word to meet the culture of my people?"

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

David, a man after God's own heart, cries out, "Praise the Lord with harp; sing unto him with the psaltery and an instrument of ten strings. Sing unto him a new song; play skillfully with a loud noise" (Ps. 33:2, 3). Yes! And let's praise Him with vina and sitar and tamboura; praise Him with flutes, the oud, and the qanun; praise Him with quin and pipa; praise Him with the shakuhachi, gongs, samisen, and koto.



CUBA

And Jesus says, "True worshipers will worship the Father in spirit and truth."

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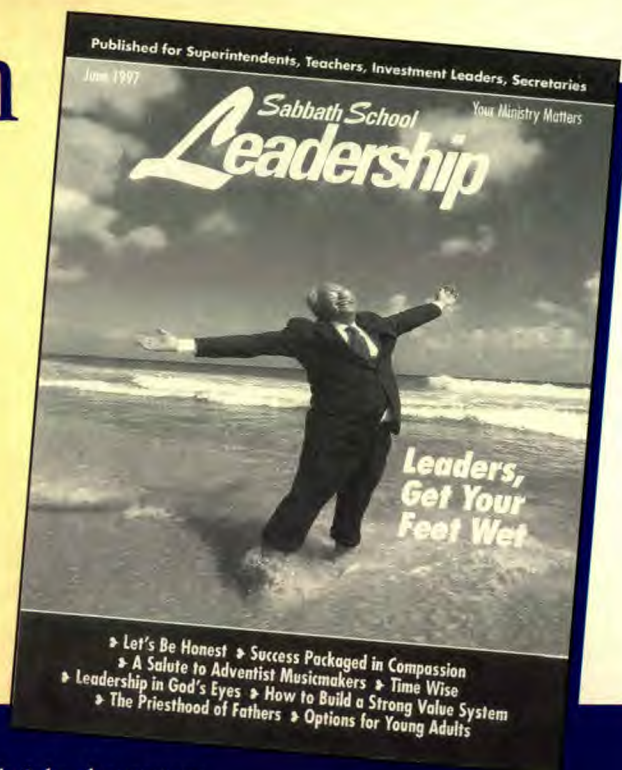
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A Symphony of Praise

Snapshots of worship submitted by
Review readers around the globe.

"Praise the Lord.

Praise God in his sanctuary;

praise him in his mighty heavens.

Praise him for his acts of power;

praise him for his surpassing greatness.

Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet,

praise him with the harp and lyre,

praise him with tambourine and dancing,

praise him with the strings and flute,

praise him with the clash of cymbals,

praise him with resounding cymbals.

Let everything that has breath praise the Lord.

Praise the Lord" (Ps. 150, NIV).



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