



December 15, 2005

A D V E N T I S T

Review

DISCIPLESHIP

Study of the Word



The Road

“Jesus said, ‘I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me’” (John 14:6, Message).

¹You’re blessed when you stay on course, walking steadily on the road revealed by God.

²You’re blessed when you follow his directions, doing your best to find him.

⁵Oh, that my steps might be steady, keeping to the course you set;

⁶Then I’d never have any regrets in comparing my life with your counsel.

⁹How can a young person live a clean life? By carefully reading the map of your Word.

¹⁰I’m single-minded in pursuit of you; don’t let me miss the road signs you’ve posted.

¹¹I’ve banked your promises in the vault of my heart so I won’t sin myself bankrupt.

¹⁴I delight far more in what you tell me about living than in gathering a pile of riches.

¹⁵I ponder every morsel of wisdom from you, I attentively watch how you’ve done it.

²⁰My soul is starved and hungry, ravenous!—insatiable for your nourishing commands.

²⁹Barricade the road that goes Nowhere; grace me with your clear revelation.

³⁰I choose the true road to Somewhere, I post your road signs at every curve and corner.

³²I’ll run the course you lay out for me if you’ll just show me how.

³⁴Give me insight so I can do what you tell me—my whole life one long, obedient response.

⁴¹Let your love, God, shape my life with salvation, exactly as you promised.

⁵⁰These words hold me up in bad times; yes, your promises rejuvenate me.

⁶⁴Your love, God, fills the earth! Train me to live by your counsel.

⁸⁸In your great love revive me so I can alertly obey your every word.

⁸⁹What you say goes, God, and *stays*, as permanent as the heavens.

⁹⁰Your truth never goes out of fashion; it’s as up-to-date as the earth when the sun comes up.

⁹²If your revelation hadn’t delighted me so, I would have given up when the hard times came.

¹⁰⁴With your instruction, I understand life; that’s why I hate false propaganda. ¹⁰⁵By your words I can see where I’m going; they throw a beam of light on my dark path.

¹⁰⁷Everything’s falling apart on me, God; put me together again with your Word.

¹¹¹I inherited your book on living; it’s mine forever—what a gift! And how happy it makes me!

¹¹⁴You’re my place of quiet retreat.

¹⁴⁴The way you tell me to live is always right; help me understand it so I can live to the fullest.

¹⁶⁸I follow your directions, abide by your counsel; my life’s an open book before you.

¹⁶⁹Let my cry come right into your presence, God; provide me with the insight that comes only from your Word.

¹⁷⁴I’m homesick, God, for your salvation; I love it when you show yourself!

¹⁷⁵Invigorate my soul so I can praise you well, use your decrees to put iron in my soul.

¹⁷⁶And should I wander off like a lost sheep—seek me! I’ll recognize the sound of your voice.

(Excerpts from Ps. 119, Message)

“Jesus said, ‘I am the Road, also the Truth, also the Life. No one gets to the Father apart from me’” (John 14:6, Message).

The Fullness of the Word

BY BILL KNOTT

Family tradition has it that when my father or any of his four sisters would complain about some kind of food on the dinner table or a particularly poor-tasting medicine, my English grandfather would insouciantly conclude, “That’s because you lack it in your system.”

Now, there’s not much science in a line like that: I have never believed, for instance, that my contempt for canned beets stemmed from the fact that I had eaten too few of them. Quite the contrary: one was more than enough.

But a line like that has a way of playing on the edges of your imagination, emerging at all sorts of unexpected moments when neither cauliflower nor castor oil is involved. On many an earnest morning as I sat at my desk and detected in my soul a desire to avoid some uncomfortable part of Scripture (the stories of Uzzah, Eli, or Ananias and Sapphira, parts of Joshua and Judges), some inner voice loudly whispered my grandfather’s bon mot: “That’s because you lack it in your system.”

And perhaps I did—did lack the difficult, unwelcome truth of a part of Scripture I too easily passed over. Flushed with the illusion that Scripture’s role in my life should always be inspirational—that I should mount up from my daily contact with the Word on eagle’s wings and soar into the sunshine of God’s love—I often migrated to more convivial surroundings: green pastures, noonday wells, even dark and sour stables. The “system” I constructed had too much of mountaintops about it, and not nearly enough valleys—too many narratives of joy and triumph, without the leavening of sorrow, loss, unanswered questions, and pain.

My theology—and probably yours—proclaims that the Bible is truly God’s Word for all seasons, that it speaks to us and should have authority in every life situation. But little about our usual methods of Bible study induces us to tackle challenging passages or complex understandings of the Father’s will. We want the Word to “fix” our mood, explain our loss, dry up our tears, instead of helping us achieve a sane and measured integration of its life-changing principles in our daily lives. We usually seek good feelings more than we seek godliness, preferring stories that tell us we are loved over those that urge us to live differently.

Here’s a call to a fuller embrace of the Word of God in our lives—to listening to its somberness as well as its celebrations. The stories and passages with which we actually wrestle will probably achieve more of God’s purposes in our lives than those we love to repeat. God’s grace and goodness are best glimpsed in the totality of His Word, and not only in those passages to which our Bibles naturally fall open. In that fuller embrace, we will discover that all our lack is supplied in Christ, and that in Him we are “equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:17, NIV).

Bill Knott is an associate editor of the *Adventist Review*.

ADVENTIST Review

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ADVENTIST Review

"Behold, I come quickly . . ."

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Fitted for a New MANTLE

BY GERRY WAGONER

American religious history is filled with churches you'll never find on Fifth Avenue or, for that matter, on Main Street, Paducah, Kentucky. In any comprehensive handbook of denominations you'll encounter the Dunkards and Shakers, the Two-Seed-in-the-Spirit Predestinarian Baptists, Hephzibah Faith Missionary Association, Fire Baptized Holiness Church of God of America, and the Old German Baptist Brethren.

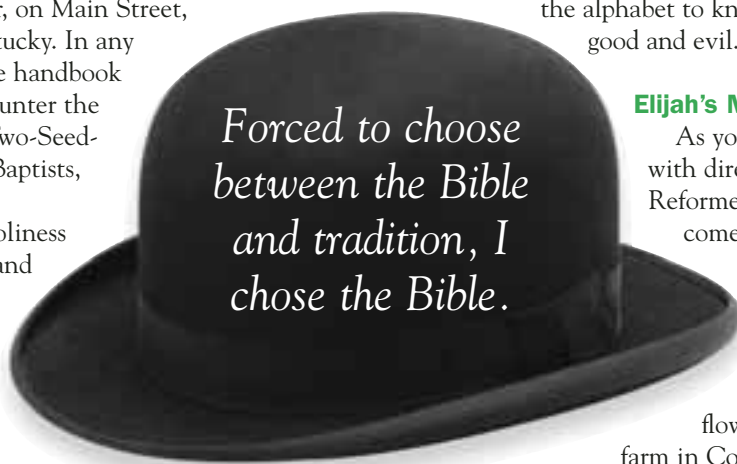
That last one was my church, going back seven generations. Old German Baptists originated in Schwarzenau, Germany, in 1708.

A blend of Mennonite, Anabaptist,* and Pietism, they arrived in America in 1729, where they found freedom to worship God as they pleased. Today they number about 5,200, and are generally known as either Amish or Mennonites. Think of them as Amish in minivans.

Nothing in my childhood motivated me to leave my church. My boyhood memories overflow with scenes of sincere worship and fellowship. That 80 percent of German Baptist youth remain in the church is a testimony to the attraction of the German Brethren way of life. My people value hard work; thus the skill to start one's own business is treasured more than an academic degree.

So it was with me. I had 25 years of construction experi-

ence under my belt when I turned 40. I also had a solid, TV-free education in the ABCs, and I knew enough of the rest of the alphabet to know the difference between good and evil.



Elijah's Mantle

As you would expect of a church with direct ties to the Anabaptist Reformers, membership doesn't come as a birthright; you choose a believer's baptism when you're ready, not before. For me, that choice came in 1984. I was baptized in the chilly spring that flowed through Uncle Carl's farm in Covington, Ohio. I witnessed

no heavenly phenomenon as I wiped the water from my face—just the quiet realization that I was carrying the torch for another generation. My fellow members expected this of me, and I determined to fulfill my twentieth-century Anabaptist role the best I could.

An ancient story stoked my determination. In my mind's eye I saw Elijah and Elisha cross the Jordan. They stood for a moment, the hand of the elder resting gently on the shoulder of the younger. A request is made, a conditional promise given, and they move on. Then a celestial chariot swoops down, and Elijah steps on board. Behind he leaves only the emblem of a fulfilled promise. Nothing on earth is as precious to Elisha as that old piece of Elijah's mantle.

Sixteen years ago the Lord led me back to this story and

left me with the conviction that I too had been given a mantle—a black broad-brimmed hat and pants that buttoned (no genuine mantle would have a zipper). It came with a question every believer must answer: Did your mantle fall from heaven or from tradition?

My Better Half

My wife, Nancy, grew up in Scottville, Michigan. She and her 11 siblings were raised in a barn that had been converted into a house. Like me, she had 11 grades of education. She received her diploma through a GED program just five years ago, which, she reminds me with a twinkle in her eye, makes her smarter than I am.

As often happens in Old German Brethren circles, we first saw each other in church and, for three years, exchanged covert glances across crowded rooms. We finally met after church one night in Maple Grove, Ohio. I was 21, Nancy 18. As a baptized member of the church, Nancy wore a patterned dress approved by the church. Her lace “prayer covering” symbolized the veil Paul advocated for women in the church at Corinth. On our first date two nights later, we joined 150 fellow German Baptists to witness the baptism of four youth—by immersion, of course. Our second date

took us to the Stillwater congregation near Dayton, Ohio, for the annual Communion service. On Mother’s Day, 1982, after seven months of courtship, I popped the question. We were married on October 2.

Because German Baptists don’t conduct weddings inside their churches, we were married in a community center owned by my uncle Glen. Uncle Carl performed the ceremony before some 200 relatives and friends. The wedding was modest—a few flowers, a few candles. Nancy wore a white dress cut to the church’s pattern. Because I was not yet baptized, I wore a rented tuxedo. Pretty snazzy! Normally, marrying a nonmember is not encouraged, but in my case the brethren knew it was just a matter of time before I made my commitment to God. I was baptized a year later.

Nights of the Burning Heart

In November 1986 Nancy served me our usual breakfast of bacon and eggs. I drank my usual cup of orange juice, carried my dishes to the kitchen sink, as usual; kissed Nancy on the cheek, as usual; patted our two children, Dylan and Nathan, on the head, as usual; and headed for my backyard workshop—as usual.

That Saturday evening Nancy and I shared a meal in the home of a business partner, Eric Rich. Nancy had lived with Eric and his wife, Shirley, in Ohio. As we ate, Eric showed me a colorful brochure that had been put into his mailbox that morning. It advertised something called a Daniel and Revelation Seminar. Eric and I discussed it at length and decided to attend the opening night’s meeting. Knowing the suspicion with which our church colleagues regarded anything our church had not originated, we didn’t advertise our decision. We determined that if it wasn’t “good,” we wouldn’t go back.

Although I can’t speak for the rest of the audience that evening, we two German Baptists were hit between the ears with something powerful: indeed a revelation of Jesus Christ. I found myself irresistibly drawn to Him.

The following Monday evening Eric and I gathered up our families and returned—early, to get a good seat. Night after night the Holy Spirit opened my mind to hitherto unseen Bible truths. Like the disciples on the Emmaus road, we said to each other, “Did not our heart burn within us as he opened the Scriptures to us?” I attended all 21 sessions, even after circumstances prevented Eric from returning. By the close of the seminar I had learned three compelling truths: The Bible is held together by extraordinary power. That power is a Person. That person is Jesus, the Christ.

A Complete Nitwit

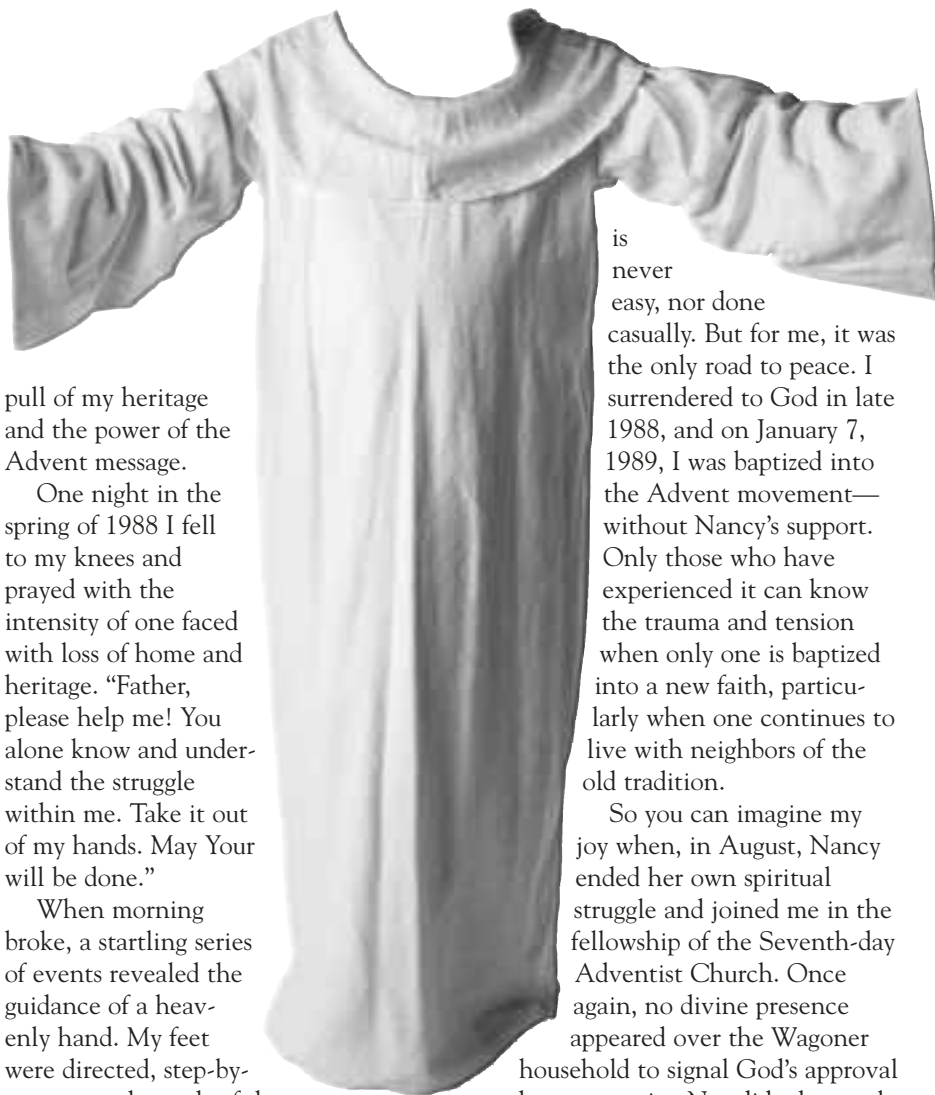
The evangelist, Pieter Barkhuizen, and his wife, Yvonne, made a great team. To the great foundational truths of the gospel, Barkhuizen added others: the conditional immortality of the soul, the impending judgment all must face, the Sabbath rest, and a panoramic view of redemptive history—the great controversy. These wonderful revelations were like water from a deep well, all pointing to Jesus and His unbelievable love.

But now I had a problem: Where had these truths been for seven generations? “Where were You, Jesus?” I prayed. “Why have these plain truths been hidden from me?” I was shaken to the core. Revelation Seminar indeed!

I did the only thing I could think of; I got out my Bible and began to study it carefully. Maybe I’d missed something. Seven generations can’t be wrong. I resolved to disprove this new message. During the next two years of intensive study, I learned that if a pillar of faith topples, it is a false pillar, without biblical foundation.

At the end of two years of research I had earned the suspicion of my wife, who silently observed her well-respected husband confirm a message he had sought to refute. I was about to go from well-respected husband and church member to complete nitwit in the eyes of my family and erstwhile friends. Had I mistaken the strictures of conviction that bound me for a mantle? I was sorely torn between the

*I was torn
between my
heritage and the
power of the
Advent message.*



pull of my heritage and the power of the Advent message.

One night in the spring of 1988 I fell to my knees and prayed with the intensity of one faced with loss of home and heritage. "Father, please help me! You alone know and understand the struggle within me. Take it out of my hands. May Your will be done."

When morning broke, a startling series of events revealed the guidance of a heavenly hand. My feet were directed, step-by-step, onto the path of the Advent movement. And, believe me, not one step went unreported! Rumors spread from Ohio to California and back again, embellished several times over. In two weeks I became a social and spiritual pariah.

Through it all I clung to the revelation of Jesus Christ that had challenged and transformed my heart. I recall thinking that it should really bother me to walk away from the heritage of my forebears. But nothing mattered to me but doing my heavenly Father's will, nothing. The Advent mantle had fallen in my path. I picked it up and made it mine.

Walking Together

Walking away from seven generations of tradition—particularly in such a close-knit, distinctive church as that of the Old German Baptist Brethren—

is never easy, nor done casually. But for me, it was the only road to peace. I surrendered to God in late 1988, and on January 7, 1989, I was baptized into the Advent movement—without Nancy's support. Only those who have experienced it can know the trauma and tension when only one is baptized into a new faith, particularly when one continues to live with neighbors of the old tradition.

So you can imagine my joy when, in August, Nancy ended her own spiritual struggle and joined me in the fellowship of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Once again, no divine presence appeared over the Wagoner household to signal God's approval to the community. Nor did a heavenly being make itself visual in our kitchen or workshop. However, the Scriptures I loved as a boy blossomed into living truths, foremost that one that said, "I am the way and the truth and the life" (John 14:6, NIV).

A Mantle From Heaven?

Look!—There's a mantle on the ground in front of you. Old. Worn. Threadbare. Lacking the luster of discovery. A mantle that symbolizes how some who have been long in the way—years, decades, centuries—regard truth. Yes, some of them are descendants of the Anabaptists. But there are also descendants of Adventist pioneers.

No parent or grandparent can put that mantle on our shoulders; it doesn't work that way. It works the way it did with me: a Bible in hand,

knees bent in prayer; conviction pressed home on the heart by the Holy Spirit.

That mantle in front of you! Pick it up. Look at it. Ask yourself: Did the Adventist mantle fall from heaven or from tradition?

**To learn what the author believes Adventists can learn from Anabaptists, and what he believes the Anabaptists can learn from Adventists, visit our Web site at www.adventistreview.org.*

Gerry Wagoner is a commercial roofing contractor. The Wagoners are members of the Seventh-day Adventist church in Piqua, Ohio. This story is adapted from an article that originally appeared in Perspective Digest.



Questions for Reflection or for Use in Your Small Group

1. What does the phrase "The truth as it is in Jesus" mean to you? How has it made a difference in your life?
2. When have you been challenged to reexamine some of the traditions handed down to you? What was the result?
3. What Bible passages have been especially helpful in shedding light on your spiritual development over the years?
4. What methods do you use to translate Adventist values and biblical understanding to young Adventists or new believers? What do you find most effective?

Bible Study: BIBLE NEEDED



BY KIMBERLY LUSTE MARAN

SHORTLY AFTER GRADUATING FROM college about a decade ago (say it isn't so!) I decided I really needed to get in touch with God through His Word. Prayer was already a major factor in my life, but I craved more—I wanted to discover God through sermon, parable, and account. To me, it was almost a tangible way to know Him, to touch God intimately. And so I started out “scientifically”—I would let the Bible fall open to a section, and I'd proceed to read wherever my eyes first fell.

After reading half of Isaiah 67 about 20 times and Matthew 6 about 10 (I had a church bulletin stuck in that spot), I figured out there was probably a better way to study the Scriptures. I decided to read books of the Bible that contained stories that meant, for a variety of reasons, a lot to me. I read Genesis, Psalms, 1 and 2 Samuel, Proverbs, Judges, Daniel, Jonah, most of the New Testament, and (of course) Isaiah. It was nice reacquainting myself with Cain and Abel, David and Bathsheba, Solomon and his wisdom, and many of the other well-known characters and stories.

Since then I have followed other strategies for Bible reading and have enjoyed them immensely. Right now I'm immersed in a plan of my own making that combines Old and New Testament books—I'm actually finding fun in this new scheme.

I have also, on occasion, picked up a Yancey, Goldstein, or Lucado book and read the scriptural lessons based in these tomes. It is exciting, to be sure, to see the Bible through someone else's eyes and to discover that people don't always see the same story the same way.

I've also tried different Bibles that cater to different people. You know the kind: the “single-woman-who-works-professionally-but-also-enjoys-mountain-climbing-on-Sundays-in-the-fall-in-the-Adirondacks” or the “married-twenty-something-couple-who-are-active-in-church-but-don't-teach-any-classes-or-sing-in-the-choir” Bibles that have built-in, focused study assistance. They were entertaining and certainly got me thinking about Scripture and its appli-

cation in my life in myriad ways.

All these experiences, however, have taught me a lesson: there is nothing so good as the Bible itself. And there is nothing that can replace simply reading the Bible (in whatever version) for yourself, in your own way. It is only in this way that you can discover Jesus personally. It is in this way you can learn of *and* experience—sample—the vast love He has for you.

While most of the Bible-reading books and formulas and supports out there help foster a person's relationship with God, some of the profound communication between Father and child is compromised, and a deep, very intimate conversation between God and a person is lost when one does not read directly from the Bible. Some lessons are not typically found unless one discovers them in his/her own Bible study.

Unsung Heroes

Here is one example (of many). It's from 2 Kings 13. After an illness, Elisha the prophet died and was buried (verse 20). A group of Israelites was in the midst of a funeral when they spotted a band of Moabite raiders. The Israelites quickly tossed the body into the prophet's tomb and fled. “When the body touched Elisha's bones, the man came to life and stood up on his feet” (verse 21).*

We tend to talk more about the relationship between Elijah and Elisha, about the boys who made fun of Elisha's lack of lustrous locks adorning his head, about floating axheads. These are all fine things to remember and discuss. But think about this for a moment: God is so awesome that even His dead servant's *bones* were still warm with power, still infused with His might! I am so glad I serve such an amazing and powerful God!

Here's another example involving life and death, found in Acts 20:7-12. While listening to the apostle Paul preach late one night during a seven-day stop in Troas, a young man named Eutychus fell asleep. Unfortunately, he was sitting in an open third-story window trying to catch a cooling breeze, and he fell to the ground below. Everyone rushed

outside to help, but the fall was lethal. Paul stopped preaching, went down stairs, leaned over the young man's body, and hugged him. Paul then looked at the people gathered and said, "Don't be alarmed. . . . He's alive!" (verse 10). The group ate together, and Paul finished his sermon, departing around dawn.

I don't know about you, but I've read about Paul's various stints in prison and lots about his travels and talks across the Middle East—and I don't recall Eutychus' resurrection featuring prominently in any commentary. This incident is, however, such a testament to God's power, ability, and love to work through mere mortals in such a magnificent way! For me, this is faith-building stuff.

And what about another young man? This one was running around Gethsemane garbed in a sheet—and nothing else. When Jesus is arrested by the priests and elders, everyone deserts Him (Mark 14:43-50). This passage is (or should be) familiar to every Christian. And these verses, to be sure, are heartbreaking. But what really intrigues me is the content of verses 51 and 52: "A young man, wearing nothing but a linen garment, was following Jesus. When they seized him, he fled naked, leaving his garment behind." A naked body dashing off into the night, can you imagine it? This sounds pretty bizarre.

Was this young man a person Jesus cast demons out of and someone, maybe a disciple, had lent him a simple garment? Or was the young man so enthralled with Jesus that he didn't even take the time to get dressed—when he knew Jesus was out in Gethsemane in the middle of the night, did he run from his home, pausing only to grab the simplest of attire? And if this one guy is mentioned, does this mean there were more people out there too? I have always thought Jesus and His disciples were very alone, but what if there were others wandering around looking for Jesus or trying to get close enough for a sermon or touch from the Savior? While these verses may not be "important" in understand-

ing the gospel message, they are there for a reason—this makes me yearn to know the story behind these verses.

Here's another interesting episode, only one verse long. It is Judges 3:31, after Ehud, the left-handed deliverer, retires from fighting on Israel's behalf. Ehud had done much good for Israel—during his command the people followed the Lord. He and Deborah, a prophetess who led Israel after Ehud, are recognizable characters. But what about Shamgar? "After Ehud came Shamgar son of Anath, who struck down six hundred Philistines with an oxgoad. He too saved Israel" (verse 31). That's all we get to know about Shamgar, but even this morsel is important. Again, the power of God is emphasized as He uses a human with a long, pointed stick to destroy enemies of His children.

The last sentence of the verse is perhaps the most significant, however. "He too saved Israel." This indicates that while Ehud and the other more

popular heroes of the day should be acknowledged for their efforts and what God did through them, everyday people who were not knighted as deliverers or prophets also had momentous impact. Shamgar *saved* Israel *too*. To me, that is pretty significant.

It's known more as a sword than a goad, but what about the gospel and those who spread it? We read about Paul, Stephen, John, and the other apostles, but how often do we study specifically about Priscilla? She is believed to have converted her husband, Aquila, and others. In Acts 18:18-26 Priscilla does some preaching on the road with Paul and her husband, and she is integral in Apollos' conversion. A woman actively involved in ministry: spreading the

gospel was not and is not solely the mission of men!

Nothing So Good

These were some events, stories, I had long since overlooked. In the readings and recollections of the more flashy and dramatic, I had forgotten the few verses scattered here and there depicting rather startling and exciting incidents. I would not have picked up these important lessons and/or thought-provoking happenings through any other means except by reading them—again—along the way.

To be fair, there is only so much a typical reading plan or outline or guide can accomplish in an appropriate amount of pages. Just think: How would you sit in an easy chair with a book several reams of paper long? It would be quite uncomfortable—your lap and legs would probably give out before you'd gotten to page 100 of a gazillion pages!

But that aside, helps are just that:

help. They can never replace the Bible. My point stands: there is nothing so good as the Bible itself. So when I do step away from the straight text (as I mentioned, these forays are helpful to Christian

growth) and read different material, I am never away for long. I always go back to the Bible—and just the Bible. My motto is simple—Bible study: Bible needed.

*Bible texts are from the New International Version.

Kimberly Luste Maran is an assistant editor of the Adventist Review.



Some lessons are not typically found unless one discovers them in his/her own Bible study.

Why Study the BIBLE?

A roundtable discussion

BY BONITA JOYNER SHIELDS

Adventist Review dialogues with Lyndelle Chiomenti, editor of CQ (the collegiate quarterly); Falvo Fowler, communication projects manager for Office of Adventist Mission/Global Mission; and Gary Swanson, associate director of Sabbath School and Personal Ministries Department of the General Conference.

In this roundtable discussion, participants approach the topic of Bible study and discuss the importance of it to our spiritual growth.

BJS: Below is an excerpt from an e-mail that I received recently:

“Why do I want to sit around for an hour listening to the same Bible story I’ve heard a million times? . . . I’m tired of Bible stories and abstract principles. I have a son to raise, and a marriage that is just OK. And instead of addressing the real problems and concerns we have with society today, we sit talking about people who lived 2,000 years ago. Yes, their stories may hold lessons, but I want real people, real stories.”

How would you answer her question? How does reading about people 2,000 years ago affect our lives today?

LC: The writer said she wanted to hear about real people. Well, the Bible is about real people. And even though they lived 2,000 years ago, human nature never changes—except by the grace of God. So the principles we glean from the Bible are just as valid today as they were back then. We like to hold people in the Bible up as paragons of virtue, but

they all struggled with doubt. And they all struggled with their own particular vices. Look at David.

GS: I think they were more real than we’re comfortable with at times. It makes me wince a little to hear about some of the things they did, and yet God loved them. And God continued to love them unconditionally. They were more real than we are in many ways.

FF: What many people fail to see—and I didn’t see it until I started reading the Bible for myself—is that every story in the Bible is different, and how God dealt with people in the Bible is different. No two stories are alike. Even the miracles are different. It tells me that we can be ourselves, and God still loves us.

LC: How did you discover it for yourself?

FF: I hit the wall really hard in my life, and I needed to find out whether I actually believed in this thing called Christianity. I wanted to see where God began leading His people, so I decided to start reading in Genesis. It was then that I realized that God dealt with each individual differently. That knowledge allows me to see that I don’t have to be a Daniel, and I don’t have to be a Paul. I can be me, and know He has a way for me.

BJS: So, with a guy named Joseph in prison, a man named David committing murder and polygamy, and a woman named Jael driving a tent peg through a man’s temple . . . How does what God said to them speak to us?



GETTY IMAGES

FF: Biblical people were willing to listen. I think we grew up in a culture in which we talk to God, but we would be very uncomfortable if He were to talk back to us.

LC: That is what Bible study is about: *God talking back to us*. It's our opportunity to read His words, and to listen to Him.

GS: I think we could just as easily ask, "Why not read the Bible?"

I'm not so old that I don't remember getting a love letter! When I read a love letter, am I reading for nuance, and trying to decide if the comma had been here instead of there, what difference would it have made in the language? No. I try to discover what the writer is trying to say. In the broadest sense, that's the way we should be reading Scripture. It really is in its broadest sense a love letter. The difference is that we don't all have the same relationship that we used to. But the love is still there, and why not be reading it?

FF: Many people I know—myself included—didn't read the Bible because we were *told* to read the Bible. And when you are told to do something while growing up, you usually don't want to do it. I think one of the reasons the majority of Adventists haven't read Ellen White, or haven't understood her, is that we've been told we *have* to read her. When I read the Bible for myself, because I want to, I come to the point where I ask, "Why didn't anybody tell me about this?"

LC: One of my favorite books of Ellen White's is *Education*. She says there that the purpose of redemption is to restore God's image in us. I can't think of a better reason to study the Bible. It's through the Bible that we learn about how He wants to restore His image in us. And when you think of being re-created in the image of God so that we can be like Him—with a loving, forgiving, merciful heart toward people who do wrong to us—what a wonderful reason to study the Bible!

BJS: *Is there a difference between reading the Bible and studying the Bible?*

GS: Yes, there is a difference. To read it for its story is valid. In any approach to literature, you can read it superficially for its story. But the time comes when it is necessary to study it as well, to discover what it's trying to say on a more profound level. That's where the issue of study comes in.



“Working with the Bible for my livelihood has forced me to broaden my definition of Bible study.”

—Lyndelle Chiomenti

FF: Often we just read through the Bible. But it's important to look at what God has to say, and what He was saying at the time. So much was happening during biblical times in their culture. And if we don't understand what was happening with the rest of the world, then the Bible will have a very narrow definition to our lives, and we will separate it from what's happening in our world. For example, I was reading the introduction to the book of Ezra recently, and the scholars brought out the point that Confucius was in China at the time, Buddha was in India, and Socrates was in Greece. Just think of the philosophy going around! There was a *world* going on in Bible times! To me, it makes the Bible relevant to living, and not a separate part of our lives.

LC: I think reading the Bible implies a certain roteness, dullness, of a stale habitual type. "I have to read so many chapters a day to get through the Bible in a year." But studying the Bible implies that you are serious about doing something with it. Then you get into the issue of why you are studying the Bible. Do you study it merely to prove that the Sabbath is right? Or are you studying it because you really want to be re-created in the image of God?

GS: There exists a cognitive response to Scripture, and an affective response to Scripture. And, generally speaking, we are a cognitive people. We like to prove things. We like to have our ducks in a row. We must prove that $A+B=C$. You can prove things to death and not feel it. It's the

difference between information and transformation.

LC: We need both. And who's to say which is more important than the other? I would be more inclined to say transformation is more important. But I can't be transformed unless I have the information basis.

I think if each of us, as we study or read the Bible, could see our life as an extension of the Bible, an extension of the greatest story ever told, then it might start to take on more meaning. We might begin to ask, "How does my story fit into all this?"

FF: One of the sad things about Christianity these days from a Western standpoint—and I say this with all due respect—is that we fail to see how the Bible was written, or why these stories were told. They came basically from Eastern culture, from a highly narrative history. And the reason for these stories is so that future generations will remember the belief systems of their society. Hinduism has its stories, as does Islam, as per its culture. But the stories of Christianity and Judaism are told because of their faith. The Old Testament stories were told specifically so that the people would remember their history, and not misunderstand it. And they came *together* to hear these stories. There was a culture that came together to hear truth.

That's why group Bible study is so important. If I study it on my own, I can go off on a tangent. But if I come together in a group and we talk about my interpretation of Scripture, somebody can respond, "That's not what I think they meant." Then I can look at it from a different perspective. I put the two together—individual and group study—and I'm closer to truth.

GS: That's one of the challenges to the Western mind: this idea that you don't go to yourself solely to decide what is truth. People in biblical times had far more of a collective mentality, and arrived at truth in community. We in a Western society have been acculturated to more of an individualistic approach.

BJS: *Who or what has been instrumental in making the Bible relevant in your life?*

LC: Oddly enough, my high school English teacher. He said to us, "Don't believe something just because your parents believed it. Find out if you believe it. And if you believe it after you've studied it, fine." So I started studying it for myself.

FF: My mom taught me from a very early age to fight/wrestle with God. She used examples in the Bible (Abraham, Elijah, Moses) in which men argued and debated with God. It was as if they

were saying, “I will talk and debate with You, because You are real to me.” For many, there is this sense of “Don’t touch God because you might mess Him up.” My mom taught me to talk with Him, laugh with Him, and fight with Him *because He’s real*.

GS: I admired my grandfather, who was a Swedish immigrant and shoemaker. He was a simple man. He wasn’t an articulate or sophisticated thinker. But he’s the man whom I consider to be the best Christian I have ever known. And I loved him deeply.

LC: I had wonderful teachers at Andrews University (included are people such as Dr. Augsburg and Dr. Gregg). Observing the lives of these Christian men and women talking about the Bible from up front in class, hearing them pray, and having them invite us into their homes really inspired me.

BJS: *What has been your greatest struggle with Bible study?*

FF: I’m surrounded by Christians, and it’s a wonderful environment to be in. But the challenges to my faith are not as many as when I am working in a non-Christian environment. I think it’s easier when we’re searching Scripture, and living and/or working in a non-Christian environment, because I think we more readily see ways that we can witness, and put our Christianity into practice.

LC: That’s my greatest struggle too. When you edit Bible study guides, as I do, you don’t want to go home and read the Bible again. Reading the Bible for a living can take the shine off Bible study to some degree. On the other hand, the blessing is that you don’t realize what your brain and heart



“Life is full of noise. It can be good noise. But finding the time, and hearing the still small voice through it all, take effort. You can’t just hope it’s going to get through.”

—Gary Swanson



“I don’t think we should say that ‘we have the truth,’ but that ‘we have come together and recognized God’s truth.’ There’s a difference.”

—Falvo Fowler

are absorbing until you’re sitting at a stop light on a Friday afternoon, and you’re mentally struggling with a situation. And all of a sudden the Holy Spirit reminds you of a verse you read that week that fits your situation perfectly. And you say, “OK. I get the message.” Part of the struggle for me as well is finding the time to study on my own, and not just when I need to for work.

GS: Life is full of noise. It can be good noise. But finding the time, and hearing the still small voice through it all, take effort. You can’t just hope it’s going to get through. The Lord can do that at times, when there doesn’t seem to be any other way, but staying open is tough.

LC: Working with the Bible for my livelihood has forced me to broaden my definition of Bible study. I don’t know

what that definition is yet; I’m still working on it! But often I equate my gardening with Bible study because I think of what Christ said about nature. It really is brought home to me when I’m weeding or bird-watching. To me, that’s a form of Bible study. Another thing that my work has forced me to do is to engage in other spiritual disciplines: prayer, meditating on God’s Word, simplicity. It’s been an exciting journey!

FF: I promised myself I wouldn’t say anything about music . . . but in the eighties many ministers made money talking about the evils of rock music. One person used “backward masking” to “prove” that rock music was from the devil. He took songs by such groups as Led Zeppelin, the Eagles, and Pink Floyd, and spun them backward for you to hear the “real” message of the song. The interesting thing about that was

that, from that point on, whenever I heard the song, I forgot about the song; I remembered only what the “message” was! I didn’t know the message existed before. So the devil actually spoke to me because of the minister.

That ties into Scripture. When I study Scripture, because of fear about the end time that some have drummed into us, it’s hard to read books such as Daniel and Revelation. When we read them, we see the beast (of Revelation 13 and 14) and the fear of the end times, but fail to see the hope that God offers. In the process of trying to scare the “hell” out of us, they’ve unfortunately scared the Christ out of us, too.

GS: I’ve noticed lately that scriptural themes are turning up in popular culture. And it’s been a revelation to me to realize that many of the inspiring themes in Scripture are

quite universal. For too long I've considered Scripture and culture as two parallel tracks that never crossed, that the truth you find in each of them has no connection. But many things going on in culture are very familiar, spiritual themes that are universal to humanity—and they come from God. He's putting truth out there wherever people will hear it. Unfortunately, Adventists have often acted arrogantly in our belief that we are the only ones who "have the truth."

FF: Many people my age don't want to read the Bible because of that arrogance. I don't think we should say that "we have the truth," but that "we have come together and recognized God's truth." There's a difference. When we say, "We have the truth," it appears that we own it. It's ours.

We did this exercise in our Bible study class in which we talked about time. We asked, "How much TV do you watch in a day?" "How much computer . . ." When we added it all up, we figured out that most people have about 15-20 minutes saved for God. And out of the 15-20 minutes, they try to fit it in between commercials so they can see what happens on TV.

After that study, a lot of class members realized that they do have a yearning to study the Bible. But then

they asked why they didn't make the time. That's a tough question. When we look at it, it can be difficult to figure out why we don't make time. We could say we're too tired, but that's not it. It boils down to: *How important is our relationship with God?*

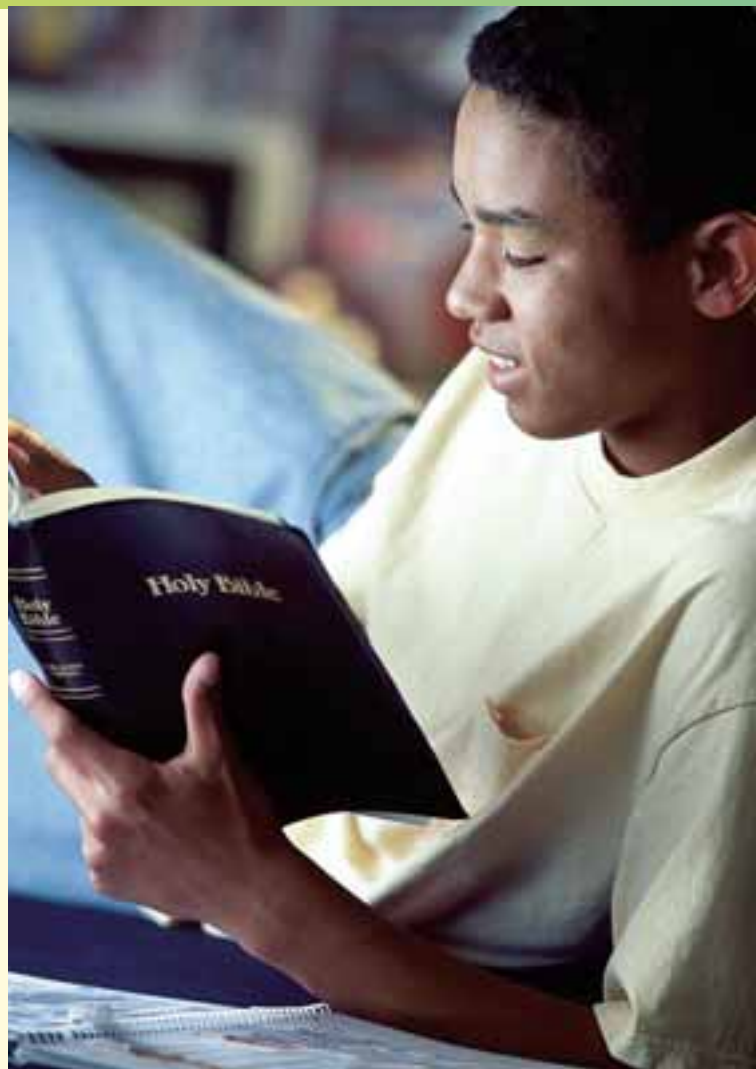
Bonita Joyner Shields is an assistant editor of the Adventist Review.



“For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope.”

—Romans 15:4, NIV.

Thoughts on Bible STUDY



“I study my Bible like I gather apples. First, I shake the whole tree that the ripest may fall. Then I shake each limb, and when I have shaken each limb, I shake each branch and every twig. Then I look under every leaf. I search the Bible as a whole like shaking the whole tree. Then I shake every limb—study book after book. Then I shake every branch, giving attention to the chapters. Then I shake every twig, or a

careful study of the paragraphs and sentences and words and their meanings.”

—Martin Luther

“Born to be battered . . . the loving phone call book. Underline it, circle things, write in the margins, turn down page corners, the more you use it, the more valuable it gets to be.”

—Ad in South Central Bell Telephone Company Yellow Pages.

"O search the Bible with a heart hungry for spiritual food! Dig into the Word as a miner digs into the earth to find the veins of gold. Do not give up your search till you have learned your relation to God and His will concerning you."—Ellen White, *Youth's Instructor*, July 24, 1902.

"It is a common temptation of Satan to make us give up the reading of the Word and prayer when our enjoyment is gone; as if it were of no use to read the Scriptures when we do not enjoy them, and as if it were no use to pray when we have no spirit of prayer. The truth is that in order to enjoy the Word, we ought to continue to read it, and the way to obtain a spirit of prayer is to continue praying. The less we read the Word of God, the less we desire to read it, and the less we pray, the less we desire to pray."—George Müller, *A Narrative of Some of the Lord's Dealings With George Müller*.

"Never let good books take the place of the Bible. Drink from the Well, not from the streams that flow from the Well."—Amy Carmichael.

"The Bible itself gives us one short prayer which is suitable for all who are struggling with the beliefs and doctrines. It is: Lord, I believe, help Thou my unbelief."—Letters of C. S. Lewis, March 18, 1952, p. 239.

"Many years ago in a Moscow theater, matinee idol Alexander Rostovzev was converted while playing the role of Jesus in a sacrilegious play entitled Christ in a Tuxedo. He was supposed to read two verses from the Sermon on the Mount, remove his gown, and cry out, 'Give me my tuxedo and top hat!' But as he read the words, 'Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are they that mourn, for they shall be comforted,' he

began to tremble. Instead of following the script, he kept reading from Matthew 5, ignoring the coughs, calls, and foot-stamping of his fellow actors. . . . Before the curtain could be lowered, Rostovzev had trusted Jesus Christ as his personal Savior."—J. K. Johnston, *Why Christians Sin*, Discovery House, 1992, p. 121.

"It is a law of the mind that it gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is trained to dwell. If occupied with commonplace matters only, it will become dwarfed and enfeebled. If never required to grapple with difficult problems, it will after a time almost lose the power of growth. As an educating power the Bible is without a rival. In the Word of God the mind finds subject for the deepest thought, the loftiest aspiration."—Ellen White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 596.

Digging DEEPER

*Bible Study:
The Essential
Christian Life
Skill*

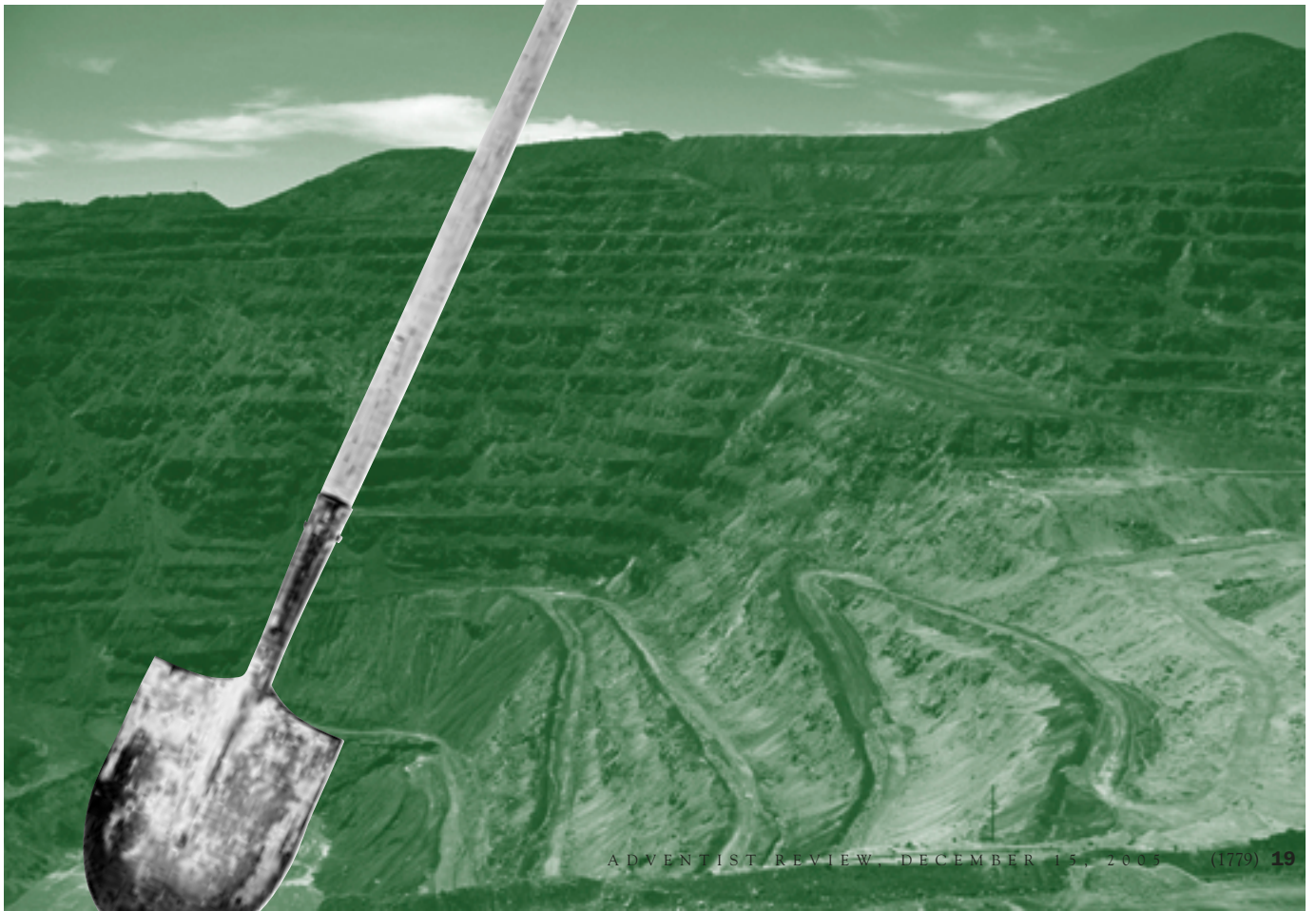
BY LEE GUGLIOTTO

WHAT DOES THE BIBLE MEAN to you?

Many historical heavyweights faced this same question, including our sixth president, John Quincy Adams, who proudly confessed, “So great is my veneration for the Bible that the earlier my children begin to read it, the more confident will be my hope that they will prove useful citizens to their country and respectable members of society.”¹

The apostle Paul expressed similar thoughts in 2 Timothy 3:15-17: “You have known since childhood the Scriptures that can enable you to conclude that salvation is through faith in Christ Jesus. All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for instruction, convincing, correcting, and training in righteousness, so that the man of God may be complete, fully equipped for every good work.”* He recommended the Bible to Timothy as the source of what we need to enter and experience the Christian life.

Thus, in Paul’s view we cannot participate in everyday



Christianity without studying God's Word. Ellen White agrees: "We should not take the testimony of any man," she advises, "as to what the Scriptures teach, but should study the words of God for ourselves."² Personal Bible study, then, makes the Christian life go round; it is the essential Christian life skill.

What Do We Get From Bible Study?

Expectations vary, but a majority of Christians want a better grasp of Bible doctrine and a deeper understanding of its prophecies. These are noble goals, but fall short of what God wants for us. We settle for less, because we do not appreciate Bible study's full value.

A young man named Bill spent months searching for a high school graduation gift with his dad: a car.

When his father surprised him with a gift-wrapped Bible instead, Bill threw the Bible down and stormed out of the house. Years later, news of his father's death brought him home again. As he went through his father's effects, Bill

came across that Bible and opened it. Inside he found a cashier's check, dated the day of his graduation, for the exact amount of the car they had chosen together.

Just as Bill should have looked inside the Bible for the check that would lead him to the gift of a car, we should look inside the Bible for Christ, who will lead us to the gift of eternal life. "You search the scriptures because you think you have eternal life in them; but they are the ones that testify about me. Yet you refuse to approach me, that you might possess life" (John 5:39, 40).

Evidently Jesus knew people who depended on Bible study to save them. He made it clear, however, that the Bible is only a stepping-stone on our journey toward eternal life. Bible doctrines cannot transfer everlasting life from the immortal One to us (1 Tim. 6:16), but they can convince us to approach Christ so He may share His life with us.

Hunting for more knowledge or pointing others to your church is not enough. Bible study as Christ defines it points beyond the Bible to Him. Anything less is incomplete; anything else misses the point.

How Do We Study the Bible So That It Points to Christ?

Bible study is a process—a fixed series of steps and phases; you should follow all of them to go beyond the truth in the text to the Truth Himself. And contrary to popular opinion, you don't need a scholar's library to experience first-class study. All you need are the basics:

- A formal translation of the Bible (KJV, NKJV, NRSV, NASB)
- A Bible dictionary (such as volume 8 of the *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*)
- A Strong's Concordance (with dictionaries at the back)
- A notebook/journal to record discoveries, and log experiences with Christ as you study
- Constant prayer throughout the process, to depend on God instead of others



STEP ONE: Lay a foundation through **OBSERVATION**, the three-phase skill of noticing what God wants you to see in the text. This will help you to develop a big picture and an overall view of the text, so you won't leave anything out that shapes its meaning.

1. The flyover gives a rough sketch of a Bible book, just as pictures taken from high-altitude show only the main features of the landscape below. Books such as Daniel *tell a story* one event at a time, in the order they happen. Books such as Romans *explain or describe ideas* one thought at a time, through logic or some other line of reasoning. Both kinds of books look the same from the air, but a high-altitude pass over either format will answer the 5 W's: it will show **who** wrote it, to **whom** and about **whom** it was written, **what** it says about everyone involved, and **where, when, and why** it was written.

After the flyover, it's time to land and walk through the book for a closer look at what you saw from the air.

2. The walkthrough has two parts: **the walk** that gives you a closer look,



and **the head trip** to reflect on what you saw.

- **To walk a storybook**, follow the natural flow of the story, and work one chapter or episode at a time. Find out where and when chapters occur, and what they say about their characters. Then list the events in each chapter in the order they happen. **To walk an explanatory book**, label verses according to what they do. Verses may express:

Examples to follow

Reasons for thanksgiving or praise

Lessons of what we need to learn about God, Jesus, ourselves, or others

Warnings to avoid or confess sin

Instructions to obey

Promises to claim

- **To go on a head trip** in either kind of book, analyze what you saw for **topics** (what chapters are all about) and **themes** (what you learn about topics from reading their chapters); then blend topics and themes into **titles** that sum up their chapters in a few words. In Jonah 1, for example, its topic (Jonah runs away from God), and theme (Jonah can't get away) combine to form the title (You run away from God, but you can't get away).

3. Draw a book of the Bible chart with three columns and as many rows as you need to transfer all the topics, themes, and titles from the walk-through. Like a big picture, it shows at a glance how the writer organized the entire book.



STEP TWO: Build on your foundation through EXPOSITION, the four-phase skill of allowing the Bible to explain itself.

1. Define key words or terms that unlock the meaning of the text. They are easy to spot because the writer repeats them, or verses no longer make sense if you leave them out. You can learn what they mean in two ways:

- The writer may define, translate, or describe them in the text, such as when Paul defines the “Gospel of Christ” as “the power of God unto salvation,” in Romans 1:16.

- You can look them up in the dictionaries at the back of *Strong's Concordance*. Look for the italicized word(s) and pay attention to insights.

2. Explanations. To get more mileage from their language, Bible writers resorted to symbols and figures. Figures of speech s-t-r-e-t-c-h the meaning of words:

- **Similes** compare items that vaguely resemble each other, with the words “like” or “as.” The kingdom of God is like a mustard seed, because they both start small and grow very big.

- **Metaphors** compare items that resemble each other enough to call one by the other's name. Jesus calls Himself the true vine, in John 15:1, because He has a lot in common with a vine.

- **Parables** start as similes, then add details to drive home the main point of comparison. So the parable of Lazarus and the rich man expands on the simile: everyone, rich or poor, comes into their final reward after death.

- **Allegories** start as metaphors, then add details to bring out more points of resemblance, as details in verses 2-8 turn “I am the true vine” into an allegory.

- **Analogies** compare meanings in two parts; the pattern in one part [smile is to happy], explains the other [? is to sad]. “As a smile expresses happiness, a frown expresses sadness.” Understanding analogies comes in handy, since the New Testament is full of them.

- **Idioms** exaggerate so much that you can't take them literally. So when Paul wishes he were accursed from Christ for his Jewish relatives (Rom. 9:1-3), he actually emphasizes his pain over their lack of conversion.

To explain figures, look them up in *Strong's Concordance*, a Bible dictionary, and an English dictionary. Match the possibilities with your passage and settle on the one that fits best.

- **Symbols** are signs that point to something else. Three simple guidelines will lead you to their meanings: **(1) Symbols are too flexible to assign them permanent meanings.** A lion, for example, can represent both Christ and the devil. So let the context decide how symbols apply. **(2) Symbols follow a pecking order.** You can't, for instance, understand the body parts in Daniel 2 unless you first understand the symbolism of their body—the statue. So always interpret the highest symbol before you try to understand others that depend on it for meaning. **(3) Symbols point only to what they represent.** The head of gold represents only Babylon: it does not equal Babylon. So work with their main features and don't get bogged down with details.

3. Backgrounds acquaint us with people, places, and things in the text and take us on a virtual tour of the book. Look up the history and culture behind them in a Bible dictionary.

4. Summaries restate the text without changing its meaning. Just substitute your definitions for words, explanations for figures and symbols, and backgrounds for people, places, and things—and people will understand the text the same way as did the original audience.

you found an example or reason, he or she wants to inform; a lesson or warning, he or she wants to educate; an instruction or promise, he or she wants to persuade.

3. Connect with what the writer passes on through the text. When writers inform, adopt a plan, idea, cause, or practice from the text; when they educate, adapt to the text by transformation or modification; and when they persuade, adjust by making changes to better fit or act consistent with the text.

Instead of adding what you get from the text to what you know, review everything you know in the new light. Then develop action plans to put it into practice and tie it to a related memory, story, song, or text so you won't forget it.

STEP FOUR: Share the text with others through PRESENTATION, the two-phase skill of allowing the Bible to express itself through you.

1. Organize your thoughts.

First, select what you want to share from your studies. Next, plan what to say around the writer's topic, theme, and title.

But reword them to fit the situation you want to address. Then find quotes, anecdotes, and stories that make it easier for your audience to grasp what you present.

2. Prepare the text. Retell stories, explaining events as you go with the help of what you learned from the text. Generate interest at the beginning of explanatory messages with a strong opening; then dynamically explain lessons to hold the audience's attention; and end with a big finish—either a main lesson or a summary of lessons you have already shared.

In for a Landing

Bible study is the essential Christian life skill, when it points beyond itself to Christ. I have learned from personal experience that direct

STEP THREE: Let the text change you through APPLICATION, the three-phase skill of allowing the Bible to express itself.

1. Identify the writer's point of view. Check for positive or negative clues, ask how he or she makes you feel, and weigh the evidence to determine whether he or she is for or against what he or she says in the text.

2. Identify the writer's purpose. Everything boils down to three purposes: *to inform, educate, or persuade*. Check the labels you assigned to verses during the walkthrough. If

interaction with Christ will fill your notebook with discoveries, your journal with entries, and take you beyond the truth in the text, to the Truth Himself.

*Bible texts are the author's translation.

¹The Encyclopedia of Religious Quotations, p. 23.

²Ellen G. White, *Steps to Christ*, p. 89.

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Gugliotto Creates Ohana for Keiki

BY ALLEN LIPPS

Most Week of Prayer speakers invited to Hawaii stay for a week, tell stories, sing songs, have a few laughs, and see the sights. But the recent Mauna Loa school speaker got a workout zipping between meetings at the Hilo church, the Mauna Loa school, and the Kona school. Lee Gugliotto of Empower Ministries, telling story after story about his days growing up with his parents and brother in Brooklyn, entertained listeners each morning.



However, it was what transpired after those early-morning sessions that caused a revival among the students at Mauna Loa. After each morning meeting, all 37 stu-

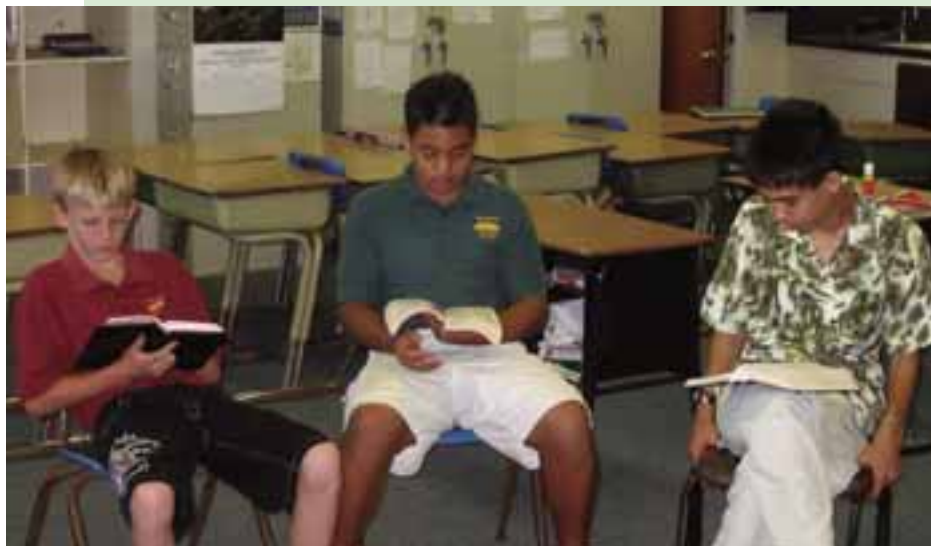
dents in grades 1 through 8 gathered in the cafeteria for a one-hour lesson in how to do inductive Bible study. The lesson was based on the story of Samson, as told in Judges 13-16.

Students first read the Scripture, one verse per student, chapter by chapter. After each chapter was read to get an

overview, all chapters were given basic titles. Then they read Scripture a second time and looked for strengths and accomplishments or weaknesses in Samson's life. This method of Bible study really caught on, with one fourth grader insisting, "Bible study is really fun!" When "Pastor G" left on Friday, he encouraged the students and staff to continue using the tools he had taught them. They took him seriously. Students got together the following Tuesday and did some deep thinking about how Samson's story could apply to their own lives.

At a staff meeting that afternoon, Jeannette Teehee, Julia Kohltfarber, and Principal Allen Lipps decided to take advantage of these newfound Bible study tools. They divided the school into six groups of six, each called "Ohana (Family) Groups." A seventh or eighth grader leads each group, which meets every Thursday morning for the first hour of school to study the Bible. Older students in each group mentor their younger "study buddies."

During that hour they get to know one another a little better each time by praying, singing, studying the Bible, and thinking of ways to apply witnessing techniques. One young leader, Elias Castillo, was a little nervous about being in charge of a group. However, after leading out for the first time, he told his teacher, "I'm going to be able to do this. In fact, next time I'm going to get a little prayer journal that we are going to use to keep track of our prayers in, and every time one is answered, we'll highlight it. This is fun!"—Originally printed in the *Pacific Union Recorder*, June 2005.



Set FREE

A story of Bible study and deliverance

BY DMITRY LOSSEV

IT WAS A WARM SUMMER EVENING IN northern California's beautiful Napa Valley. A few hours after sunset the hills of Angwin, with the Adventist community that surrounded Pacific Union College, became still. As Cheryl Davison was on her way to bed years of spiritual struggles came back to her, and she finally said to herself: *I can't take this anymore; I'm through with it. I don't want God.*

Cheryl picked up her collection of Ellen White books, along with her well-read Bible, and tossed them across the room. "I've tried to follow You," she cried, shaking her fist at God. "I've done everything to please You, to get peace of mind. I just can't do it." Turning over to go to sleep, she told God that she would never talk to Him again. She fully meant it. After long, painful years of struggling to follow God, trying to find the necessary peace and balance in Him, she finally gave up.

Standing on False Premises

Cheryl grew up in a Christian home. As a teenager, she couldn't imagine a situation that would cause her to leave the church. She loved God and wanted to follow Him. She loved the Adventist Church, and never had any desire to go out and do anything "crazy."

Yet God allowed Cheryl to go through a very difficult period in her life. Once, as she read Ellen White's descriptions about the close of probation, Cheryl started to have terrible fears that it was too late for her to be ready for Jesus' return. She started fearing the time of trouble as well, having terrible nightmares. Her fears led her to wish she could

die before those events took place. She'd always been taught that if she loved God enough, she would give up anything for Him in order to be saved. So, with the fear of being left behind, Cheryl wondered what she was doing wrong.

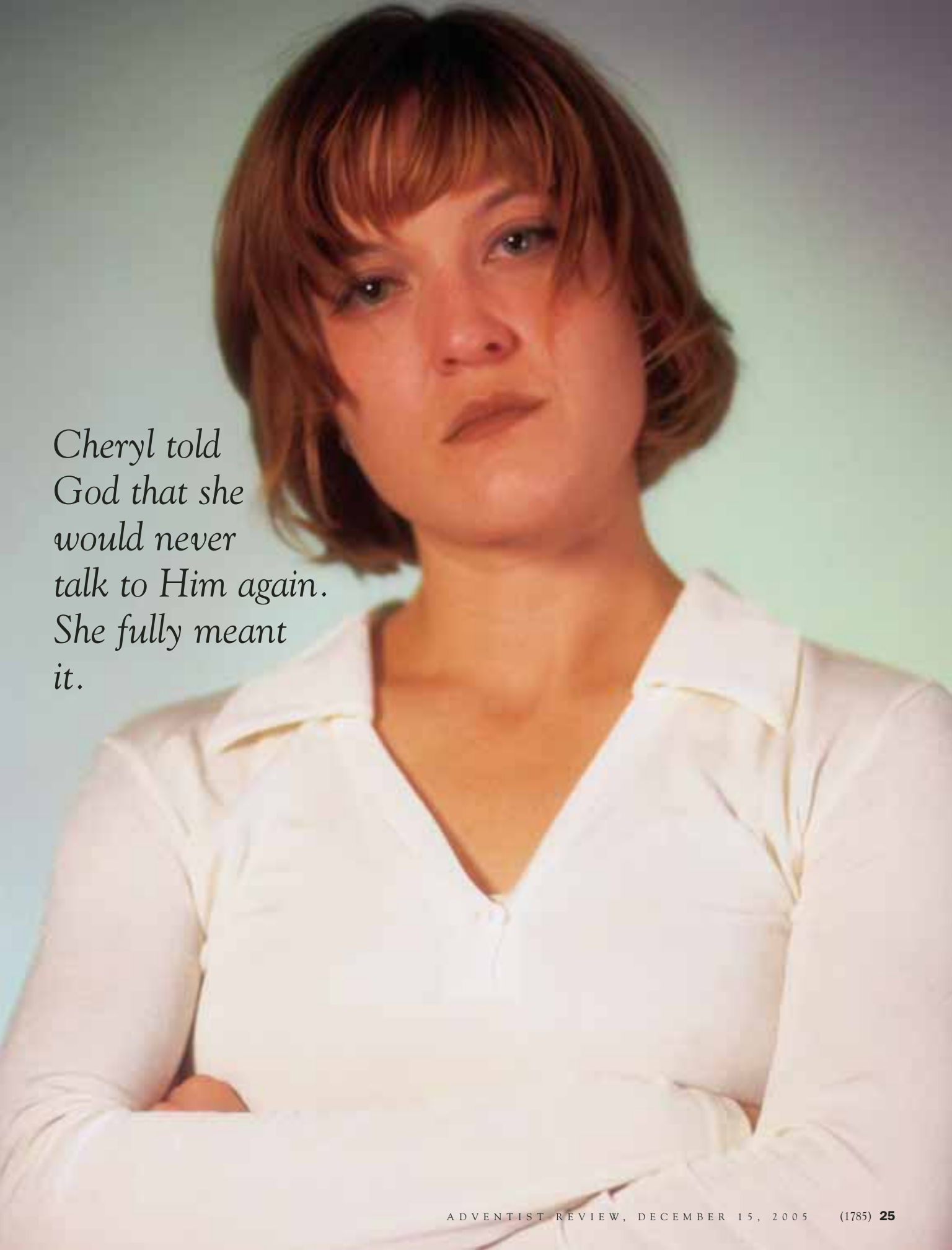
"This began 12 long years of sorrow and downward spiral as I took my eyes off Jesus Christ," said Cheryl. "I was focusing on what I thought I should do to be saved."

Cheryl started searching Ellen White's writings to see what the prophet said about the proper length of dress (for women), the right diet, wholesome recreation, etc. Her primary concern became to be perfect when the Lord returned. The more she studied, the more her focus was on what she imagined she had to do to be saved. All the statements about living a perfect life became so twisted in her mind that everything she did caused her guilt and fear.

It seemed that Satan, unable to push Cheryl to indifference as a teenager, pushed her to the opposite extreme—fanaticism—as an adult. As Cheryl searched more and more, she started losing interest in religion and God. She approached her close friends and family, trying to find peace of mind from the terrible guilt that became a part of her life. She went to church every Sabbath. No one could tell what was going on within her painful heart and her restless, confused mind. At church she was told, "Just follow God, and you'll be happy."

Cheryl's internal reply to those affirmations was, "That's because you haven't studied like I have."

As Cheryl felt more and more fear and guilt, she felt like she was shunning the Holy Spirit by failing to do all the things taught by the Bible and Ellen White. When Cheryl



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was not able to do all these things, she suffered extreme guilt. But doing them made her life a burden, which she hated.

A God She Could Love

Years passed, and Cheryl struggled to overcome her condition. But the more she struggled to love God and do all these supposedly necessary things, the more she found she didn't like God at all. She came to the point where she didn't want to read her Bible anymore. She kept thinking, *I guess I've never been a Christian. I must not have been converted, because I don't have the kind of love that makes me want to give up all these things and take my stand, like Daniel.*

When Cheryl truly meant to forsake God for good, she heard His voice loud and clear: "My dear Cheryl, how can I let you go?"

"His voice was agonizing love, and it broke my heart," says Cheryl. "I

knew that God loved me." Cheryl knew that the only thing that could take her out of God's hand was her own decisions. Cheryl wasn't happy serving the Lord. She didn't have the necessary wisdom or knowledge to get out of this emotional hell that she had created for herself all those many years. She just cried and begged, "Lord, please don't let me go."

"I will never leave you, nor forsake you," said the Lord.

Here is her story in her own words:

I continued to struggle because God didn't immediately raise me out of that pit. I had to see that I couldn't do one thing to save myself. Even though God showed me His mercy and love at that moment, I still had within me the idea that I had to struggle to save myself. I still suffered with terrible guilt. I had a certain temptation in my life that I couldn't overcome. God gave me this verse: "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor.

*15:57). * I started to claim this promise, because I knew that I couldn't deliver myself from this obsession.*

After a few days of repeating this verse again and again, I thought, Wow! We have no part of the victory. God totally hands it to us. It's a gift. We don't do anything except ask for it.

For several days I praised and thanked God. Even though I didn't feel victorious, I realized He was going to give me the victory. Then God hit me with His power. It swept over me, just as unmistakable as the voice I had heard. I felt God's love flooding my soul, and His peace came over me. He completely delivered me from the past 12 years of guilt and oppression. I was freed from feeling unworthy; that I had to do something about my condition.

But I still had a process to go through. I believed that once I claimed God's promise, Satan was defeated in my life from then on. But Satan said, "Do you think I'm done with you? Not on your life!"

Satan made me believe that my experience of deliverance with Christ was a false one. I fell into a depression I had never experienced before. For four months I went through the most agonizing fear I've ever experienced. I didn't sleep; I paced the floor night after night pulling my hair, wringing my hands, and saying, "It's too late!"

I don't know how my husband or my children put up with me. I was driving everybody in the house crazy. I had totally given up hope on God's victory and taken myself away from Him and started looking within myself. As I went through this struggle, God allowed me to finally reach bottom, to realize I could do nothing to save myself.

After four months with hardly any sleep and no hope, I felt like a person who had fallen into a deep, dark well. I was so far down, all I could see was darkness. I groped at the side of the well, but there was no foothold, nothing to hang on to. Finally in that darkness God sent me a rope. God showed me about the whole armor of God (see Eph. 6:10-15).

According to Ellen White, God stands behind all His promises. She wrote: "Can you not trust in your heavenly Father? Can you not rest upon His gracious

promise? . . . Can we not have implicit trust, knowing that He is faithful who hath promised? I entreat you to let your trembling faith again grasp the promises of God. Bear your whole weight upon them with unwavering faith; for they will not, they cannot, fail" (Testimonies for the Church, vol. 2, p. 497).

If we trust God and believe that He never lies to us in His Word, when we claim His promises for victory, we know that God will do it. If He has promised, He will do it.

When I was in the bottom of this well, God spoke through His Word to me through His promises. I realized I was helpless to help myself, just like the demons in the Bible who threw themselves at Christ's feet and cursed His name because they had no control over what they said or did. When God finally let me reach the bottom, I discovered that the Bible contains more than 3,500 promises for us and for our deliverance.

The first promise He gave me was Jesus' words in John 6:37: "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away." Through my foggy brain I said, "You promised if I came to You, You wouldn't cast me out."

The next verse that God gave me was Luke 4:18, 19, where Jesus quoted the prophet Isaiah: "The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor."

I said, "Lord, I'm brokenhearted, I'm a captive, I'm blinded. I'm bruised and kicked by Satan."

So I claimed the promise in James 1:5: "If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given." I prayed, "I'm confused; I don't know what to do."

Then God spoke to me through His Word. David wrote: "In thy presence is fulness of joy" (Ps. 16:11, KJV). And the next words of God's promise were about pleasures forevermore. I said, "Lord, I'm not experiencing any pleasure. I must be believing lies."

Satan kept attacking me with fearful

thoughts that I was lost. But I kept looking to the promises of God, saying: "God, You haven't given me the spirit of fear." Whenever Satan attacked me, I held up God's armor between me and Satan's attacks. Suddenly I realized the condition to any promise is that we ask! If we lack wisdom, let us ask of God. If we want forgiveness, ask forgiveness. If we want the Holy Spirit, all we have to do is ask. God promises to fulfill His Word.

God never gave up on me. I am free from the darkness and pain.

Living Life to the Full

Today Cheryl is living proof of a loving God; a praising believer who is drawing many others to the throne of grace. She believes in miracles and leads a prayer group in her home. Cheryl praises God and thanks Him for her trials. She says that she has never been as close to God as she is today. She knows that from the very beginning of her life until this day, God never has stopped loving her. Nevertheless, it took a long 12 years for Cheryl to accept the Lord's promise to deliver her from the darkness and pain to a new life of light. Not in a moment, but gradually, the Lord taught and showed her many different aspects about living the victorious life.

Step-by-step, verse-by-verse, Cheryl received the truth, and God's power set her free. Many Christians long to experience God's unconditional love and power because they go through the same or similar struggles in their lives. But the price of salvation and victory has been paid at the cross.

It's simple. Just ask for the victory by claiming His powerful and life-changing promises, and the truth will set you free.

*Unless otherwise noted, quotations from the Bible are taken from the New International Version.

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Questions for Reflection or for Use in Your Small Group

1. Have you ever felt that God had unrealistic expectations about your spiritual condition? What were the sources of those misconceptions?
2. When did you first understand that God meant to deliver you from guilt and condemnation? What part did the Bible play in that revelation?
3. How do God's promises play a role in our living a life of assurance?
4. What Bible promises do you claim when you feel estranged from God?

Walk With Me

"Now that same day two of them were going to a village called Emmaus, about seven miles from Jerusalem. They were talking with each other about everything that had happened. As they talked and discussed these things with each other, Jesus himself came up and walked along with them"

God: My Past, Present, and Future

BY DAVID HOOVEN

I thought I knew what Bible study is and how to do it, but I was wrong.

I used to read God's Word, a chapter at a time, and compare what I read with the notes I took from sermons. But that's all I did; I considered that Bible study.

Then I discovered that Jesus should be our teacher. It's wonderful to hear Bible students speak or teach, but now, instead of reviewing their insights with the Bible, I study for myself. I need to understand the Bible without depending on other people.

I never realized what was missing until I started digging into the Bible. There's a lot more in Scripture than meets the eye! Digging deeper and personally has given me a closer, more profound relationship with our Creator. I now see more clearly how awesome God is, and how amazing is His plan for us all!

Inductive Bible study sheds light on my life so God can show me where I've been, where I am, and where to go.

A Wonderfully Fun Way to Study the Scriptures

BY JEANINA BARTLING

Oh, the craziness of life today! Every teeny degree of the compass brings myriads of duties and pleasures to entice or coerce us. All involving time. But we're encouraged to spend a thoughtful hour each day contemplating, thinking about, and absorbing the beauty and power of the Son of man. I have found that that's where

Three of the world's most powerful instruments are Scripture, prayer, and imagination.

my safety and sanity lie.

And so I delight in a wonderfully fun way of studying the Scriptures. Of course, many different ways exist, but this manner of studying helps to hold my thoughts captive to Christ.

This morning I immersed myself in the story of Christ's first public miracle (John 2). A relative of Mary's was getting married in Cana, and Jesus, along with His new disciples, attended. John tells what happened at that wedding, and the Spirit of Prophecy enlarges on it beautifully in *The Desire of Ages*, starting on page 144. But what went on behind the scenes? That's where the fun begins.

I talked with God about this first miracle, and replayed the scenes of the story. This time around I became one of the servants—the servant in charge, as a matter of fact.

When Mary summoned me and said to me, "Whatever He says to you, do it," I looked into the face of her Son. And He looked at me. My breath suddenly left me as I felt almost a physical reaction to those searching, yet gentle, eyes.

After we had filled the six jars with water, He told me to draw it out and serve it to the master of the banquet. A tumult arose in my heart! Serve water? When they expect wine? Strange desires to protect Mary's Son from ridicule mingled with the

confusing thoughts that tumbled incoherently about in my mind.

I looked again at Jesus. He gazed back at me, a smile twitching at the corner of His mouth. A deep quiet hushed those turbulent thoughts. And I turned and poured the water from a pitcher into the master's cup.

My hand jerked in shock and surprise, and some of the sparkling, purple liquid spilled onto the master's sleeve. His eyes swung up at me irritably even as he took a sip from the goblet. Then I was forgotten as he took another sip, then a mouthful. Then he turned to the bridegroom and, almost in awe, praised him handsomely for providing the best wine he had ever tasted in his life.

I stood there transfixed. I myself had poured water into the jar. All I could think was, *It was water. Now it's wine. The richest wine I have ever seen.*

I looked around, searching the busy crowd of merrymakers for that Man, Jesus. He had disappeared. But I knew I had to find Him . . .

I encourage you, my friend, to experience holy fun combining three of the world's most powerful instruments: *Scripture, prayer, and imagination.*

Why Didn't Someone Tell Me That Before?

BY DEREK MORRIS

As a teaching pastor, I have the privilege of preaching about 100 sermons every year. To some, that might sound like a burden. But it is actually a huge blessing! I have the opportunity to study the Bible for significant blocks of time each week.

I am currently preaching through Paul's Epistle to the Ephesians, and I came in my Bible study to Ephesians 4:30: "Do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God" (NIV). That verse had always intimidated me. I grew up with the misunderstanding that this word "grieve" meant to annoy or irritate. After all, the same English word, "grieve," was used in the King James Version in Acts 4:2 and Acts 16:18. In both of those contexts, the picture is one of frustration, irritation, and annoyance. But I discovered last week that a different Greek verb is used in Ephesians 4:30. The root meaning of

this verb is grieving, as in sorrow or sadness. It's the same root word used to describe the rich young ruler who went away "sorrowful" (Matt. 19:22).

As I continued my Bible study, a question flashed into my mind: "What about the word used to describe the anguish of Jesus in the Garden of Gethsemane? He was exceedingly sorrowful. I turned quickly to Matthew 26:38. What I discovered there filled my heart with wonder! The same root word is used in this verse as is found as a verb in Ephesians 4:30. I was overwhelmed with a deeper appreciation for the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is not irritated and annoyed when we make unhealthy choices. He is not frowning and scowling, waiting to abandon us at the least provocation. Rather, when we make unhealthy choices, the Holy Spirit experiences sadness. He longs for us to put off the old self that is being corrupted by its evil desires and to be made new. What a revelation! Why didn't someone tell me that before?

I can't wait for the next opportunity to study the amazing Word of God! I know that my soul will be refreshed.

His Ambassador

BY ROY K. ONESS

It isn't easy being a Christian in a hostile world, but can you imagine what it's like to be under attack in your own home? Living with a Buddhist spouse brings a challenge every day, but I have found sanctuary in God's Word and prayer.

This past spring Jesus sent Lee Gugliotto to our church in Hilo, Hawaii, to introduce our congregation to inductive Bible study. Inductive methods call for me to depend directly on God when I study. I now look forward to time investigating the words of God for myself—because He will be there to teach me. I guess God knows that I need the extra assurance of personal discovery; it's very hard to defend one's faith with borrowed insights.

As a cell group leader, I have taught these methods to others in the group, and we have studied the Bible this way ever since. We all look forward to sharing our faith and discoveries with one another.

Recently I offered to be the Bible study leader for Hilo church, to nurture new people, as well as find and

recover nonactive members. I want them to spend time experiencing Him rather than me. After all, I'm just His ambassador.

Bible Study: Completing the Circle of Prayer

BY JEAN KELLNER

Studying God's Word is, for me, like the completing of prayer. Praying is only half the communication, because mostly I'm doing the talking. While God can move upon my heart during prayer, He can reason with me and change my way of thinking as I study His Word. Bible study is wonderful because though I may read a familiar passage or story many times, I will at times find myself deeply impressed by something in that passage that previously I glossed over. Suddenly it becomes personal and applicable to me. This is because when I open His Word, I find that God is waiting to open Himself to me. He is uninhibited in His intimacy with me, graciously inviting me to come to Him, to know Him, and to learn from

Him. Often, as He speaks to me through His Word, I am overwhelmed by His graciousness, holiness, and love, and then by my need. He lets me know it is safe in His presence as He speaks to me through His Word. He invites me to honestly look inside myself, and see where I need correction, perspective, healing, and His sanctifying power in my life.

His Word often leads me right back to prayer. Thus the conversation and growing intimacy between the infinite Creator and me are formed, and through these His Spirit unites me with Himself. And I become open to His transforming power in my life.

He lets me know it is safe in His presence.

