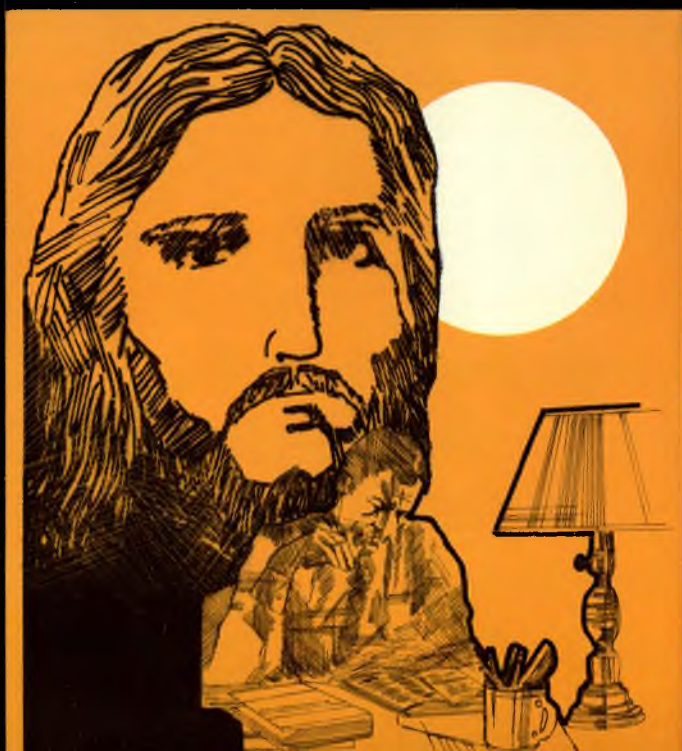


Collegiate Quarterly

January-March 1984

A North American Youth Ministries Publication

THE COMMITTED LIFE



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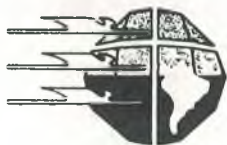
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Dear Sabbath School Members,

We are happy and thankful to God for being the object of attention and help of our Sabbath School members throughout the world one more time. God has blessed His church in South America. Our desire is to carry the sweet message of Jesus' soon return to the uttermost parts of the earth.

We have set as our objective for the world crusade of 1000 Days of Reaping to baptize by His Spirit at least 170,000 souls. Each congregation, family, and member is experiencing the thrill of winning souls. We hope to organize one new congregation and begin construction of one new chapel each day, thus reaching a total of 1000 new churches.

The Special Projects portion (25 percent) of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering on March 31 will aid three specific programs--two in the Chile Union, and one in Brazil.

1. The construction of chapels in Chile. A phenomenal change is occurring in the religious life of that country. Evangelical churches are gaining much attention as they grow in size and number. This is the time to proclaim Bible truth with power and clarity. But we urgently need to construct chapels to house expanding congregations.
2. The construction of a secondary school in Antofagasta. Thanks to the dynamic evangelism of pastors and laymen, many congregations have sprung up in Antofagasta, the political, economic, and cultural center of northern Chile. The school presently operates with inadequate facilities under the Central Church.
3. The construction of Minas Gerais Academy. This new Brazilian boarding school will serve the youth of the Minas and South Minas missions. The first students arrived as soon as the property was acquired. They study and work under extremely trying conditions. The institutional master plan has already been approved and the campaign to raise materials and funds locally is well under way. Your prayers and offering will provide a much-needed boost toward the completion of this project.

The 700,000 Seventh-day Adventists in South America thank you for your vision and generosity through the years and wish you God's blessings as you continue to sacrifice for the completion of the eternal gospel.

Your brother in Jesus,


Joao Wolff
President

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The Collegiate Quarterly is written by faculty, students, and friends of the Seventh-day Adventist colleges and universities in North America. Organized under the Union College Board of Trustees, it is coordinated by Campus Ministry and published with the approval of the North American Division Church Ministries Committee.

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THIS QUARTER'S ART **Urias Chagas**

Urias Chagas, the artist for this quarter, is a senior theology major at Southwestern Adventist College. Born on a Brazilian farm, Chagas remembers watching his parents work while he drew in the dirt with sticks—his earliest expression of talent.

At the age of 15 he went to work for a large advertising agency in São Paulo, and after he finished high school, his boss put him through two years of art school. "I'd always wanted to work for the church, though," he says, "and when Casa Publicadora

Brasileira (the Brazil Seventh-day Adventist publishing house) asked me to come to work, I became a graphic artist for them, illustrating and laying out magazines and books."

While at the publisher, Chagas began to dream of becoming a minister. "Art has a deep relationship with everything you do in life, and a minister is talking of eternal life. Sometimes it's so difficult to visualize and remember some of these important ideas. If I use my art, people can see, hear and remember truth."

He went to the Instituto Adventista de Ensino (Adventist Institute of Teaching) for three years, taking theology while doing artwork and layout work for the college. While there, he won first place in a South American Division art competition.

"I thought it would be a real help in my ministry and my artwork to learn English, so then I came to Southwestern Adventist College," he comments. Again, he was put to work using his talents at the college.

His illustrations for the quarterly were done with pen and ink and a knife. "The most important part of these lessons is the individual characters," Chagas says. "And yet I wanted to show what they did. In the old style, only the actions would have been shown, nothing about the individuals themselves. I've tried to combine what they did with their faces, because we can all relate to a face."

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HOW TO USE THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

The Collegiate Quarterly, a North American Youth Ministries Publication, is designed for the college and university person, and anyone else who might happen to enjoy it. It is produced and written by college and university students and faculty, and by youth and young adult Sabbath School groups throughout North America. Over 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year, on a volunteer basis.

When studying the weekly lessons, one of the most important things for you to notice is the key texts that come under the Testimony, Evidence, How To, and Opinion pieces. Reading these passages will enhance your study because it will help keep your study centered in the Bible and show the relationship of each article with Scripture.

The weekly lessons, divided by days, are also divided by sections. Each section serves a different purpose.

- **Introduction (Sunday)** This piece is designated to get your attention and center your mind on the week's theme.
- **Logos (Monday)** This section combines the Scripture passages that form basis for the entire week's study.
- **Testimony (Tuesday)** Here the theme is approached through the writings of Ellen White.
- **Evidence (Wednesday)** This is usually the most "scholarly" article of the week as the theme is discussed from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
- **How To (Thursday)** Presented here are the practical implications of the week's theme. It shows what all the theory, previously discussed, means in day-to-day living.
- **Opinion (Friday)** This piece is a personal perspective on the theme, meant to encourage further thought and discussion on the topic.
- **React** Here questions are presented for personal reflection and group discussion.

Because one of the aims of the Collegiate Quarterly is to encourage personal thought and investigation rather than hand down official, readily-accepted and pre-digested "truth," at some point you will probably find something with which you disagree. When this happens don't get all flustered and start laying eggs, having puppies, or whatever the case may be. Instead, study the issues with an open mind and discuss them with your class. The results will not only be interesting but also rewarding.

Introduction to the Quarter

IT'S ALL OVER ALMOST

It's all over, almost. All the manuscripts have come in, all the articles have been written. First, second, fourth, sixth, whatever number of edits that are done, have been completed. The reading committee has sent in their reports. Changes have been made. The final manuscript has been prepared and sent to the printers. They have sent the galleys back and these have been corrected and returned to the printers. It's all over, almost. There's just one thing left to do. The Introduction to the Quarter needs to be written. But after reading, writing, and thinking commitment—the theme of the quarter—for the past two months, I would dearly love to assign this job to someone else.

Commitment?

It is finished, a life of pain and sorrow which no one will ever completely understand. This life, born in impoverished circumstances and raised to a life of unceasing toil, was now dying, having apparently accomplished nothing. The unending, thankless hours given in service, the long days of abuse that were endured, and the longer nights spent in prayer, seemed all for naught. Death, at times a comfort, now brought only fear and uncertainty. "Eloi, Eloi, lama, Sabachthani?" But, despite appearances, Christ still prayed, "Father forgive them; for they know not what they do." Then, "Father into thy hands I commit my spirit." And finally, "It is finished." Salvation became ours.

Commitment!

It's all over, almost. The decisive battle has been fought and won. Final victory is within our grasp. It's all over . . . almost. There have been famines and earthquakes. Men hate one another. Wickedness has multiplied. False prophets have led many astray, and love has grown cold. The sun has darkened, the moon has not given it's light, and the stars have fallen. It's all over . . . almost. But children still starve while billions are spent on ways to kill. Lives are empty and have little meaning. The naked are not clothed. Men die and they are not happy. "I know your works: you are neither cold nor hot" (Rev. 3:15, RSV). "For I was hungry and you gave me no food, I was thirsty and you gave me no drink, I was a stranger and you did not welcome me, naked and you did not clothe me, sick and in prison and you did not visit me" (Matt. 25:42, 43, RSV). Instead you watch for signs, make charts, and count to 144,000, not knowing that you are "wretched, pitiable, poor, blind, and naked" (Rev. 3:17, RSV).

Commitment?

"Those I love I reprove and chasten . . . Behold I stand at the door" (Rev. 3:19, 20, RSV.) It's all over, almost.

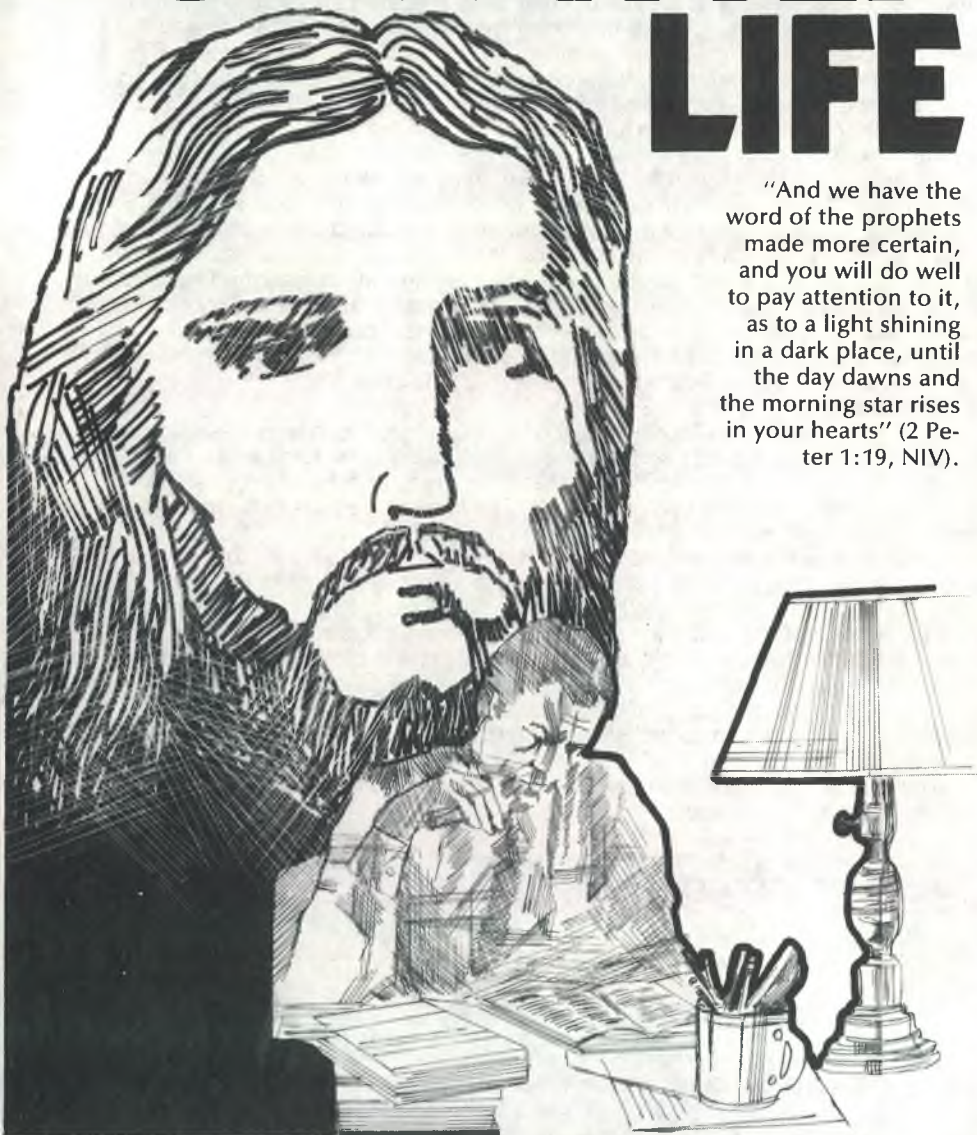


Evert R. McDowell
Editor

Lesson 1, January 1-7

DIRECTION FOR THE COMMITTED LIFE

"And we have the word of the prophets made more certain, 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" (2 Peter 1:19, NIV).



Of Maps, Trust, and Commitment

by Bruce Closser

Road maps have always held a fascination for me. I keep an assortment of them in my car and from time to time I pull them out, review the routes I've traveled and dream of going again. Just why maps affect me as they do I cannot say, unless it is that they, like unwrapped Christmas gifts, hold the promise of unlimited entertainment and enjoyment.

In thinking about my collection of maps it occurs to me that I have never doubted them. In the past they've led me down countless back roads and up many busy freeways to places I've wanted to visit. In the future they'll lead me to new places I've not yet considered. And always I'll travel by following a road map. I depend on my maps, and I trust them because I've never found them to be inaccurate.

Maps haven't always been so reliable. Cartographers of old did as well as they could with their primitive skills, but much confusion resulted from the inaccuracies of their endeavors. Many place names in the new world often resulted from the mistaken assumption that a mariner was someplace where he was not. Mutineers from the *Bounty* were able to hide from British jurisdiction because they discovered that Pitcairn Island was improperly placed on nautical maps; any warship looking for them would have to discover Pit-

cairn as the mutineers had, by sheer accident.

I suspect my trust in maps is based on the trust I have for the map makers. I set out on every new trip confidently because I believe that the one who prepared my map traveled that way before me, noting road numbers, conditions and directions. If there are difficulties along the way they will be noted. Exits on freeways, distances between shops, town locations, and often much, much more, appear on standard road maps because someone traveled that way and recorded such helpful items.

I recall one particularly hard winter. Walking to school in a fierce blizzard, I was forced to draw my hood tight around my face and turn my head down to keep out the blowing, freezing wind. I could see, for only a few feet ahead of me, the path where others had trudged to school. Once or twice I stepped off the path, sinking to my waist in snow. Very soon I learned that I was safe only on the path where others had gone before, preparing the way.

The foregoing illustrates a rather fundamental notion: we place our faith in the Bible, at least in part, because it represents a way to achieve a successful God-relationship tested and tried by others who struggled toward God before us and succeeded, or did not, and left their stories for our instruction and admonition.

INTRODUCTION

Who Is in Command?

LOGOS

The question of authority is one that has puzzled humanity throughout its existence. Who, if anyone, are we responsible to? Who decides what is right or wrong? Back in Eden, the debate revolved around questions of authority—whether the fruit vendor knew more about apples than the One who made them. Ever since, humanity has continued to grope for the authority on which to base its actions. Today, milleniums after Eden, the problem still hasn't been solved. Revolutionaries continue violently to resist governmental authority, while closer to home businessmen regularly cheat the IRS, and teenagers continually defy parental counsel. Examples everywhere express the absence of an absolute authority. Anarchy rears its ugly head as voices cry out, "There is no absolute authority—man himself is his only authority." And at first glance, they seem to speak the truth.

But from within the deep recesses of eternity, the voice of God is heard in resounding refutation. "I am the Alpha and the Omega," says the Lord God, 'who is, and who was, and who is to come, the Almighty'" (Rev. 1:8, NIV). The universal intelligences immediately join in an emphatic second: "You are worthy, our Lord and God, to receive glory and honor and power, for you created all things, and by your will they were created and have their being" (Rev. 4:11, NIV).

Fortunately for us, God is not silent. He has repeatedly spoken to inform us that it is he who created us, that it is he who defines right and wrong. But many have not heard. Despite God's various efforts to communicate his supremacy, it still goes for the most part unheeded.

The Son of God and the Holy Spirit, as well as the Father, exert authority in particular ways. The Son engineered creation, and all nature is subservient to him. Christ's disciples witnessed this fact firsthand on the Sea of Galilee, and their reactions were—"What kind of man is this? Even the winds and the waves obey him!" (Matt. 8:27, NIV). Furthermore, Christ's words spoken on earth rang with the confidence of absolute authority. "When Jesus had finished saying these things, the crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law (Matt. 7:28, 29, NIV).

The Holy Spirit also communicates the authority of God to man. His work is to provide a channel through which divine authority can be constantly revealed. Christ described this role to his followers when he said, "But when he, the Spirit of truth, comes, he will guide you into all truth. He will not speak on his own; he will speak only what he hears. . . ." (John 16:13, NIV).

Scripture is another source of absolute authority. God's Word serves to delineate the divine character in human terms—to establish the basis for the absolute authority of God. As Timothy puts it, "All Scripture is God-breathed and is useful for teaching, rebuking, correcting and training in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16, NIV).

No matter which mode God uses to express his absolute authority, the message remains the same. We have not been abandoned to ourselves. Our existence still matters. The universe is not adrift in eternity—there is Someone in command!

L. R. C.

By Inspiration . . .

The Bible points to God as its author; yet it was written by human hands; and in the varied style of its different books it presents the characteristics of the several writers. The truths revealed are all "given by inspiration of God" (2 Tim. 3:16); yet they are expressed in the words of men. The Infinite One by His Holy Spirit has shed light into the minds and hearts of His servants. He has given dreams and visions, symbols and figures; and those to whom the truth was thus revealed, have themselves embodied the thought in human language.

The ten commandments were spoken by God Himself, and were written by His own hand. They are of divine, and not of human composition. But the Bible, with its God-given truths expressed in the language of men, presents a union of the divine and the human. Such a union existed in the nature of Christ, who was the Son of God and the Son of man. Thus it is true of the Bible, as it was of Christ, that "the Word was made flesh, and dwelt among us." John 1:14.

Written in different ages, by men who differed widely in rank and occupation, and in mental and spiritual endowments, the books of the Bible present a wide contrast in style, as well as a diversity in the nature of the subjects unfolded. Different forms of expression are employed by different writers; often the same truth is more strikingly presented by one than by another. And as several writers present a subject under varied aspects and relations, there may appear, to the superficial, careless, or prejudiced reader, to be discrepancy or contradiction, where the thoughtful, reverent student, with clearer insight, discerns the underlying harmony. . . .

God has been pleased to communicate His truth to the world by human agencies, and He Himself, by His Holy Spirit, qualified men and enabled them to do this work. He guided the mind in the selection of what to speak and what to write. The treasure was entrusted to earthen vessels, yet it is, nonetheless, from Heaven. The testimony is conveyed through the imperfect expression of human language, yet it is the testimony of God; and the obedient, believing child of God beholds in it the glory of a divine power, full of grace and truth.

In His word, God has committed to men the knowledge necessary for salvation. The Holy Scriptures are to be accepted as an authoritative, infallible revelation of His will. They are the standard of character, the revealer of doctrines, and the test of experience. "Every scripture inspired of God is also profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for instruction which is in righteousness; that the man of God may be complete, furnished completely unto every good work." 2 Tim. 3:16, 17, R. V.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
2 Tim. 3:16

**"In His word,
God has
committed to
men the
knowledge
necessary for
salvation."**

Excerpted from *The
Great Controversy*,
pp. v-vii.

☐ January 3
Tuesday

Freedom Within Authority

by Charles Scriven

EVIDENCE
Key text:
Deuteronomy
21:18-21

“When a man has a son who is disobedient and out of control, and will not obey his father or his mother, or pay attention when they punish him, then his father and mother shall take hold of him and bring him out to the elders of the town, at the town gate. They shall say to the elders of the town, ‘This son of ours is disobedient and out of control; he will not obey us, he is a wastrel and a drunkard.’ Then all the men of the town shall stone him to death, and you will thereby rid yourselves of this wickedness. All Israel will hear of it and be afraid” (Deut. 21:18-21).¹

Some of you reading this might already be in pine boxes if we still threw stones at disobedient young people. And it would be a good thing, too. Our permissive age has turned its back on this sound Bible principle, and the whole society is paying for it. Just look at the growing national menace of teenage crime; even some of our own Adventist students are known drug-users, and many of them are like hoodlums in the way they insult and talk back to their parents.

It is time to return to the Bible policy of capital punishment for those who constantly disobey their parents. Deuteronomy prescribes it as a way “to rid yourselves of this wickedness.” And since the Bible is our highest written authority as Christians, we have a duty to rouse our society to accept and live by this important counsel. . . .

**“In rebelling
against the
authority of
this one text,
we were
still subject
to authority.”**

Now let me stop. You would put this magazine down in sheer amazement if the editor had really let me develop this idea in print. Today it would be considered an outrage to find someone seriously urging the death penalty for young people who are “disobedient and out of control.” Still, most of you would agree that the Bible is our highest written authority as Christians. And the fact is that Deuteronomy contains the verses quoted. On what basis, then, are Christians free to disagree with what those verses say?

There is a way that most of you, I think, would reply to this question, and we’ll come to that. But first, let’s mark it down that when we read a Bible text like this one we run into questions about a very important part of Christian experience, namely, the experience of authority.

Let me explain. We say that the Christian is someone who stops trying to be his own boss and submits to the authority of Christ. This concept of *authority* becomes clear if we recall what it means to say that Abe Lincoln is the *author* of the Gettysburg Address: it means that Lincoln himself permeates that address; he is the one who gave it its shape. So submitting to the *authority* of Christ simply means that the Christian lets Christ permeate his being; he lets Christ guide and shape his life.

We also say, as Christians, that the best-written information about Christ is that found in the Bible; so the Christian also submits to the authority of the Bible; he lets Scripture permeate, guide, and shape his life. And with this we come again to our problem: on what basis are Christians ever free to disagree with what some particular verse of the Bible has to say? Why, for example, should any Christian be indignant if someone calls for the stoning of disobedient young people? Aren’t the texts of Scripture supposed to shape our lives?

As to the particular question of punishment by stoning, most of you, I think, would come up with an answer that is itself based upon words found in Scripture—which, as we will see, is very significant. You might first point out that even in this text the concern is with enhancing family stability, which is a noble thing. Certainly you would point out that Deuteronomy, viewed as a whole, preaches a human togetherness based upon brotherhood and neighborly regard; and that, moreover, another book of the Pentateuch, Leviticus, contains the famous dictum “You shall love your neighbour as a man like yourself” (Lev. 19:18).

Here already, you could then argue, are laws that imply what you might call progress in understanding; here already is the basis for a criticism of capital punishment for disobedient children. How could anyone stone an unruly teenager and feel he was treating this young person as he himself would like to be treated?

Very soon in your answer you would no doubt urge the authority of Jesus against the authority of this text in Deuteronomy. Jesus said, “Love your enemies; do good to those who hate you; bless those who curse you; pray for those who treat you spitefully” (Luke 6:28). How could you possibly follow Jesus while killing a son who will not obey? After all, the love exemplified by Jesus is, as Paul said, “patient” and “kind”—and it “never comes to an end” (1 Cor. 13: 4, 8).

If you made this kind of argument to me, I would be persuaded. Since every Christian would probably be persuaded by it, young persons who wish to be “disobedient and out of control” may breathe more easily than did their forebearers in ancient Israel. This, perhaps, is part of what is meant by the term “good news.”

Now, on the assumption that we are all in agreement so far, let’s see what has happened. We began with a law written in the Bible; then we rebelled against it. You can’t be true to the larger spirit of the Bible or to Christ, we said, and obey this injunction to stone people who disobey their parents.

Here is what is striking about all this: in rebelling against the authority of this one text, *we were still subject to authority*. No one, I am sure, thought of saying, “I object just because I felt like it, just because I’m me.” Instead, we made an appeal to the Bible, and, ultimately, to Christ, to justify our objection.

This whole procedure illustrates some important points about authority in the Christian life:

It reminds us, first of all, that in trying to figure out what is right and true, we depend upon authority; we depend, in other words, upon what is given to us by persons who have more than we have. This is important to remember since, for some, the word *authority* has acquired a negative, almost repulsive, connotation. We hear people speak of wanting to “get out from under authority,” as if authority were something altogether repressive and bad.

The little exercise we have been doing has shown us that the experience of authority is something we could never get along without; from the day of birth we benefit continually from the guidance and wisdom of persons who have gone before us. From them we

“Truth is progressive, but Christian freedom is always a freedom within authority.”

learn our language, our knowledge of how to survive, of how to live with others, of how to have fun, of how to be creative.

With respect to spiritual life, we benefit from parents, pastors, and teachers who pass along the good news that nourishes us. Especially do we benefit from the wisdom of the Bible; it is our highest written authority, our most reliable deposit of Christian understanding. But most of all, we benefit from the authority of Christ; He, indeed, is the author of everything that makes life meaningful to us.

Second, our exercise has taught us that written words, even authoritative written words, cannot be counted on to be utterly infallible. Paul said that we have the treasure of the gospel "in earthen vessels" (2 Cor. 4:7). He was telling us, in this fine metaphor, that our understanding is limited, is finite. And this is true even for inspired writers like the author of Deuteronomy, and even for Paul himself. For it was Paul who admitted that he saw in a mirror dimly, "For our knowledge and our prophecy alike are partial," he told the Corinthians (1 Cor. 13:9). And Ellen White, whose special authority does much to guide and shape Adventist life, echoed Paul when she said, "In regard to infallibility, I never claimed it; God alone is infallible."²

From the first two points there follows a third: within our experience of authority we have freedom to grow in understanding, and to change the way we live. Written authority, even inspired written authority, is limited; that is why it is no outrage for us to rebel against, say, the law of capital punishment for disobedient children, even though that law is enshrined in the Bible.

But remember, in this rebellion we still submit to authority. We still let those who have more experience than we have permeate and shape us. The Bible remains our highest written source of wisdom, and Christ remains the highest authority of all.

What does all this mean to you? It means that your natural desire as a young person to grow and to change is a healthy desire. You are free to advance beyond the ways and the knowledge of the past. Truth is progressive, but when you are a Christian your freedom is always a freedom within authority, a freedom within your basic allegiance to Christ.

How this affects a person's thinking and living has been illustrated in our reflection on that text in Deuteronomy. We had to decide whether the Bible—taken as a whole and read in the light of our knowledge of Christ—can really be the basis for stoning the disobedient. We decided that it cannot be.

This exercise was perhaps too easy—no one would disagree with the conclusion we came to—but it does indicate, very roughly, a Christian way of growing in understanding, a Christian way of deciding what is right and true. And in dealing with the really difficult questions we face today—on the role of women, say, or the relation of the church and the world, or the meaning of righteousness by faith—having some notion of how to decide is important. The concept of freedom within authority can take us a long way toward knowing how.

1. Texts in this article are from the *New English Bible*.

2. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 37.

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God Gives No B's

The ultimate authority for the Christian is the Word of God. We all believe this statement (at least we say we do) but saying we believe it is not enough. We cannot just say that the Word is our authority. We must let it be our authority and guide. In order to do this, we need to consider four points.

HOW TO
Key text:
James 1:22

1. **We must study the Bible—not just read it.** There is a big difference between reading and studying. Too often what we call Bible study is nothing but Bible reading. We sit down, read a chapter through from start to finish, and say, "Well, I've done my duty." That is reading. Studying, on the other hand, requires a little brainwork. It may involve underlining or copying important passages for future reference. It may involve reading one verse over and over until you understand it. In short, reading is something we do just so we can say we've done it. Studying is an honest attempt to learn and understand what we read. We need to *study* God's Word.

2. **We must study the Bible daily.** On the first day of school, teachers usually tell their students to study every day—not to put everything off until the night before the exam. If you have ever tried "cramming" you have probably found, as I have, that it doesn't work very well. It may get you through the test the next day, but it doesn't help you remember the material over a long period of time. In order to learn something thoroughly, you have to study and review often.

The same principle applies to Bible study. We need to "search the Scriptures daily." It is entirely possible to read as much material in a few hours on Sabbath afternoon as you could have covered in short periods each day. These daily periods, however, are much more productive and beneficial.

3. **We must use what we learn from our Bible study.** Imagine taking a class in which the teacher gave you an A just for coming to class and listening to the lectures. It sounds wonderful, but how much would you actually learn in such a class? Probably not a whole lot! That is why teachers expect you to take exams, write papers, and do outside projects in which you put your knowledge to practical use. It is by doing these things that one learns.

James tells us to be "doers of the word, and not hearers only" (James 1:22). We cannot be satisfied with merely studying the Bible. We need to talk about what we read with others and then put the knowledge we've gained to practical use. Once we do this, we are ready to move on to point four.

4. **We must be willing to make a full commitment.** Too often we treat God's Word as a syllabus for a required course we aren't too enthusiastic about taking. We study the requirements carefully and then do only as much as we think we absolutely have to to get a passing grade. The Bible is not a course syllabus which outlines the requirements for an A, B, or C. God only gives A's and F's. He is only interested in *total* commitment. He doesn't want us to follow him only when it seems convenient. He wants us to follow him always!

That You May Have Life

by James Miller

OPINION

Key text:
John 5:36-40

A recent study has shown that those Adventists most likely to read Ellen White are most likely to read their Bibles and those most likely to ignore one, ignore the other.¹ To me this points out a principle of authority: If you're willing to listen to one authority, you'll listen to others of the same kind. If you won't listen to one, you won't listen to the other. This may sound obvious, but it leads to two lines of thought which help put authorities into proper perspective.

The first is quite simple, and is backed by several personal experiences. You can't hope to build up the authority of the Bible by tearing down the authority of Ellen White. The contents are too similar. The way they were written is too similar. An attack on one attacks the other.

The second goes like this: If you take the inspiration and authority of Ellen White seriously, you must take seriously statements defining her role like the following, "Little heed is given to the Bible, and the Lord has given a lesser light to lead men and women to the greater light."² From the earliest writings of her ministry she had this to say, "I recommend to you, dear reader, the word of God as the rule of your faith and practice. By that word we are to be judged. God has, in that word, promised to give visions in the 'last days'; not for a new rule of faith, but for the comfort of his people, and to correct those who err from Bible truth."³

Encouraged by Ellen White, we turn to the Bible. We find that it contains these words of Jesus. "You search the scriptures, because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that bear witness to me" (John 5:39, RSV). The scriptures he was talking about is our Old Testament. We find the New Testament to have the same center. The last book begins by declaring its intention to reveal Jesus: "The revelation of Jesus Christ . . ." (Rev. 1:1, RSV). Paul declared a similar intention for his writing by resolving "to know nothing among you except Jesus Christ and him crucified" (1 Cor. 2:2, RSV). Clearly, the Bible itself declares that its authority isn't worth the paper it's printed on unless Jesus is recognized as its theme and as Lord and Savior. Without this we will be like those in John 5:40 who didn't have life because they didn't come to him.

Neither Ellen White nor the Bible carry any independent authority. Only when Ellen White sends her reader back to the Bible can any of her distinctive teachings carry any authority. Only as either one of these causes us to turn to the Father and the Son can they have any authority at all.

If Jesus gave us inspired writings to teach us his character and will, we may well wonder whether many who don't accept their authority can still call Jesus "Lord." The word "Lord" implies rulership. If our Lord has chosen to reveal his will in these writings, those who find them too confining may also find their author too confining. There are those who are still examining the evidence before accepting these writings as his word, but there are others who refuse to accept them because they don't fit well with their pet theories and practices.

If he has spoken, let us listen.

"Only when Ellen White sends her reader back to the Bible can her distinctive teachings carry authority."

1. Roger L. Dudley and Des Cummings, "Who Reads Ellen White?" *Ministry*, Oct. 1982, p. 10.
2. *Review and Herald*, Jan. 20, 1903.
3. *Early Writings*, p. 78.

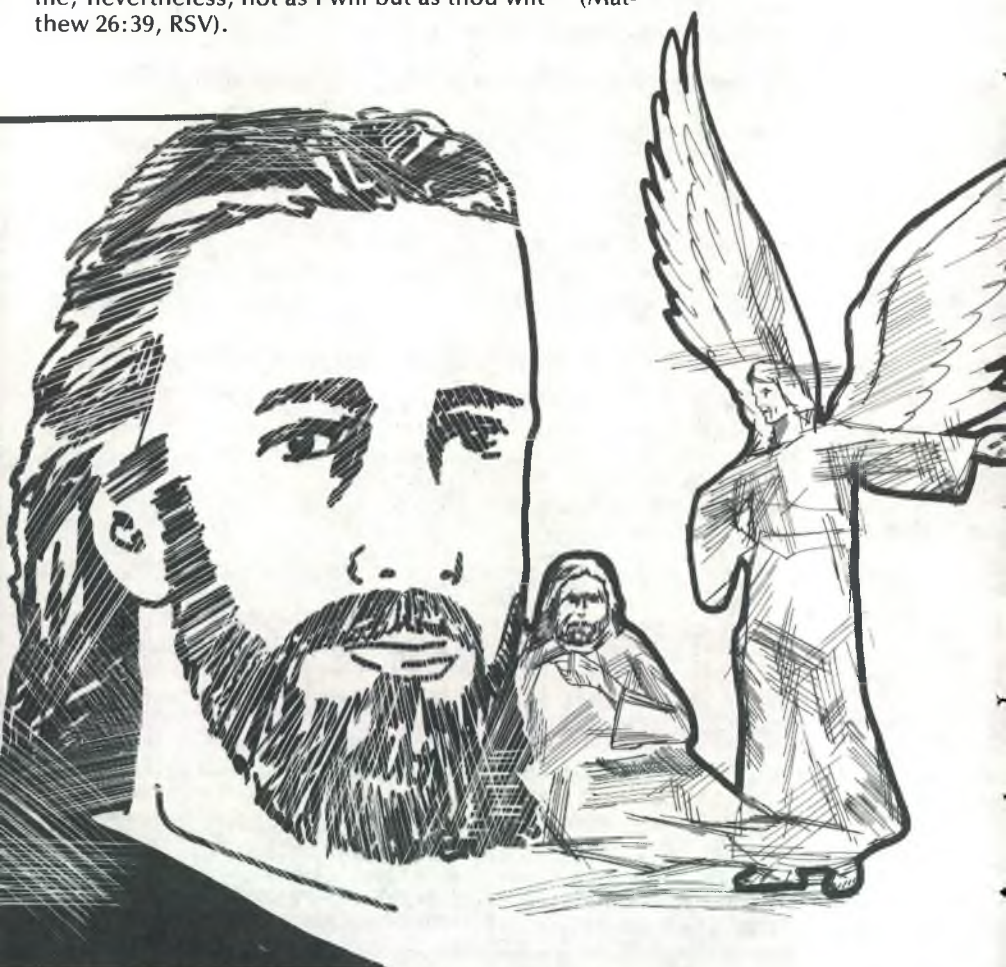
☐ January 6
Friday

James Miller is a Master of Divinity student at Andrews University.

1. Is "authority" too strong a term to describe the relationship of God's Word to the Christian? Does it imply a checklist religion of dos and don'ts? What is the role of human freedom in our Christian experience?
 2. Why doesn't God express his authority in universal terms that cannot be ignored—such as a thundering voice from heaven heard around the world? What implications would such an action have? Would it change our perception of God?
 3. Many groups that affirm the authority of the Bible hold radically different interpretations of the Bible. Is there a source for authoritative interpretation of Scripture? Or is there a procedure that all Christians can agree upon for arriving at a reliable interpretation of the Bible? Explain.
 4. Are all the instructions in the Bible literally to be obeyed? If not, what criteria determine whether or not a Christian should obey a scriptural command (see Evidence)?
 5. Most recognize that regular, careful Bible study is essential to the committed Christian life. Yet, many find Bible study to be a difficult, frustrating experience. If you have problems or questions about Bible study, share them with your class and ask for suggestions. If you learned some ways of making Bible study more productive, share them with the class.
 6. Does the authority of the Holy Spirit manifest itself tangibly in the life of the church today? If so, how? What is the relationship between the authority of the Holy Spirit and the authority of Scripture?
 7. James Miller (Opinion) suggests that Ellen White's writings carry authority only as they point us to the Bible and the Bible has authority only as it leads us to God. Do you agree? How do we determine if Ellen White is leading us to the Bible, or if the Bible is leading us to God?
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THE SUPREME EXAMPLE OF COMMITMENT

“ ‘My Father, if it be possible, let this cup pass from me; nevertheless, not as I will but as thou wilt’ ” (Matthew 26:39, RSV).



Lesson 2, January 8-14

by Sharon Carroll

The Call

INTRO- DUCTION

The call of the mountain—it is the call of light. And to follow its voice is to rise, rise, and move above the horizon, above the thin air of the towns into the light itself of the known.

There is a vast and open stillness on the top of the Salève. You stop, staring, in wonder at the stillness. You hold your breath. No sound. No sound. Just the movement of a slow breeze, and the scent of sweet spring that sings with a depth of life.

You have emerged from the darkness of your forested climb, and you stand now in a world of light, the first touch of light itself, and color alive with its call. For as far as you can see, green flows smooth and flawless, interrupted only by the fire yellow turquoise of the season's first flowers. It is the land of the alpine, catching your soul with the power of its color, color exuberant and alive.

You step toward the horizon, peering over the mountain's crumbling edge. Clouds below, soft whispers of light, and—there, there, beyond them—such green, green so vast—teasing your eye with the clarity of its brightness. The land unfolds itself, fully green, carefully patterned with geometric crops and fences of pines. You squint to catch the red of the scattered chateaux, so delicate

and fragile in the distance.

The green spreads with a slow movement into the rugged base of the Jura mountains just beyond, barely discernable in the moving fog off the distant coast of the land. And to the right, ah—you smile at the sight. Geneva—Geneva fully spread, caught in the clutch of afternoon light, Geneva alive and movement, movement in dazzling light, movement full, full and glory itself, and there, all there—suddenly just a grasp away, all of it, the glory of the city spread, the size of your open hand. You stand there, above, overlooking the vast city, watching, waiting, just one quick scoop away. . . .

You smile to yourself, triumphant, and powerful. You turn, then glance further to the right. Something caught, there, in the light, glints. A hint of golden, and—ah, ah the Alps rising full, with fullness spread, and Mont Blanc itself, rising, rising, majesty in full force—and calls, calls with the mystery of rising light, light beyond and light alive. You stare, still. You hear the call that asks you to rise—to rise beyond the grasp of the mere shadows of this Light. You step toward the power that thrusts itself heavenward, and you whisper in affirmation, “. . . Holy.”

At the time of this writing Sharon Carroll was a senior English major at Andrews University.

January 8
Sunday

The Proving of Obedience

LOGOS "Son though he was, he had to prove the meaning of obedience through all that he suffered" (Heb. 5:8, Phillips). Though this isn't a literal, word-for-word translation of the Greek text, J. B. Phillips here captures the essence of Christ's mission on earth—the salvation of man and the vindication of God's character. To do this Christ had to live a perfect life; he had to prove the meaning of obedience.

But now, alone and emaciated from forty days of fasting, Christ trembled before the enormous responsibility facing him. He was to be the one man, who by his perfect obedience, would make righteousness available to all (Romans 5:19). But forty days of hunger had dimmed the assurance of his baptismal experience. And now an apparent answer to his prayers for strength and guidance stood before him. He was told: "If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread" (Matt. 4:3, NIV). In this would be the absolute certainty that he was the Messiah. Previously only faith had told him that he was the Son of God and now, by yielding to this suggestion, it seemed that all doubt would be removed and the memory of his baptism would be confirmed. "Not without struggle could Jesus listen in silence to the archdeceiver."¹ But Christ's commitment to his Father and to humanity remained firm. He silenced the tempter and his promptings with the cry, "Away from me Satan! For it is written: 'Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only'" (Matt. 4:10, NIV).

Christ's commitment, confirmed through his wilderness experience, remained steadfast throughout the rest of his life. When exuberant crowds sought to make him a king he rejected their temporal designs. He preferred service to God over the praise of men, even though "After this many of the disciples drew back and no longer went about with him" (John 6:66, RSV).

Neither did Christ allow the ties of his nuclear family to interfere with his appointed work. When his mother and his brothers came seeking to distract him from his mission he asked, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Matt. 12:48, NIV). Then pointing to those who shared his commitment he said, "Here are my mother and my brothers. For whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:40, 50, NIV).

Near the end of his life, when explaining to his disciples that he must die, Jesus rebuked Peter for trying to dissuade him from completing the purpose of his mission (Matt. 16:21-23). Despite the attractiveness of Peter's suggestion Christ remained firm, allowing nothing to distract him. He chose instead to empty himself and become obedient unto death, even to death on a cross (Phil. 2:8, RSV).

So in every circumstance and every mood Christ showed us the supreme example of commitment, because "though he was in the form of God, he did not count equality with God a thing to be grasped" (Phil. 2:6, RSV). He surrendered his will to his Father and thus he proved the meaning of obedience.

E. R. M.

1. *The Desire of Ages*,
p. 119.

Commitment Under Trial

by Linda Morton Closser

Christ's obedience and commitment to the will of God is our supreme example of faithfulness to divine authority. I've heard this so many times before that the information usually goes right by me, without even so much as a nod of agreement. But to write this article, I re-read the chapters in *The Desire of Ages* entitled "The Temptation," "The Victory," and "Gethsemane." I was surprised—I felt refreshed and troubled at the same time. Refreshed because I remembered how special Christ's ministry on earth was; and troubled because I could not fathom, or come close to appreciating, the intensity of his commitment to God.

Temptation, and how we face it, is the real test of commitment. And the best examples of the kind of commitment Christ possessed are found in the most severe temptations he faced—in the wilderness and in Gethsemane.

After his baptism, God led Christ into the wilderness to be alone, to contemplate his mission and work, by fasting and prayer. Satan had been present at Christ's baptism; he had heard God say, "This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased" (Matt. 3:17), and the words burned him. He saw that to win the conflict between good and evil, he must overcome Christ. He followed Christ into the wilderness, hoping that under the force of despondency and extreme hunger, Christ would lose faith and work a miracle in his own behalf. If Christ succumbed, he would break the plan of salvation, and Satan's victory would be complete.

But Christ, even through his weakened condition, knew that he had to face sin as we face it. He had to overcome without the aid of his supernatural powers, and thus leave us an example of faith and submission. Jesus met Satan with the words of Scripture. Only from his close relationship to God, his commitment to his mission and to God, could he draw the strength to overcome temptation.

On the eve of his crucifixion, Christ suffered in Gethsemane. He knew that he was now counted among the transgressors of God's will because he bore the guilt of all sinners. This sin appeared so horrible, and the weight of guilt so heavy, that Christ feared it would separate him from God forever. Part of the agony was that he could not exert his divine power to escape this separation. He had to suffer the consequences of sin as a man.

As Christ felt his union with the Father disintegrating, he feared that in his human nature he would be unable to endure the coming conflict with Satan. And Satan was well-prepared for the battle. He told Christ that if he became the salvation for the world, the separation would be eternal; those that Christ died for would turn against him. Three times, Christ, in his agony, uttered the prayer, "Oh my Father, if this cup may not pass away from me, except I drink, Thy will be done," as he wrestled with the temptation to quit his mission. But when Christ despaired the most, he saw the real power of sin, and how Satan would rule if he gave up. He could not give up—he submitted to the will of God. His commitment withstood the greatest temptation man could ever face: to escape the suffering of death and what he was tempted to think of as eternal separation from God.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Matthew 4:1-11

"Temptation is the real test of commitment."

Linda Morton Closser finished her M.A. in English at Andrews University in 1981. She is now working for the university.

January 10
Tuesday

The Call for Honest Commitment

by Cheryl Jetter

EVIDENCE

Part 1

Key text:

Matthew 1:23

In the Garden of Eden the serpent, "more subtle than any other wild creature" (Gen. 3:1, RSV), induced Eve into disobedience by twisting the facts. That she would not die was true, in a sense, for she would not die the moment that she disobeyed. That she would gain a knowledge of evil as well as good was also true, but in an experiential way that she could not foresee. The lethality of the serpent's presentation was his "neglect" to link together that experiential knowledge of evil with its inevitable results—the death predicted by God. Such an imbalance of facts, the shortsightedness of a partial reality, has plagued mankind ever since.

In the first half of this century, Albert Camus, French philosopher and writer, developed the concept of the *absurd*. As he observed man throughout history, Camus concluded that there was a great and empty gap between man's desire to live in a just and rational universe, and his actual experience in a chaotic world which inflicts suffering and meaningless death on the generation who lives in it. To illustrate this gap, this *absurd*, Camus chose the mythical character Sisyphus, doomed eternally to roll a heavy rock up the side of a mountain, only to have it roll down again.¹

Camus' conclusions, based on observations of man's terrestrial plight alone, could not be more logical. The difficulty of his *absurd* lies not in its pointing out of a truth, but in its building its conclusions on the obvious effects of evil without considering its causes.

"The universe of Camus is anonymous, meaningless, and absurd."

In a 1948 address to a Christian audience, Camus presents the sincerity of his belief: "I share with you the same horror of evil. But I do not share your hope and I continue to struggle against this universe where children suffer and die."² In a letter to the Ephesian church, Paul writes of another struggle: "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places" (Eph. 6:12). The universe of Camus is anonymous, meaningless, and absurd. But Paul's universe is filled with personalities, a living reality of conflict and controversy that explains the effects of sin and why humanity often appears as victim rather than creator of its circumstances.

This is the larger reality that Christ came to confirm. Every act and word of Christ affirmed the existence of "God with us" (Matt. 1:23). When he looked beyond his blood mother and brothers to ask, "Who is my mother, and who are my brothers?" (Matt. 12:48, RSV), he affirmed the relationships of humanity under one Father. When he avoided the people who would make him king, he affirmed the reality of God's theocracy and his own subjugation to it (John 6:15). And when he rebuked Peter for trying to protect him from death, he affirmed the reality of the plan of salvation (Matt. 16:22).

In the same address Camus answers the question, What does the unbeliever expect from the Christian?: "... the world today longs to see Christians remain Christians." Here is a call for honest commitment to a spiritual reality. In Christ we can study the supreme example of such a commitment.

1. "Le mythe de Sisyphée," in *Essais*, Eds. R. Quilliot and L. Faucon, (Paris: Editions Gallimard, 1965), pp. 195-198.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 371-375.

January 11
Wednesday

Cheryl Jetter finished her M.A. in English at Andrews in 1982.

The Commitment of the Basin

by Donald B. Kraybill

EVIDENCE Part 2

What, in concrete terms, were the principles to which Jesus was so steadfastly committed? What were the conflicts and pressures he faced in living out that commitment? Donald Kraybill addresses those issues in the following excerpt from The Upside-Down Kingdom, winner of the National Religious Book Award in 1978.

... Jesus did not identify Himself with the existing religious parties and power structures in Palestine. He did not endorse the "realistic" Sadducees who cooperated extensively with the Roman occupation to preserve the sacred functions of the temple and their economic interests. There can be no question that He rejected the formal establishment of proper religion represented by the progressive Pharisees. He was not lured by a serene life in the desert in an Essene commune. He gave an emphatic and definite NO to the righteous revolutionary violence of the Zealots. He rejected the symbols of these four strategies for dealing with Rome's domination. The temple, oral law, wilderness, and sword find little prominence in his kingdom. Although Jesus did not participate in any of these feasible political options, He did stay right in the middle of things. His in-the-middle-of-things involvement was unusually upside down.

Every kingdom has a flag. This symbol represents the collective meanings of the kingdom and serves as a rallying point for loyalty and action. The symbols of the Upside-Down Kingdom are indeed upside down! They are certainly not the typical symbols which accompany a right-side-up king. The flags of this kingdom are a manger, stable, desert, donkey, thorns, basin, cross, and tomb. These are not the signs of successful kings. Such rulers are born in V.I.P. suites of prominent hospitals; they ride armored limosines, wear golden crowns, and receive international applause. But don't be mistaken. This Jesus is a King. He doesn't walk into Jerusalem on His feet. He rides in kingly fashion. His beast, however, is not the white stallion of a commander-in-chief; it's the poor man's donkey. He is a King but not a conventional one by any means.

"This Upside-Down King uses the instruments of the servant."

The cross has become the symbol par excellence of the Christian church. It represents both the atoning sacrifice of God's beloved Son for the sins of humankind and the nonresistant way of Jesus. A preoccupation with the cross, however, can detract from the very reason that the cross came about in the first place. There are three upside-down symbols which must be seen flowing together in telling the gospel story: the basin, the cross, and the tomb. In a real sense the basin is truly the symbol par excellence because it is this symbol that Jesus Himself voluntarily selected and used. The cross was the Roman symbol. It was used by them to crucify criminals. The cross was forced on Jesus by the ruling powers. It was the sign of evil men reacting to the way of the basin. The empty tomb is God's final word that He is triumphant over even the most vicious forces of evil.

In the context of the Last Supper as His earthly ministry was about to conclude, Jesus hoisted the flag of His Upside-Down Kingdom:

[Jesus] laid aside his garments, and girded himself with a towel. Then he poured water into a basin, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel with which

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January 11
Wednesday

he was girded. John 13:4, 5.

The towel and basin are the tools of the slave. This Upside-Down King uses the instruments of the servant. Instead of the typical powerful kingly symbols of sword, chariot, and white stallion Jesus reaches for the tools of service found at the bottom of the ladder. . . .

This is not the first time this King has gone down to the bottom. This King has been washing feet all His life. The towel and basin are the fundamental symbols which represent what Jesus was all about. Jesus had been using the basin for three years, not like Pilate did to absolve himself of responsibility, not like the Pharisees did to exclude others. His basin was one of assertive love which took responsibility for others and included them in the flat kingdom. It was His basin work, in fact, which set the stage for the cross. . . .

We have already seen the shape of the basin ministry. Jesus spoke out forcefully against the rich who callously perpetuated their economic dominance of the poor. He healed and shelled grain on the Sabbath. He ate with sinners and tax collectors. He committed blasphemy by calling God His Father and by forgiving sins. He violated and condemned the oral law. He allowed a prostitute to touch and anoint Him. He traveled with women in public. He told parables which stung the religious leaders. He talked freely with Samaritans and Gentiles. He healed the sick. He blessed the helpless. He touched lepers. He entered the homes of pagans. He purged the sacred temple. He stirred up large crowds.

“He was quite aware that His deviant behavior would trigger His death.”

In almost every instance He was breaking informal and formal social rules created by the powerful religious authorities. He didn't make a fuss just for the sake of making a fuss. He actively and aggressively used the basin and towel to serve the poor and helpless regardless of the conventional social customs. He was quite aware that His deviant behavior would trigger His death. He knew full well that death was the prescribed punishment for some of His behavior. But the harassment from the authorities and the threat of death didn't stop His acts of love. Although He was not a violent revolutionary, His behavior was a political threat to the entrenched powers. The chief priests and Pharisees said, “If we let him go on thus, every one will believe in him, and the Romans will come and destroy both our holy place and our nation” (John 11:48). Many of the charges at His trial were false. But there can be no question that in the minds of the Jewish leaders His new teaching and acting threatened the false sense of peace in Palestine. The Romans considered any source of instability a political threat to their control of Palestine. So they executed Him as a political insurrectionist and hung the tag “King of the Jews” on the cross.

Excerpted from Donald B. Kraybill, *The Upside-Down Kingdom*, (Scottsdale, PA: The Herald Press, 1978), pp. 291-295.

To Be Like Him

by Monte Salyer

A look at Jesus' experience with temptation reveals some principles vital to us in our own struggle to stay committed.

1. **Jesus learned perfect obedience to God's will.** Commitment did not come naturally to him. He went through a learning process which involved suffering (Heb. 5:8). There is a tendency today to pamper oneself, to satisfy natural desires as far as possible. Anyone who willingly sacrifices his own desires is considered odd. Smart people, in this way of thinking, just do what they want to do. But for Christian character to grow certain hard decisions have to be made. First it is necessary to deny self. Perhaps through prayer you decide that drinking cola is wrong. You would not call yourself a cola addict, yet you have developed a taste for it. With God's help, you quit cola, and learn that dedication to God's will enables you to change your life. With the same kind of decision-making process, you are able to gain even greater victories in your life.

2. **Jesus exercised perfect faith because he knew God.** He said, "If you have seen me, you have seen the Father" (see John 14:9). A spiritual connection with the Father permeates the bread of heaven spoken of in John 6. Now Jesus is calling for us to eat his spiritual bread, to come into close relationship with him and, through him, with the Father. He is not referring to a casual acquaintance. The words he uses are "abide in me" (John 6:56). Who do you know better than the person you live with? Is it not also true that we become like those who are nearest to us? One great secret for the success Jesus had in living a perfect life was that he chose to live with the Father daily. This may also be our key to spiritual success day by day.

3. **Jesus maintained perfect faithfulness by continually orienting his life to God's will.** At an early age, Christ determined to walk with our heavenly Father. At the age of twelve he stated: "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business?" (Luke 2:49). Later, during the hectic days of his public ministry, Jesus continued to declare his allegiance to the Father. "The Son can do nothing of himself, but what he seeth the Father doing" (John 5:19). It was this attitude, this commitment that enabled Jesus to face death itself and not back down. Confronted with body and soul wrenching crucifixion, Jesus affirmed, "Not as I will, but as you will" (Matthew 26:39, NIV).

Jesus is our example. We also may determine to walk with God. He is willing to accept us anytime, but what a mistake it is to delay making a commitment to him until one reaches a crisis. If we want to be ready to make godly decisions tomorrow, we must allow Jesus to live in our lives today. Christ was sent "to bless you by turning each of you from your wicked ways" (Acts 3:26, NIV). Let us open our hearts to him and let him finish the good work he has begun.

HOW TO

Key text:
Hebrews 5:8

Christ's Commitment: Implications for Harmony

by Steve
Mauro

OPINION
Key text:
Romans 5:19

Romans 5:19 tells us that Christ's obedience makes us righteous. This fact brings immeasurable relief and freedom from our struggles to acquire a right standing with God. This freedom also allows us to perceive things from a new perspective.

One implication of this is that communion with Christ is available to us anytime and anywhere. Due to the presence of his Spirit, the Saviour is closer to us today than he was to his own family and friends when he preached on the Galilean hillsides nearly two thousand years ago. Through his life and death, Christ became one with us, and our daily interaction with him allows us to be reminded of this fact.

Our unity with Christ enables us to be confident in him and in the freedom from sin which he offers us daily. Therefore, the second implication of Christ's gift is that we can always be confident that we are accepted in the Beloved (Ephesians 1:6). It is Christ's acceptance of the frail human sinner which inspires love and devotion. At Simon's feast, Christ was criticized for allowing a sinful woman to touch him. To the disgust of his contemporaries, he interpreted the woman's motives as being entirely acceptable because they were prompted by a pure and unselfish love. Christ's judgment of this sinful mortal was based on the genuine response of her heart. She was accepted by God because she accepted his pardoning love (Luke 7:47). It was on this and similar occasions which Christ demonstrated a divine commitment to accepting the unwashed and the unwanted, the fallen race. It was this commitment which aroused the greatest jealousy among the religious leaders of his day. They inadvertently proclaimed the Gospel when muttering this plaudit dourly, "This man receives sinners and eats with them" (Luke 15:2).

The third implication which we must consider is that Christ's gifts enable us to enhance our relationships with each other. The freedoms of the cross also constitute some of the great claims of the cross. The sacrifice of Christ has set us free from the law of sin and death (Romans 8:2) yet at the foot of this cross we find ourselves kneeling with others whom we have formerly shunned as undesirable. It is the healing power of Christ's sacrifice which enables us to submit to his twofold injunction to love God and to love each other. We do not have the power within ourselves to love either God or our fellow humans. It is only the power of Christ's presence in our lives that melts our sin-hardened hearts.

This truth teaches that Christ's gift of acceptance frees us from prejudice and fear. This freedom gives life an entirely new perspective. We are no longer bound by a law of slavery to sin, but we are released by the principles of love. It is in Christ's love that we find the freedom to respond spontaneously to him and to each other.

Christ's commitment enables us to perceive and to respond to the spiritual reality of his presence. The acceptance he has given us enables us to live confidently in him. These truths about Christ's commitment to weak sinful humans have enormous implications for the harmony we can experience with God and with each other.

REACT
Lesson 2

1. Does the scene described in the Introduction correlate in any way to the temptations Christ faced? To the ones we face? Explain.
2. How was Jesus able to sustain his commitment to God through every challenge? Are all his resources available to us?
3. What does the author of Hebrews mean saying Jesus “learned obedience” (see How To)? What are the implications for us?
4. Do you agree with the Evidence (Part 1) author’s statement that Camus’ concept of the *absurd* is logical when one considers the empirical evidence alone? What response does the way of Jesus offer to this concept?
5. What does Donald Kraybill (Evidence, Part 2) mean by “basin commitment”? Is this the type of commitment God desires from us?
6. Why is Christ the “upside-down King”? Should we also be considered “upside-down” by the worldly majority? If we are not so considered, is that evidence that we are not truly following the way of Jesus?
7. Can you identify two or three specific things that a commitment to Jesus’ basin ministry would mean in today’s world?
8. Do you think Christ’s perfect obedience, credited to us in a substitutionary sense, has any direct implications for our level of commitment (see Opinion for some ideas)? Which has greater impact—Christ as atoning sacrifice or Christ as the paradigm of true commitment and love?

DISCOVERING GOD'S WILL

"I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you" (Psalm 32:8, RSV).



I Will Instruct Thee

by Frances Cook

INTRODUCTION

David looked over the class schedule for winter quarter. Chemistry, Computer Science, American Lit 411. . . .

An aptitude test had indicated ability in science and math. "But," he mused, "what to do with it?" Time was running out; a sophomore, and still he hadn't decided on a major. He couldn't, he knew, go to school much longer without a decision.

He stared out the window, watching students who all seemed to know where they were going, which careers were right for them, what they wanted. "Why don't I? Why can't God telephone me, write to me or at least give me a hard shove in the right direction? Do only theology majors get that?"

Trisha stood before her dorm room mirror, brush in hand, studying herself. She had been dating Paul, a pre-med student, since the fall picnic. Now he wanted marriage before he graduated in August. She slowly pulled the brush through long auburn hair, tilting her head to untangle the curls at the end. "Should I?" she asked the reflection in the glass. The gray eyes looked back steadily, barely hinting at the jumble of excitement and doubt, of love

and fear, behind them. "Med school, then where, then what? A nice house? Cute kids? Would they be happy then? God knows. Is there any way I can really know what he thinks about it?"

Eva slid into her assigned chapel seat, pulled out the list of terms for that day's psychology quiz, and tried to ignore the blur of sounds around her. Halfway down the list, she paused to watch the speakers move onto the platform, then she half-heartedly joined the song and prayer. As the main speaker reached the pulpit, she returned to her notebook . . . "Metapsychological . . . of or relating to. . . ."

The speaker's enthusiasm pricked her curiosity, and she listened. Colporteurs. Student colporteur in the summer. Various students giving testimonies.

The adventure of it stirred her. The liberal quotes from *Colporteur Ministry* burned in. Then came the passionate appeal for summer recruits. Should she? Could she? It all sounded so wonderful, so almost compulsory! Was God touching her, or was it the human emotions of the appeal? Could she know? How?

Frances Cook is the wife of a student at the Theological Seminary at Andrews University and mother of three.

January 15
Sunday

Guaranteed Success

LOGOS

Like most people, I don't remember much from the scores of graduation sermons that I've heard. But the speaker's main point from our academy consecration service somehow etched itself in my memory: "God has a plan for your life. Within that plan you cannot fail. Outside that plan you cannot succeed."¹ If we believe that concept, and wish to live according to God's plan, a dilemma remains. How do I find out specifics of the plan?

God assures us that he will communicate his direction for our lives. "I will instruct you and teach you the way you should go; I will counsel you with my eye upon you" (Psalm 32:8, RSV). We might wish that this counsel was communicated to us very directly and specifically, with easy answers to every dilemma accessed simply by dialing the phone, checking a computer printout or flicking on a TV screen. If God did that, though, he wouldn't be treating us like free, intelligent human beings. So instead, like a good human teacher, he uses various media to communicate the broad principles of his will, with some examples, and then leaves it up to us to discover the specific answer for our lives. Our role in establishing what God's will for us is, then, two-fold: staying attuned to his media and then making informed decisions.

God's primary medium is Scripture. Paul writes, "All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:15, 16, RSV). By direct teaching and by stories about God's interaction with people in the past, Scripture reliably outlines the boundaries of the divine will.

The psalmist declared, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path" (Psalm 119:105). Yet the words of Scripture alone are at times confusing and apparently conflicting. That's why the Bible points beyond itself to the source of its own light. Jesus said, "I am the light of the world. Whoever follows me will never walk in darkness, but will have the light of life" (John 8:12, NIV). It's from the gospel—the teaching, example, and saving deeds of Jesus Christ, that light for our decision making shines with greatest clarity. When faced with a decision, writes John Brunt, "The Christian must ask, is this course of action consistent with the gospel?"²

God never leads us contrary to the illumination that comes from the light of the world and the inspired witness to him. Yet we also have a living, active source of guidance in the Holy Spirit who guides us into all truth (see John 16:13). For most of us the Spirit's voice is an inner, inaudible one. We accept by faith the promise of his aid in helping us decide how the principle of Scripture applies to our particular situation.

Finally, guidance from God comes only to those who believe he knows best and are committed to following his direction. We cannot truly know his will if we are detached from him, and view his way as an option to take or leave. The wise man recommends, "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight" (Prov. 3:5, 6, NIV).

D. F. M.

1. The speaker was Dr. Floyd Breese, now in the General Conference Ministerial Department.

2. John Brunt, *Decisions*, (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1979), p. 45.

In the Days of Thy Youth

selected by Kathy Beagles

Youth is the time to . . . lay the plan, and accustom one's self to the practice, of ordering all the acts of life with reference to the will of God and the welfare of our fellow-creatures. . . .¹

In order to know the will of God, you must study it, rather than follow your own inclinations and the natural bent of your own mind. "What wilt thou have me to do?" should be the anxious earnest inquiry of your heart. . . . God is not well pleased that His servants shall be ignorant of His divine will, novices in spiritual understanding, but wise in worldly wisdom and knowledge.²

There are three ways in which the Lord reveals His will to us, to guide us, and to fit us to guide others. How may we know His voice from that of a stranger? How shall we distinguish it from the voice of a false shepherd? God reveals His will to us in His word, the Holy Scriptures. His voice is also revealed in His providential workings; and it will be recognized if we do not separate our souls from His by walking in our own ways, doing according to our own wills, and following the promptings of an unsanctified heart, until the senses have become so confused that eternal things are not discerned, and the voice of Satan is so disguised that it is accepted as the voice of God.

Another way in which God's voice is heard is through the appeals of His Holy Spirit, making impressions upon the heart, which will be wrought out in the character. If you are in doubt upon any subject you must first consult the Scriptures. If you have truly begun the life of faith you have given yourself to the Lord to be wholly His, and He has taken you to mold and fashion according to His purpose, that you may be a vessel unto honor. You should have an earnest desire to be pliable in His hands and to follow whithersoever He may lead you.³

We all desire immediate and direct answers to our prayers. . . . But God is too wise and good to answer our prayers always at just the time and in just the manner we desire. And because we can trust His wisdom and love, we should not ask Him to concede to our will, but should seek to enter into and accomplish His purpose. Our desires and interests should be lost in His will.⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Ecclesiastes
12:1

**"To know the
will of God,
you must
study it."**

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 234.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 512.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 512.

4. *Ministry of Healing*, pp. 230, 231.

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January 17
Tuesday

An Expected End

by Collette Joy Crowell

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Jeremiah 29:11

"God has a plan." To a Christian young adult, those four words can provide the ultimate solace. In the maze of decisions, we can know that God will indeed bring us to the place where we can fulfill his purpose for our lives—to his expected end. And if God has a plan, even the end of a once-promising romance, or the closing of a professional opportunity need not bring despair. Instead, they produce gratefulness that God is so specifically answering our prayer for guidance. But how can we really know that God has a plan for our individual lives, that he has called us to a specific task, time, and place? How can we know that he wants to involve himself in our everyday lives?

1. *The evidence of the conscience.* The greatest evidence we have that God wants to involve himself in our lives lies in the fact that he doesn't leave us alone. The proverbial "hound of heaven" follows us no matter how great or how small our deviation from his will. Psalm 139:7-10 indicates that we can't get away from God because he has a plan, and he is not satisfied until we follow it. We have all experienced the proddings of the Spirit. We know firsthand the disquieted, disturbed, gut-level emotions that inevitably result when we step out of God's will. The trauma we experience is evidence that God uses to prod us to choose a better way.

"God doesn't
leave us
alone."

We also have experienced that peace that God sends to us as a guarantee when we are living according to his plan. Although there is validity in the warnings against emotional decision making, there also is truth in the fact that God leads through our conscience. When we get serious, and ask him to lead our lives, we will hear his voice. "And thine ears shall hear a word behind thee saying, 'This is the way, walk ye in it,' when ye turn to the right hand, and when ye turn to the left" (Isaiah 30:21).

2. *The evidence of practical biblical principles.* God doesn't count on our consciences alone to lead us to his expected end. In most cases, he writes his will for our everyday lives in black and white; in biblical principles that should leave no doubt in our minds as to the choices he would like us to make. The Bible is not ethereal and other-worldly, it is downright practical. If we read it seriously, looking for personal application, we often find God being very specific about his plan for our lives. Even if God spoke to us in no other way, if we carefully followed every principle we found in the scriptures, we would be able to live our lives without regret.

3. *The evidence of the cross.* Jesus died that God's plan might be fulfilled in our lives—so it would not be short-circuited by sin, guilt, and hopelessness. His plans for our lives are so important to him that he would have died to work out his plan for just one life—your life. If he was serious enough about our happiness to die for us, why do we doubt that he cares enough to bring us to his worthwhile purpose for our lives?

With all this evidence of God's care and concern, our question should not be, "Does God have a plan," but instead, "Am I willing to follow God's plan? Am I in his will for my life?"

Decisions, Decisions, Decisions

by Kathy Beagles

HOW TO
Key text:
Isaiah 30:21

You believe God guides and has a plan for your life. But you are faced with a decision that you think is important and you want to know what his will for you is in this matter. Right now. What do you do? How do you get in touch with him?

First of all, you better decide if you just want to know his will or if you really want to do it, whatever it is. Being human, and a creative being, you have some ideas about what you would like. Are you willing to lay those aside if he should, from his omniscience, direct a different plan?

Let's say that with God's grace and enabling you decide that you want, not only to know his will, but to do it. At this point, many dedicated Christians go on whatever feeling or impression presents itself next. Be careful! Satan probably has a will for you in the matter also. Don't make your decision based on your impressions alone. The Holy Spirit will guide you, but you must test your impressions to find out whether they come from him, your own active imagination, or some worse source.

Guidance from God will always be in harmony with Scripture and previous revelations from him. Even if there is not an answer to your very specific, very today problem, going to Scripture is a good way to commune with God and to get closer to an understanding of his will for your whole life.

Another important test for your impressions is providential workings. It is a great faith builder to watch how God used providential workings in the lives of dedicated Christians. The pieces of the puzzle called life seem to fall into place so smoothly sometimes, that the untrained eye misses it. If you have the impression that God wants you to be a missionary doctor but you just can't get a passing grade in chemistry, look closely for some other doors that seem open to you and more in line with what God has already revealed about your life and abilities.

Paul says that the Christian life is a "reasonable service" (Rom. 12:1). Martin Wells Knapp, author of the book *Impressions* says: "God has given us reasoning powers for a purpose, and he respects them, appeals to them, and all of his leadings are in unison with them."¹

Talk the matter over with godly friends. Parents or teachers that you respect are often good counselors. And of course, present the whole thing to the Lord asking him to reveal his will.

Now you are up from your knees and there is no answer written across your bedroom mirror. There has been no thundering from heaven. You are still faced with a decision.

1. List all the possibilities remaining to you now that you have weeded out those inconsistent with Scripture, providential workings and godly advice (if you have found some).

2. From the options left, choose the one you feel most comfortable with.

3. Inform God of your choice, believing that he will guide you, and then move ahead (Isaiah 30:21).

4. Ask God to keep you open to any further guidance he may have for you, and be willing to have him block the way at any time, should you have wandered "to the right hand, or to the left."

1. As cited in *Emotions, Can You Trust Them*, Section IV, "Interpretation of Impressions" by Dr. James Dobson, Regal Books, A Division of GL Publications, Ventura, CA.

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January 19
Thursday

God Is Not Looking for Clients

by Wesley Flory

OPINION

Key text:
Proverbs 3:5, 6

This week we have studied about God's love, expressed by his gracious offer of help in our decision making. All human beings make decisions. People who know nothing about God make decisions. Books are written on decision making. University classes are taught on how to make decisions.

Experts on the decision-making process will tell you to get all the information you can on the question to be decided. Make lists of all of the options, list all of the arguments in favor of or against each option. Then use all of your experience, good judgment and common sense to make the decision.

Friendship with God does not remove any of the steps required for good decision making. Friendship with God does not mean that he will provide us with ready-made, neatly wrapped, correct answers to all of life's decisions. Friendship with God does add a wonderful dimension to decision making: knowing that the decision is in harmony with God's will. A friend of God will consider how his decision will effect God's reputation. A friend of God will consider how the decision will effect the opportunities he has for helping others become God's friends.

The "vending-machine" concept of God is too prevalent—the idea that if we follow all the "right procedures" God will reward us with answers to all our problems. God is not looking for clients, he is looking for friends. He wants us to reach the point in our experience with him where our natural thoughts and desires will be in harmony with his thoughts and desires. That is true friendship.

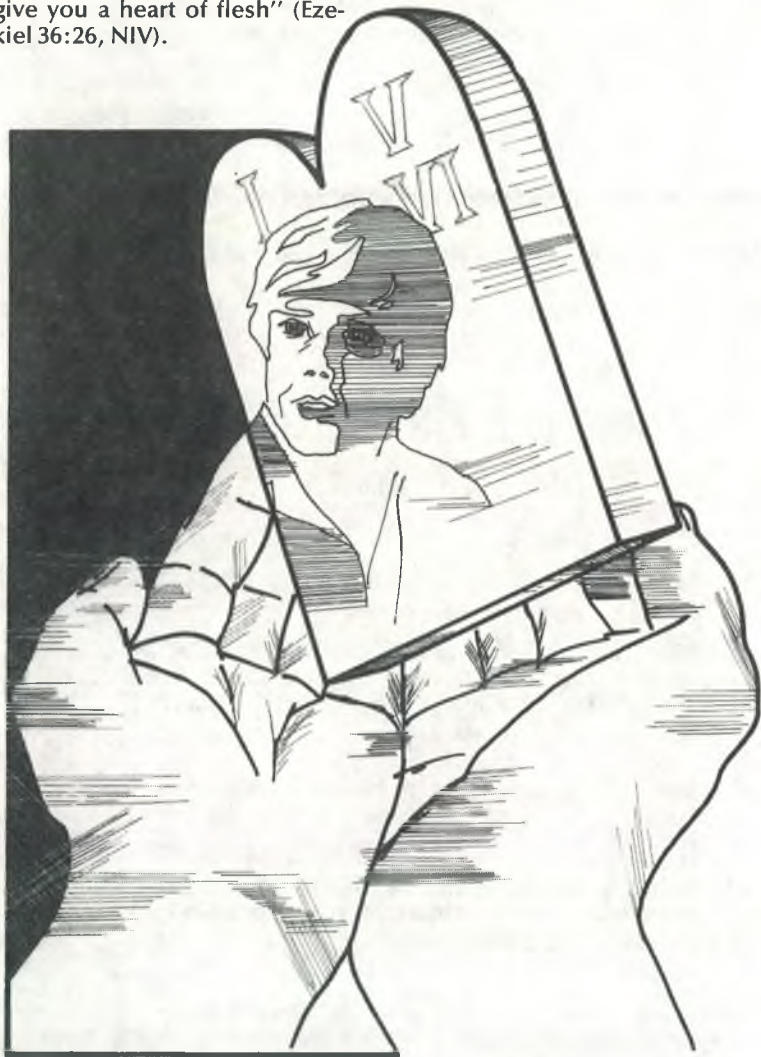
I must always remember that God's guidance is only one factor at work when I am making decisions. My own pride, ambition, selfishness, greed etc., etc., are all there too. God has given me the gift of reason to enable me to choose the best course of action. God has given me the power of choice. With that gift goes the responsibility for the consequences of my choice. How thankful I am to have a Friend who knows me completely, who loves me completely and who does provide me with the wisdom in making life's decisions.

"God does not remove the steps required for decision making."

1. How would you outline, step-by-step, the procedure for discerning God's will? If you don't think this is possible, explain why.
 2. The Introduction contains three situations in which people are faced with difficult decisions. Try to put yourself in each situation and discuss how you would go about discovering God's will.
 3. In situations like those mentioned in the Introduction, is there always one course of action that is God's will in the matter, with all other options being against his will? Explain.
 4. John Brunt suggests that when faced with a decision, we should ask, "Is this course of action consistent with the gospel?" (see Logos). What do you think he means by this? How, in practical terms, do you apply "the gospel" to decision-making?
 5. All of God's leadings are in unison with our reasoning powers, says an author quoted in the How To. Do you agree? Can you think of instances in which God would lead us *contrary* to our reasoning powers?
 6. Does friendship with God guarantee that we will make the right decision (see Opinion)? Explain. In what way, if at all, does God respond when we make wrong decisions?
-

COMMITTED FROM THE HEART

"I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezekiel 36:26, NIV).



Lesson 4, January 22-28

The Closest Thing We Have

by Laurie Shoup

INTRODUCTION

"Maybe I love him as a person. But I'm not *in* love with him." My roommate Julie looked at me sadly. I glanced around our dorm room, searching for words, seeing only the cards on her desk, the rose in the vase, the laughing pictures of Brian on the wall. Why did she break up with him? Everyone said they were the perfect couple. Walking around campus together, they looked just right for each other. Brian was wonderful. He wrote songs for her, called her every night, and kept our room looking like a florist's delight. What more could she want?

Tired, Julie finished brushing her teeth and crawled into bed. "It's hard to explain," she said as she reached for the light. "It's as if everything was decided without me. I'm not comfortable—there are things I can't talk to him about. And when someone says 'I love you' and you can't say it back, it gets awfully quiet in the room."

That was months ago. Julie's seeing someone else now. It's different this time. Like all relationships, Julie's and Donnie's has its quirks, but this time both are working on it. Donnie makes Julie shine. She laughs easily now. She doesn't get mad anymore when I drip water on the bathroom floor after my shower. And when she talks about Donnie, something in her voice tells me that she needs him. "You think I'm corny," she says, "but it's like magic. I'm a different person. No

matter what happens I want to work things out."

It's strange that some relationships work while others don't. Julie broke up with Brian because she couldn't pretend to love him. Admiring all the fine qualities in another isn't enough—there has to be a stronger commitment from the heart. If the equal commitment isn't there, the love won't be either—not for all the songs or flowers in the world.

Perhaps the secret lies in both sides being convinced. To love someone we must be convinced that we can trust him. It involves accepting and being honest with each other, even when we don't feel like it. It is only when we have this commitment that a sense of belonging to each other begins.

It's much the same with Jesus. We have to become convinced that we need him. It's something everyone must discover for himself, because we all hear his voice in different ways. Once we make the commitment, we gain a whole new perspective. Loving him gives us motives for acting the way we want to act. It gives us the ability to trust him; a longing to live his life-style.

Someone once told me that being a Christian is the closest thing we have to magic. It creates changes. Perhaps that's because when we sense God reaching for us with his powerfully gentle love, needing us because he wants to need us, offering us strength to live better lives, something precious happens inside us.

And that really is magic.

Laurie Shoup is a graduate student in English at Andrews University.

January 22
Sunday

Straight From the Heart

LOGOS Obedience is a strange quality. In fact, when expressed as a part of our proper relationship to God, obedience seems to be a classic paradox. It is required of us by God, yet it is worthless if it is rendered simply as a fulfillment of that requirement. Obedience cannot save us, yet unless we possess it salvation cannot be ours. It is the case of being between the proverbial "rock and a hard place." We are caught between God's demanding expectations: "Obey me, and I will be your God and you will be my people. Walk in all the ways I command you, that it may go well with you" (Jer. 7:23, NIV)—and our natural tendency toward disobedience: "The sinful mind is hostile to God. It does not submit to God's law, nor can it do so" (Rom. 8:7, 8, NIV). The two conditions are apparently irreconcilable.

The solution to this impasse is the love of God. Love is the great motivator. A recent popular song speaks of love which comes "straight from the heart." This is the sort of love necessary to motivate obedience. It is not "head" love—an intellectual assent to God's supremacy and a passive recognition of his direction in our lives, but "heart" love—an emotional and binding commitment to God as our never-failing Friend. Because of our sin-hardened state, however, this love must come from God. This is why he gives us a "heart transplant" when we come to him. God promises, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh. And I will put my Spirit in you and move you to follow my decrees and be careful to keep my laws" (Eze. 36:26, 27, NIV).

A new heart enables us to love God with his kind of love—the only true love. As a result, Christ lives within us (Gal. 2:20). His wishes become our commands—so much so that his law becomes engraved upon our motivations. As he says, "I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people" (Heb. 8:10, NIV). The secret of true obedience is that it must be prompted by internal motivation, not external restriction. It must be natural, automatic—a product of our love for him. Our human efforts must be devoted simply to knowing him better. For not only is it true that to know him is to love him, but also to love him is to obey him. Obedience is an effect—not a cause.

In this perspective, God's demands for obedience don't seem so difficult. In fact, we understand the true essence of Christianity only when we realize that all God wants from us is all of our love—which will automatically bring obedience—straight from the heart.

L. R. C.

Receiving God's Free Gift

Selected by Mark Naden

Everything in nature, from the mote in the sunbeam to the worlds on high, is under law. And upon obedience to these laws the order and harmony of the natural world depend.¹ Before this earth was called into being, God's law existed. Angels are governed by its principles, and in order for earth to be in harmony with heaven, man also must obey the divine statutes.²

The law given upon Sinai was the enunciation of the principle of love, a revelation to earth of the law of heaven.³ The beloved disciple, who listened to the words of Jesus on the mount, writing long afterward under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, speaks of the law as of perpetual obligation.⁴ He is speaking of the law that existed at creation and was reiterated upon Mt. Sinai.⁵

The law was not spoken at this time exclusively for the benefit of the Hebrews. God honored them by making them the guardians and keepers of His law, but it was to be held as a sacred trust for the whole world. The precepts of the decalogue are adapted to all mankind, and they were given for the instruction and government of all. Ten precepts, brief, comprehensive, and authoritative, cover the duty of man to God and to his fellowman; and all based upon the great fundamental principle of love. "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy mind; and thy neighbor as thyself." In the ten commandments these principles are carried out in detail, and made applicable to the condition and circumstances of man.⁶

So long as heaven and earth continue, the holy principles of God's law will remain. His righteousness, "like the great mountains" (Psalm 36:6), will continue, a source of blessing, sending forth streams to refresh the earth.

Because the law of the Lord is perfect, and therefore changeless, it is impossible for sinful men, in themselves, to meet the standard of its requirement. This was why Jesus came as our Redeemer. It was His mission, by making men partakers of the divine nature, to bring them into harmony with the principles of the law of heaven.⁷

God offered them, in His Son, the perfect righteousness of the law. If they would open their hearts fully to receive Christ, then the very life of God, His love, would dwell in them, transforming them into His own likeness; and thus through God's free gift they would possess the righteousness which the law requires.⁸

TESTIMONY

Key text:

Matthew 22:37, 38

"The law . . . was the enunciation of the principle of love."

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 48.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 48.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 305.

7. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 50.

8. *Ibid.*, p. 55.

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January 24
Tuesday

The Heart's Answer by Rennard Doneskey

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Ezekiel 36:26, 27

Alfred Tennyson, the great Victorian poet, mourned the loss of his friend who had died tragically young, and found this experience made him question his faith in an all-loving God (would God, if he existed, really allow this kind of waste?). Coupled with this loss came startling new revelations from science. According to the fossil record, hundreds of species of animals had been wiped out of existence, and those still alive seemed locked in a struggle for survival—survival dependent on strength and cunning alone. Tennyson was perceptive enough to know these discoveries could not be blindly discounted, for they had far-reaching implications, especially for people who believed in God. Tennyson had a difficult time reconciling these new facts with his religious faith, for intellectually he believed in science. But speaking of this crisis in his life, he wrote in one of his poems,

If e'er when faith had fallen asleep,
I heard a voice, "believe no more,"
And heard an ever-breaking shore
That tumbled in the Godless deep,

A warmth within the breast would melt
The freezing reason's colder part,
And like a man in wrath the heart
Stood up and answer'd, "I have felt."¹

Tennyson, then, intellectually doubted God, but was convicted from the heart that his intellect was wrong. He held on to a religious faith against the judgment of his reason.

Tennyson's experience demonstrates two kinds of commitment. The first—intellectual commitment—can lead to a kind of belief. The non-Adventist, for example, can believe Saturday is the proper Sabbath but still worship on Sunday. But when he is committed from the heart, he wants to change his entire life to harmonize his actions with his new belief. So, the second kind of commitment, the heartfelt kind, leads to belief plus faith, the kind of faith that makes action possible.²

I'm not promoting an emotionalism that rejects any kind of intellectual approach to Christianity. I believe Christians should intellectually search for truth. But I also believe that only heartfelt belief leads to obedience.

Fortunately, we need not worry about obtaining this heartfelt experience, for God has promised to give us a new heart, one that can keep his laws (see the text for today). So, through Christ, we can have a heartfelt commitment to God's word that will lead to a natural, unforced obedience to his commandments.

1. From *Victorian Poetry and Poetics*, Ed. Walter E. Houghton and G. Robert Stange, 2nd ed. (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1968), p. 81.

2. Thanks to Dr. Everet Lawson for sparking these ideas.

A Surpassing Commitment

HOW TO
Key text:
2 Cor. 3:6-18;
4:6

There are dos and don'ts to Christian living—there's no escaping it. There's also no escaping the apostle Paul's teaching that the law is not what governs the Christian life. And this paradox may actually be a key to the issue of this week's lesson—how to be committed to Christ from the heart rather than out of a sense of burdensome obligation.

As a people who have stressed the importance of obedience to God's laws, Adventists may be somewhat taken aback by Paul's bold assertion that "Christ is the end of the law so that there may be righteousness for everyone who believes" (Rom. 10:4, NIV). Yet this and other statements (see Rom. 7:6; 2 Cor. 3:6; Gal. 5:18) clearly show that for Paul, in contrast to the rabbinic Judaism of his day, one's relationship to God was not to be based on law (meaning the entire Torah). The Messiah, Jesus, has replaced the Torah as the means by which one enters and sustains a right relationship with God.¹

In the committed Christian life, therefore, heartfelt allegiance to a person replaces devotion to a legal code.² God's rules, then, are not checklist prescriptions, but are instead descriptions of the way of companionship with Christ. To experience the biblical way of obedience, we should:

1. Orient our lives toward the living Christ, not the dead letter of the written code. The preoccupation of the Christian life is not laws, whether they be found in the Ten Commandments, the *Testimonies*, or the *Church Manual*. Noting that "the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life" (2 Cor. 3:6, NIV), Paul goes on to contrast the law and Christ as means of relating to God. The law had great glory, so much so that, after receiving it, Moses had to veil his face so that the Israelites could look at him. But even as great as the law's glory was, it was a fading glory. Furthermore, Paul saw the veil Moses wore as indicative of a hindrance to the Israelites' access to the glory of God. By contrast, through the Spirit, the Christian has complete freedom of access to "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ" (2 Cor. 4:6, NIV; cf. 2 Cor. 3:7-18).

Thus in committing ourselves to God we should be oriented toward the far surpassing glory of Christ, not the fading glory of the law.

2. Concentrate on Christ. Since we have the privilege of free access to the glory of God through Christ, we must take advantage of it. Commitment to him can develop only if we take "prime time" each day to focus on him through Bible study and prayer. In this process our appreciation for him grows and our lives are shaped accordingly. "And we all, with unveiled face, beholding the glory of the Lord, are being changed into his likeness . . ." (2 Cor. 3:18, RSV).

3. Having thus oriented our lives toward Christ, we can view the law as more descriptive than prescriptive. That is, the law is not a list of requirements whereby we achieve and maintain status with God. We have that fully in Christ. But since Christ gave us the law as well as himself, the law is a trustworthy guide for knowing his will. The commitment from the heart that grows out of our relationship with Christ means walking in the way he leads. The law sheds light on that way.

D. F. M.

1. A Covenant relationship, not legalistic obedience, was God's desire in the Old Testament era as well as the New. See Steve Daily's "The Gospel at Sinai" in *Ministry* (March 1983), for an excellent discussion of this topic.
2. This is a paraphrase of a statement by F. F. Bruce in *Paul: Apostle of the Heart Set Free* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1977), p. 189. This article is heavily dependent on Bruce, pp. 120-122, 188-202.

January 26
Thursday

Working From the Inside

by Becky Lacy

OPINION
Key text:
Galatians 2:20

In Sunday's lesson we find this statement regarding relationships: "Admiring all the fine qualities in another isn't enough—there has to be a stronger commitment from the heart."

Nothing could be closer to the truth when discussing our relationship with God. The process in which we come to God isn't that clearcut; the steps can't be separated that easily. Coming to know Christ, really to know him, is bound to our commitment to him. One cannot sit on the sidelines as a spectator and at the same time say he knows Christ. The choice is ours and we must be careful. Martin Bell puts it this way:

"To live is to decide, to risk being wrong, to bet your life. Life itself is inextricably bound to decision making. It is not enough to be interested in this man [Christ], or fascinated by him. Either we stand ready to commit our deaths to him or we don't. No one ever knows the Christ and then commits himself. *Commitment is the one and only way by which we may know Christ.*"¹

"Commitment is the one and only way by which we may know the Christ."

This commitment will cause change, it will create a type of magic as described in the introductory article for this week. Ellen White confirms this, writing that, ". . . the very life of God, His love, would dwell in them, transforming them into His own likeness. . . ." ²

Our experience cannot be separated from our commitment. It is the experience of the incarnate God in our lives that can help to define and live out our commitment. Christ has been compared to the eye of a hurricane. The eye itself is calm and self-contained yet it's the experience of the hurricane that is altering.

To experience the Christ is to incorporate our stories with his story.

". . . [H]earing requires that I listen inside me as I listen to him. Hearing is a rhythm whereby I shuttle between his words and my experience."³

The Christ event in our lives starts with saying yes; for the door to the human heart can only be opened from the inside.

1. Martin Bell, *The Way of the Wolf*, (The Seabury Press, 1961), emphasis supplied.
2. *Thoughts from the Mount of Blessing*, p. 55.
3. Hugh Prather, from a book by John Stewart, *Bridges Not Walls*, (Addison-Wesley Publishing Company, 1977).

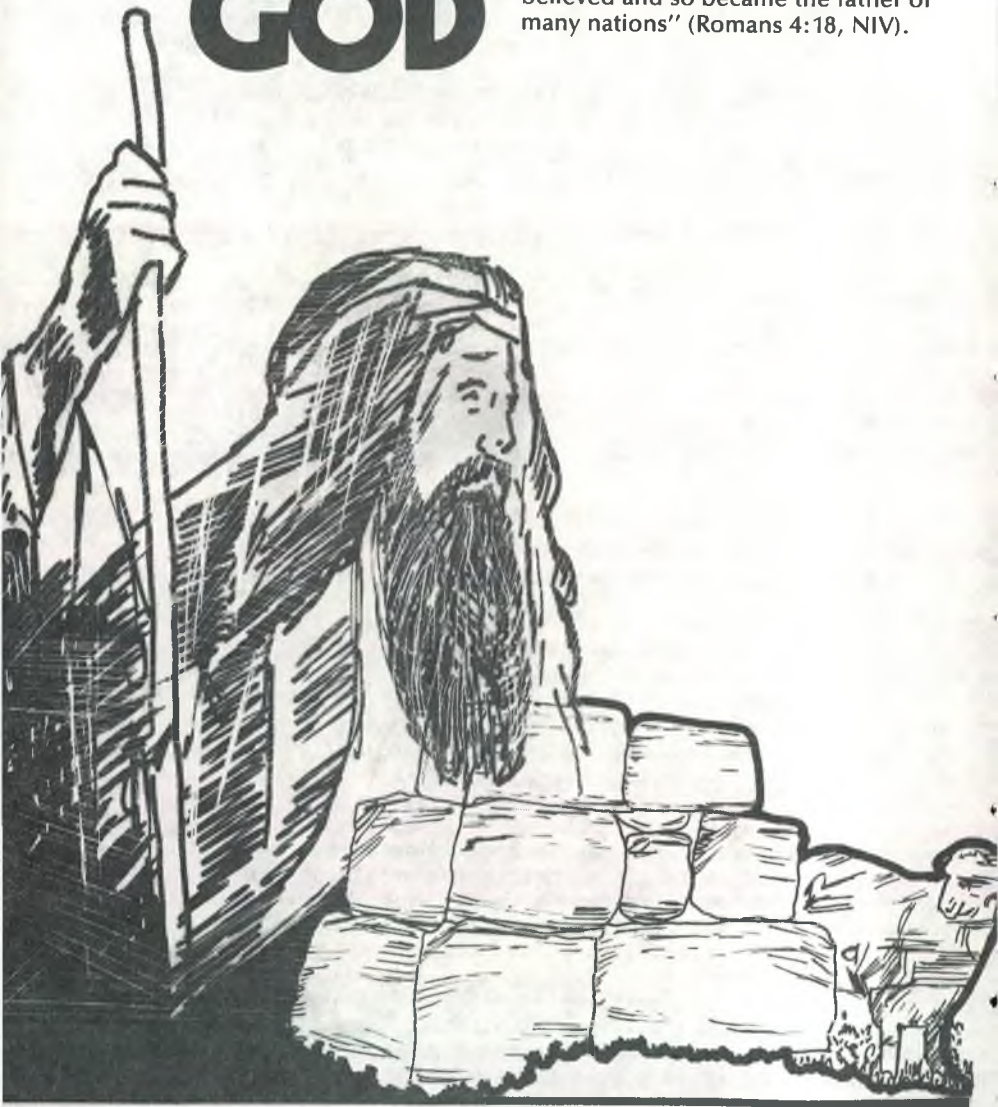
January 27
Friday
42

Becky Lacy is currently working on her Masters of Divinity degree at Andrews University Theological Seminary.

1. Is something analagous to "magic" involved in one's relationship with Christ (see Introduction, Opinion), or is it based on well-defined, explainable principles?
 2. How do you explain the paradox of obedience? Do you agree with the explanation given in the Logos piece?
 3. How much emotion is necessary for a true relationship with God? Is it possible to have an intellectual appreciation for God and an honest desire to serve him without experiencing feelings of emotional warmth towards him? Explain.
 4. Can intellectual commitment lead to heartfelt commitment? In what way?
 5. Can heartfelt commitment lead to intellectual commitment? Do you think Tennyson's choice of the heart over intellect is a valid type of faith (see Evidence)?
 6. Is all true obedience natural and spontaneous for those whose hearts have been transformed by God? Explain why or why not.
 7. The How To author argues, on the basis of Paul's writings, that "the law is not what governs the Christian life." Do you agree? Aren't the Ten Commandments eternally valid? Is it correct and/or helpful to view the law as descriptive rather than prescriptive?
 8. This week's Opinion says that you can know Christ only through commitment to him. Must you be certain your commitment is total before you can enter a relationship with Christ? Why would you want to commit your life to someone you don't know?
 9. Is it possible to measure or evaluate the depth of your commitment to Christ? If so, how? By your standards on healthful living, entertainment, sex, etc.?
-

ABRAHAM— THE FRIEND OF GOD

“Against all hope, Abraham in hope believed and so became the father of many nations” (Romans 4:18, NIV).



Lesson 5, January 29—February 4

There Are Abrahams Today . . .

by Kathy Beagles

INTRO- DUCTION

John was a brilliant mathematician. He was rising quickly in the industrial firm that had hired him right after he received his master's degree in applied mathematics. He was very comfortable working in the large western city that was also his hometown. There he had the opportunity for rising quickly to the top of his career.

Life was good. John and his wife Mary had even found the Lord and that seemed to put the icing on the cake. That is until John started getting restless. He could not understand why. There was just this uneasy feeling that seemed to grow inside him. The more he studied his Bible and the closer relationship he developed with the Lord the more John became convinced that the Lord had something else in mind for his life.

John shared with some close friends his growing concern that his industrial career was not giving him the opportunity to serve mankind in the kind of selfless way that Jesus' life had portrayed. Nonsense, he was told. Think of all the good he did with his money. The new organ, the added rooms on the church school, etc.

Then one day John was called in to see the company vice-president. He was told that in order to go any higher he would have to be willing to relocate in another state in an even bigger city. The time had come. John's prayers for guidance started being answered as he gave in to the demanding urge to resign.

John went home to inform

his family that he no longer had a job and they would be moving. Mary, a good wife, did not condemn him, even though she didn't completely understand. What more could the Lord give them? Hadn't they just thrown his blessings away?

John had for sometime felt a concern for two things. One was the great shortage of qualified math teachers for the high schools all across the country. Even the *Wall Street Journal* had run a column about the effect this phenomenon was having on the educational levels of American youth. The other concern surfaced when he entered his well-filled church, sat back in his plush pew and listened to the great array of talent that was available for every service. What about all the towns, villages and even counties in this great country that did not even have an Adventist congregation, let alone plush seats and talent. Who was reaching out to them?

These two concerns surfaced as John's mind ran through a list of options for his future. His thoughts were put into actions in the next few days as he made phone calls and wrote letters. He soon had a position teaching math for the coming year in a small school district in the southeast.

Whatever had come across John? His friends, in the church and out, avoided the entire subject as if his insanity might rub off on them. If you would like to know what possessed John, read *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pages 126 (last paragraph) and 127.

Kathy Beagles is a free-lance writer and secretary at Andrews University.

☐ January 29
Sunday

Friends Forever

LOGOS

Abraham. The name itself sounds solid—like a foundation to build something on. It rings with a tone of greatness, exuding confidence grounded in destiny. The man was arguably the greatest of the personalities of earth's early history—a man who is almost universally known today. Three major religions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam—count him among their founding fathers. But most significantly, Abraham is the only man ever designated by the Bible as the "Friend of God" (2 Chron. 20:7).

Abraham's distinction was his deep faith in God—an unshakeable confidence that God was in charge and everything would work according to divine plan. From the very beginning, Abraham showed that he was not one to second-guess God. Receiving the call to plunge into the unknown, he didn't stop to ask why. "By faith Abraham, when called to go to a place he would later receive as his inheritance, obeyed and went, even though he did not know where he was going" (Heb. 11:8, NIV). Abraham placed everything—his family, his flocks and his future—on the line, trusting that God knew best. Even though it often seemed that God's direction led toward evil, Abraham followed on. He didn't flinch—even when it looked like his obedience would cost him his beloved son (Gen. 22).

The key to Abraham's faithfulness was that he possessed a proper perspective. He saw beyond his own place and time. He concerned himself with universal truths instead of earthly trivialities, setting his sights far above this world. As the writer of Hebrews says, "he was looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10, NIV).

Underneath all of his admirable qualities, however, Abraham was still human. He still made mistakes. There were times when he failed to wait for God's direction, and invariably difficulties resulted.

Abraham's biggest mistake—the one resulting in the farthest-reaching effects—was probably his marriage to Hagar. Granted, his motives were honorable; he simply wanted to help God out. But Abraham forgot that the God who promised, "I will make you into a great nation" (Gen. 12:2, NIV), was also perfectly capable of making good his guarantee. The Arab-Israeli conflict today attests to the gravity of Abraham's error.

But Abraham's mistakes were isolated, and when he recognized them he was truly sorry. His regret was genuine and his repentance heart-felt. With a renewed resolve to let God lead, he would continue to drive doggedly onward toward his final destination—"the city with foundations."

Despite forbidding circumstances "he [Abraham] did not waver through unbelief regarding the promise of God, but was strengthened in his faith and gave glory to God, being fully persuaded that God had power to do what he had promised" (Rom. 4:20, 21, NIV). This trusting devotion to God combined with single-minded perseverance constitute Abraham's greatness. He simply took God at his word and lived up to the bargain—like a true friend. God could count on him. No wonder they called him the "Friend of God."

L. R. C.

Changed Connections

selected by Frances Cook

God selected Abraham as His messenger, through whom to communicate light to the world. The word of God came to him, not with the presentation of flattering prospects in this life, of large salary, of great appreciation and worldly honor. "Get thee out of thy country, and from thy kindred, and from thy father's house, unto a land that I will show thee," was the divine message to Abraham. The patriarch obeyed, and "went out, not knowing whither he went," as God's light bearer, to keep His name alive in the earth. He forsook his country, his home, his relatives, and all pleasant associations connected with his early life, to become a pilgrim and a stranger.

Abraham's unquestioning obedience was one of the most striking instances of faith and reliance upon God to be found in the Sacred Record. With only the naked promise that his descendants should possess Canaan, without the least outward evidence, he followed on where God should lead, fully and sincerely complying with the conditions on his part, and confident that the Lord would faithfully perform His word. The patriarch went wherever God indicated his duty; he passed through wildernesses without terror; he went among idolatrous nations, with the one thought: "God has spoken; I am obeying His voice; He will guide, He will protect me."

Just such faith and confidence as Abraham had the messengers of God need today. But many whom the Lord could use will not move onward, hearing and obeying the one Voice above all others. The connection with kindred and friends, the former habits and associations, too often have so great an influence upon God's servants that He can give them but little instruction, can communicate to them but little knowledge of His purposes; and often after a time He sets them aside and calls others in their place, whom He proves and tests in the same manner. The Lord would do much more for His servants if they were wholly consecrated to Him, esteeming His service above the ties of kindred and all other earthly associations.

TESTIMONY

Key text
Romans 12:1, 2

"Without the least outward evidence, he followed on where God should lead."

Excerpted from *Testimonies to the Church*, vol. 4, pp. 523, 524.

January 31
Tuesday

Abraham's God

by Tim Garrison

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Romans 4:17

When we look closely at our modern world we often wonder at the ability of people to discover God in the midst of contemporary society. And yet today's world offers an atmosphere of belief that is much more convincing and compelling than the world of Abraham.

As Henri Gaubert points out in his book, *Abraham, Loved by God*, the idea of one God was absolutely unthinkable in the ancient world. Polytheism was the prevailing practice. Everywhere men invoked an infinite plurality of gods. For them a tree was a god, a raised stone was a dwelling place of a god, as was a mountain, a river and the sea. Similarly, the wind, clouds, lightning and of course the earth itself and each star were gods.

And now to this shepherd, born into an idolatrous environment (see Josh. 24:2) there was suddenly revealed, without any apparent preparation, a God who insists on being the only one. With nearly five thousand gods in Babylon, thousands more in Egypt, and priests who developed intricate and complex hierarchies of gods, there is revealed to a simple shepherd the one true God.

"Today's world offers an atmosphere of belief much more convincing than the world of Abraham."

There is no way we can understand the metaphysical leap represented by the revelation made to Abraham and its acceptance by him. Silvano Arieti in *Abraham and the Contemporary Mind* calls Abraham the "first modern man" because "numberless generations before Abraham and numberless generations after him did not conceive the existence of a spiritual entity that could be separated from nature. Not only in the number of idols and deities worshiped were the beliefs of the ancients distinguished from the intuition of Abraham, but also in the fact that for them whatever was divine was immanent, that is, part of nature; for Abraham the divine both transcended and preceded nature."

So with overwhelming odds against him Abraham finds faith in a God that is beyond human understanding and is one in purpose and person. We make the decision of Abraham every day in our own understanding of that one God and his impact on our personal lives. And we make that decision in a world much more willing to acknowledge its possibility than Abraham's.

It is easy centuries later to look back and understand the implications of that ancient acceptance to the Christian world and to the Seventh-day Adventist world. And it's all the more important to understand that God not only empowers a whole nation through a humble human named Abraham, but he empowers each person willing to do as Abraham to discover the joy of a life dedicated to the one true God.

How to Be a Friend of God

It is interesting to note that the first entry in the record of the friendship between God and Abraham is that of God giving a command and Abraham obeying. "The Lord said to Abraham, 'Leave. . . .' So Abraham left" (Gen. 12:1, 4, NIV). No questions asked, he just left.

This sort of interchange is an unusual basis for a friendship. After all, how easy is it for a private to like the drill sergeant who continually tells him to drop and do fifty, or for a dorm student to appreciate the finer qualities of a strict, overbearing dean?

Yet Abraham's story illustrates an important facet in the relationship between God and man. Requisite to establishing a friendship with God is obedience. Now before you shudder in dismay at this apparently blatant legalism (ouch! heaven forbid!) let me explain.

God, for our complete happiness, has outlined the ways by which we can best get to know him. These ways are called laws and following them is called obedience. But we humans have twisted these two words in such a way that they now have negative connotations. However, they are not negative qualities. A law is merely a statement of how things work. Obedience is simply following the natural order of the law. Humans therefore are unnatural because we don't follow the law.

Now some people like to argue that there are two laws, the physical and the spiritual. An example of each would be gravity and love. Both are laws that govern the universe, but I don't believe they are separate entities. The final result of defying both is the same—death. The only difference between the two laws is that the result of breaking one is a little more immediate than the other. For example, if you were to defy the law of gravity and jump off the Empire State Building you would die in about 39 seconds. If you defy the law of love it could take any where from 70 years or more to die.

To best facilitate our relationship with him, God has outlined several principles which we should follow. These are imperative in developing a relationship with him. Because in following them is life, in disregarding them is death. It's hard to be a friend of God when you're dying and impossible when you're dead.

So, what can we learn from the story of Abraham?

1. **Accept what God has done for you** in the past and have faith in what he will do for you in the future. This, as to Abraham, will be credited to you as righteousness (Gen. 15:6).

2. **Obey.** Yield to the promptings of the Holy Spirit and the voice of God. This is the only way to develop a friendship with him. Like Abraham, respond when you are called—whatever the call may be.

3. **Continue to obey.** Once is not enough. Though Abraham made mistakes the trend of his life was that of unremitting obedience. When he was tested he was found faithful. So like Abraham, continue through the power that God will supply, to make the sacrifices required of you. Then your friendship with God will continue through all eternity.

E. R. M.

HOW TO

Key text:
2 Chronicles 20:7

Walking With Abraham

by Tim Garrison

OPINION

Key text:
Hebrews 11:4-10

Abraham—the very same name is revered by the people of three great religions of the world—Judaism, Islam and Christianity. All trace the roots of their religion to this one man. It is interesting that Abraham never wrote a word of the Bible and yet is its first prophet and greatest character.

Abraham's greatest achievement, though, is not found in the organized religions that look to him as their founder, but in the way in which he responded to the call of God.

History and tradition have a way of destroying the human side of people. Yet, it is the human understanding of God, the give and take of God and person, that brings the message of Abraham's life into the very heart of every believer's experience. It is the simple struggle of this man and his people that gives us hope in our modern world.

**"When
Abraham
discovered God
he also
discovered
himself."**

God's call to Abraham is also our call. We walk with him to the land of Canaan and dig deep within our minds to discover the guidance of our God. Some of us climb with Abraham the mountain of Moriah and face the ultimate test of our faith.

We also walk as Abraham did when we see God in the faces of those in need—when we respond to a roommate who needs someone to listen, when we hear the cry of a parent trying to understand what it means to be young in today's world, and when we recognize the frustration of a teacher trying to convey wisdom as well as knowledge.

We walk with Abraham when we find ourselves and discover our own feebleness and an understanding of the power of God's grace. For you see, when Abraham discovered God he also discovered himself. God confronts us with the truth about his character and ours. A revelation that, like in the case of Abraham, can drastically change our lives.

Abraham's story then, is very much like our story. God reveals himself to us each day in new and different ways and at the same time helps us to discover ourselves. It may not be as dramatic as God's revelation to Abraham but it's every bit as important.

REACT
Lesson 5

1. The Introduction suggests an example of the way in which Abraham's radical faith might be expressed in modern settings. Do you think John truly had faith like Abraham's? Why? Suggest other specific ways in which faith like Abraham's might be enacted in today's world? Is it necessary to take some dramatic step (like John in the Introduction) to have the faith like Abraham's? Explain.

2. Can you think of attempts in the Bible or in modern life to step out in faith which ended in failure? How do we distinguish between foolhardiness and radical faith in God?

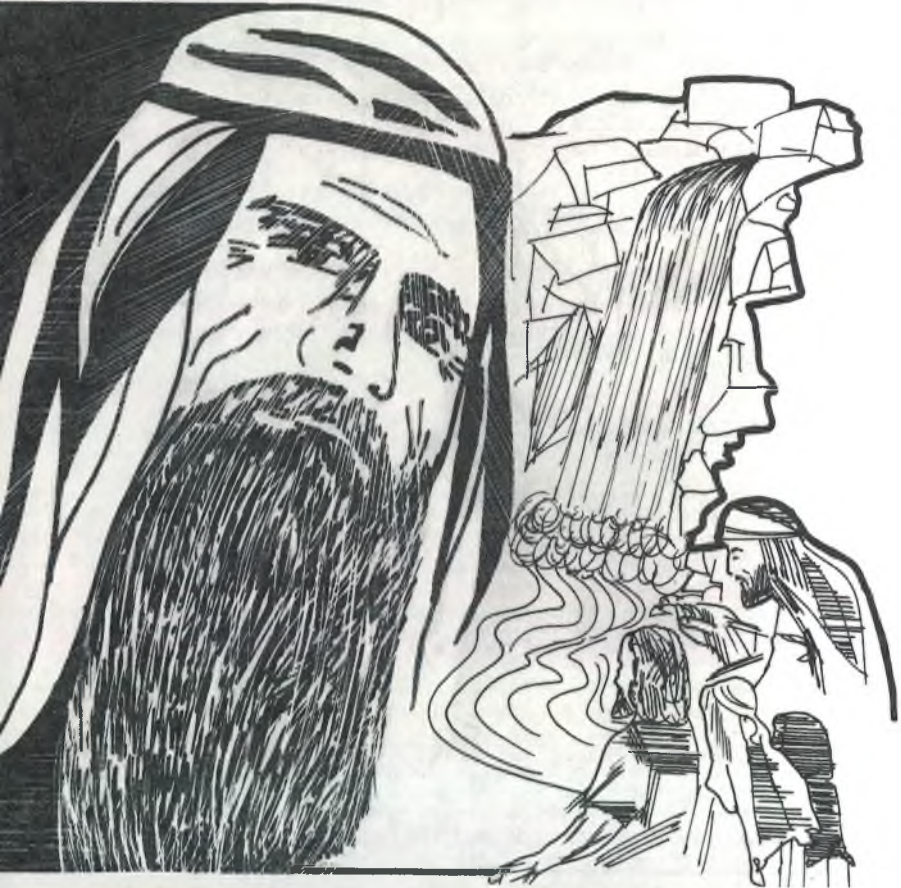
3. What do you feel was the cause of Abraham's isolated failures? Do they detract from his greatness or simply establish his "humanness"? Is the fact that we are human ever an excuse for sin?

4. Tim Garrison (Opinion) states that to discover ourselves we must first discover God. Why is this true? How did Abraham go about discovering God? Can we do the same?

5. What does the way God dealt with Abraham reveal to you about God?

MOSES— COMMITTED TO THE PEOPLE OF GOD

“By faith Moses, when he was grown up, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh’s daughter, choosing rather to share ill-treatment with the people of God than to enjoy the fleeting pleasures of sin. He considered abuse suffered for the Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt . . .” (Hebrews 11:24-26, RSV).



Lesson 6, February 5-11

Moses—God's Mountain Man

by Phil Muthersbaugh

INTRODUCTION

Being a novice backpacker, I have learned that the picturesque beauty of a summit view, or a refreshing drink from a cool mountain stream could not be fully appreciated until I had reached the top of the mountain. For me, getting to the top and learning how to hang in there during the "trail time" took total commitment. There is probably nothing more demoralizing to a group of hikers than having someone along who really is not committed, either to the group or to the goal of climbing the mountain.

Moses, the leader of one of the longest hikes in history, was one person so committed to his task that he was willing to give up his life. Moses had to climb mountains at three crucial times on his journey to the promised land, and each time was a lesson in commitment.

First, there was Mt. Horeb. Here God committed the leadership of His chosen people to an aging Israelite tending sheep for his father-in-law. Moses, in turn, made a commitment to lead this nation of slaves to freedom and into the land God had promised to Abraham. Although Moses did not realize the difficulties he would face, his commitment to God's people was so strong that he was willing to exchange his own life for the sake of the entire nation (Exodus 32).

Later Moses again climbed the same mountain, also known as Mt. Sinai. God knew that Moses and the peo-

ple needed a re-commitment. Moses needed assurance that he was still God's chosen leader. The people needed to learn that commitment involved their faith and obedience. Complaining about the food supplies, the lack of water, and Moses' leadership was not going to get them to the promised land any sooner. But God remained committed to them, as did Moses.

Finally, there was Mt. Nebo. Forty long years of wandering through the desert had wearied Moses. Near the end of the journey, his self-control gave way to anger, momentarily, and he struck the rock instead of speaking to it, bringing dishonor to God before the people (Num. 20). Yet God, ever committed to Moses, brought him to the top of the mountain giving him a panoramic view of Canaan, and a prophetic vision of Israel's future and the coming Messiah. But his greatest moment, no doubt, was an intimate, personal meeting with the transfigured Christ who was on his way to the cross and humanity's redemption.

As Christians, God challenges each of us to live a committed life, a sacrificial life (Romans 12:1). This is a "reasonable" testimony to the worthiness of God's personal commitment to us. His promise is that we, like Moses, will one day reach the mountain's summit, and stand with the Messiah, transfigured and transformed by his grace.

Phil Muthersbaugh wrote this while still a seminary student at Andrews University. He is now pastoring in Oregon.

☐ February 5
Sunday

“By Faith Moses Chose . . .”

LOGOS

“By faith Moses chose. . . .” What is a choice of faith? And how does one choose by faith? Last night at supper it was quite easy for me to choose not to eat the garlic soup the cafeteria was serving. However, it was much harder to choose to get out of bed at 5:30 this morning and go jogging. I don’t believe that the first example could be classed in the “faith” category. The latter has possibilities though. It was a choice of self-denial; a choice for the greater good—exercise over self-indulging sleep.

The choice between the opulent luxury of the Egyptian court and the headache of leading a group of problematic, stubborn, backbiting individuals through an arid desert appears to be obvious. But Moses’ choice was one of self-denial; a choice of faith. “By faith Moses, when he had grown up refused to be known as the son of Pharaoh’s daughter. He chose to be mistreated along with the people of God rather than enjoy the pleasures of sin for a short time” (Heb. 11:24, 25, NIV).

And mistreated he was, not so much *with* the people of God, but *by* the people of God. The Exodus record is filled with Israel’s cries against Moses. “Why did you bring us up out of Egypt to make us and our children and livestock die?” (Ex. 17:3, NIV). “In the desert the whole community grumbled against Moses and Aaron” (Ex. 16:2, NIV). The list goes on. Nevertheless, Moses still loved them.

The magnitude of his love for the people is evidenced by his intercession for them after their great sin at Sinai. “‘I have seen these people,’ the Lord said to Moses, ‘and they are a stiff-necked people. Now leave me alone so that my anger may burn against them and that I may destroy them. Then I will make you into a great nation’ ” (Ex. 32:9, 10, NIV). This was no small temptation. It would have undoubtedly been pleasant to be rid of these constant complainers. But Moses never hesitated. “‘O Lord,’ he said, ‘why should your anger burn against your people? . . . But now, please forgive their sin—but if not, then blot me out of the book you have written’ ” (Ex. 32:11, 32, NIV).

Though the rewards for these self-sacrificing choices were not immediately evident, and despite his failure that barred him from entering the land of Canaan (Num. 20:10-12), Moses was honored as no one else ever has been. Through his commitment to the will of God and because of his selfless attitude, “the Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friend” (Ex. 31:11, NIV). But God honored Moses further. While conversing with God, Moses asked to see his glory. God did not rebuke this bold request. Instead, “the Lord said, ‘There is a place near me where you may stand . . . I will put you in a cleft in the rock and cover you with my hand until I have passed by. Then I will remove my hand and you will see my back’ ” (Ex. 33:21-23, NIV).

E. R. M.

The Power of Humility

by Debbie Montcalm

"The Lord would speak with Moses face to face, just as a man speaks with a friend" (Ex. 33:11, GNB).

We know from reading Exodus 33:20 that Moses did not literally speak with God face-to-face; rather this refers to the intimacy he had with God. Yet at the same time Moses combined, with that intimacy, humility and reverence for God.

"The time for Israel's deliverance had come. But God's purpose was to be accomplished in a manner to pour contempt on human pride. The deliverer was to go forth as a humble shepherd, with only a rod in his hand; but God would make that rod the symbol of His power."¹

"Moses had been learning much that he must unlearn. The influences that had surrounded him in Egypt . . . all had left deep impressions upon his developing mind and had molded, to some extent, his habits and character. Time, change of surroundings, and communion with God could remove these impressions. It would require on the part of Moses himself a struggle as for life to renounce error and accept truth, but God would be his helper when the conflict should be too severe for human strength."²

"Humility and reverence should characterize the deportment of all who come into the presence of God. In the name of Jesus we may come before Him with confidence, but we must not approach Him with boldness of presumption, as though He were on a level with ourselves. There are those who address the great and all-powerful and holy God, who dwelleth in light unapproachable, as they would address an equal, or even an inferior. There are those who conduct themselves in His house as they would not presume to do in the audience chamber of an earthly ruler. These should remember that they are in His sight whom seraphim adore, before whom angels veil their faces."³

"The divine command given to Moses found him self-distrustful, slow of speech, and timid. He was overwhelmed with a sense of his incapacity to be a mouthpiece for God to Israel. But having once accepted the work, he entered upon it with his whole heart, putting all his trust in the Lord. The greatness of his mission called into exercise the best powers of his mind. God blessed his ready obedience, and he became eloquent, hopeful, self-possessed, and well-fitted for the greatest work ever given to man. This is an example of what God does to strengthen the character of those who trust Him fully and give themselves unreservedly to His commands.

"A man will gain power and efficiency as he accepts the responsibilities that God places upon him, and with his whole soul seeks to qualify himself to bear them aright. However humble his position or limited his ability, that man will attain true greatness who, trusting to divine strength, seeks to perform his work with fidelity. Had Moses relied upon his own strength and wisdom, and eagerly accepted the great charge, he would have evinced his entire unfitness for such a work. The fact that a man feels his weakness is at least some evidence that he realizes the magnitude of the work appointed him, and that he will make God his counselor and his strength."⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Exodus 33:11

"However humble his position or limited his ability, that man will attain true greatness who, trusting to divine strength, seeks to perform his work with fidelity."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 251.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 248.
3. *Ibid.*, p. 252.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 255.

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February 7
Tuesday

The Fears of Moses

by Roy C. Nader

EVIDENCE
Key text:
Exodus 3:1-12

Much is written about the courage of Moses, the meekness of Moses and the intercession of Moses. But little is written about the fears of Moses. Moses was conceived in fear. His parents knew that if their child should be a boy he must be drowned at birth in the Nile. His mother dispatched him to the palace at a tender age, and although she had great faith she must have had some fear for what might happen to his youthful commitment under the influence of the pagan Egyptian priests and royal teachers. Moses fled from Egypt in fear for his life after slaying the Egyptian. And while minding the sheep near Sinai Moses met God, and his instant reaction was to hide his face, "because he was afraid. . ." (Exodus 3:6, NIV). But this fear like the other great fears in his life he endured through faith. Thus the writer to the Hebrews adds Moses to the Hall of Heroes in Chapter 11, and introduces him with the meaningful words, "By faith Moses. . ."

"It is this endless patience in Love that has always baffled man."

Lockyer traces the steps by which God prepared Moses for the monumental task of leading Israel to the promised land. "This remarkable chapter (Exodus 3), containing the call of Moses, is full of spiritual import for our hearts. The opening verses give us *humiliation*—'Moses kept the flock' (later he had a different one to keep!); *separation*—'the backside of the desert' (deserts are good training grounds for God's leaders); *elevation*—'the mountain of God'; *revelation*—'the angel of the Lord appeared unto him.'"¹

I wonder how Moses felt as he contemplated the final encounter with Pharaoh on which, in one sense, the exodus now hung, apparently so delicately poised. That Moses had the courage to choose to face Pharaoh for this bitter confrontation is a measure of the greatness of the man. John Herculut describes that moment of destiny when Pharaoh had to make his choice too.

"'Moses, can't we make terms? . . . What about you going with your children, and just leaving your flocks and herds?' How patient God has always been. It is this endless patience in Love that has always baffled man. 'Pharaoh, we will go; our children will go; our herds will go; everything about us will go. Not a hoof will remain.' And now Pharaoh sees, and sees it all. There are no terms. There is no escape. It is God alone, or Pharaoh alone. And Pharaoh now knows all that a rebel man is allowed to know. 'Go away,' he screams. 'Get out of my sight. If ever I see you again, I'll kill you.'

"'Yes,' said God, 'You'll never see me again.' And Pharaoh never saw God again. God saw Pharaoh, of course. . . . But Pharaoh didn't see God again. And that choice, made so finally and so clearly, still stands, alongside the choice of all the Pharaohs of human history. That is the one thing about Pharaoh that does stand. He is gone. . . . But that choice, that decision, stands and must stand. In some deep sense, that is the tiny, but always real, scar which God Himself must preserve for ever, to show that the good He has made has been made against real evil."²

1. Lockyer, *All the Books and Chapters of the Bible*, p. 24.
2. John Herculut, *Pages from God's Casebook* (London: Intervarsity Press, 1969), p. 42.

February 8
Wednesday

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Roy C. Naden is Associate Professor of Religious Education at Andrews University.

Of Meekness, Moses, and Pickup Trucks

HOW TO
Key text:
Romans 12:3

In this age of fast cars, macho men, and assertive women, when nearly everyone subscribes to the "look out for #1" philosophy, an accurate view of Moses is hard to come by. The contemporary image of "the meekest man" would probably be that of a farmer maneuvering his dusty old pickup down the interstate fast lane at 48 mph. Humility simply isn't in fashion today. Not that it ever has been—it is too often equated with weakness. Even a perfunctory examination of Moses, however, shows that the stereotype certainly doesn't hold true for him.

Humility is a paradox. What is actually strength and self-control is considered weakness. What is truly a desirable quality receives a negative connotation. Perhaps this is what makes humility the distinctive trait of true greatness—so few understand it and even fewer possess it. Jesus certainly wasn't risking overpopulation when he declared, "Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth" (Matt. 5:5, NIV). Humility and a sinful life appear for the most part to be mutually exclusive. It's hard to do much sinning when you're putting others first.

But how are we to achieve this future-securing humility? Here are some suggestions:

1. Study examples of humility. It is true that "by beholding we become changed." So we can be inspired by example—the observation of Moses and Jesus cannot fail to produce imitative effects. Christ established a precedent for Christians in "taking the very nature of a servant" (Phil. 2:7, NIV). We can do as he did.

2. Put yourself in perspective. It's not so hard to be humble when we realize our relative unimportance in the universal scheme of things. Human achievements pale beside the acts of God, just as an ant's busy activities seem totally insignificant to us. The more clearly we witness God's perfection, the more crude our imperfections become. Our little games of status and pretended sophistication are shown to be ridiculous.

3. Ask God for genuine humility. This is the most important step because only the Spirit of God in our lives can produce genuine humility. "Ask and it will be given to you" (Matt. 7:7, NIV)—and that even includes a humble spirit. Will we be too proud to pass up this offer?

L. R. C.

The Choice That Really Counts

by Rene Alexenko

OPINION

Key text
Luke 12:8

Choices. We all make them every day. And as difficult as it may seem at the time, the decision for or against the new dress or between strawberry pie and a hot fudge sundae isn't going to have consequences that will alter the entire course of a lifetime. Few of us will ever make many decisions that redirect history or affect millions of lives.

Moses was in a little different situation. Raised in the court of the greatest country in the world, he had the best education available. His training in politics, mathematics, military tactics and philosophy well qualified him for the position he held—heir to the throne of Egypt. Yet he turned his back on what secular society considers success in favor of sheep herding for 40 years to learn the skills which would be necessary in leading the children of Israel.

Why did a man with such a promising career make the radical choice to lead a nation of uneducated slaves out of bondage? Why did he turn his back on what his environment and upbringing told him was sure success?

When he was still a child, Moses decided he would use his life to serve God. Once he recognized his mission, all the other choices he made were in response to his choice for God.

Even so, Moses didn't always choose wisely. No doubt God would have preferred Moses to choose against murdering an Egyptian guard, failing to circumcise his son, and striking the rock, because God had to deal sternly with those decisions.

But when making the most important decision in life—choosing for or against God—Moses had chosen correctly. And although Moses received no recognition in this life, God honored Moses' choices in some very unique ways.

God gave Moses the special privilege of seeing his glory (albeit veiled for Moses' own good). Before Moses died, God allowed him to see the land of Canaan even though he had been denied entrance. And centuries later, when the Son of God needed it most, Moses was given the very special honor of coming to earth to encourage Christ in his suffering. God promised Moses heavenly favor in lieu of earthly reward and he didn't let Moses down. Perhaps it was Moses, the meekest among men (Numbers 12:3) about whom Jesus was speaking when he said, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." Matt. 5:5.

We are all going to make less than wise choices. But just as he did with Moses, God will still direct our lives and use bad decisions for his glory if we have chosen to serve him. And just as he did for Moses, God will honor us when it really counts—in the earth made new.

REACT
Lesson 6

1. Discuss the options Moses had at key points in his career. Did he always make the right choice? Would there have been more than one right choice in some instances?
 - The choice between the court of Egypt and leading the tribes of Israel (Heb. 11:24-26).
 - God's call to leadership in the wilderness (Ex. 3, 4).
 - God's threat to disown the Israelites (Ex. 32).
 - Bringing water from the rock and God's subsequent decree (Num. 20:10-12; 26:12-23).

 2. Should we as workers for God be reluctant—as Moses was—to accept the responsibilities that God places upon us? Does an eager, enthusiastic reaction portend a tendency to do it our own way, as the Testimony piece suggests?

 3. Is humility inherited or developed? Was Moses always humble? If not, how was his humility developed? Is the same process necessary today for us optimally to serve God? How important is humility?

 4. Could Moses have done as much for the children of Israel as the ruler of Egypt? Why didn't he stay in Egypt and free them after he became ruler?

 5. What do Moses' decisions for God suggest as far as principles that can help you in choosing your career and making other major life planning decisions?
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BALAAM— SUPERFICIALLY COMMITTED

“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and Money” (Matthew 6:24, NIV).



Lesson 7, February 12-18

Exchange at the Night Bazaar

by C. Loring Gimbel

INTRODUCTION

O Balaam, Balaam,
Honored messenger of the
great God,
How is it that you now tarry at a
night bazaar
Bargaining for a new god?

I see you hurrying across
deserts
And over mountains on forbid-
den trails,
Clutching your exchange under
your cloak—

Your commitment of honor
Now a scroll in the fire,
Your head full of flattery,
Your pockets full of silver.
I hear your consecrated lips
Pronounce God's name in
vain.

Those eyes, accustomed to
extraterrestrial visions
Now blinded to the angel in
your path,
Your sensitive heart
Now murdering your faithful
beast.

Wicked obsession.
Your recreated world of greed
Too full for the God calling
you back.

What shame—
The words of a donkey reproving
your madness.
You bow momentarily
Presumptuously begging God
for His banner

To hold as you scheme to em-
brace a corrupt king
In a land of carved stones in
idol groves.

Stop, Balaam, stop!
See the prosperous encamp-
ment
Growing on the plain below.
Smell the sweet incense
through sanctuary curtains
Hear the echoes from the
bleating lambs.
Look into that cloud above
And see a man's face weeping
for someone He loves.

Three times seven altars and
black smoke rising
From the heights of Baal.
Another vision, then God calls
you again
Through your own lips.
Yes, how shall you curse
That which God has not
cursed?

Enraged, you stuff your ears
to the blessed words,
You pull your purchase from
beneath your cloak.
I see you running down the
mountain to the plain
Holding high your sculptured
god
Beckoning the children of
God
To betray their Father at the
night bazaar.

O Balaam, Balaam,
I see your body
Sliced upon a sculptured stone,
O Balaam that died
And Balaam that lives still
Why exchange your God
For blood upon a stone?

C. Loring Gimbel recently received an M.A. in
English from Andrews University.

☐ February 12
Sunday

Greed's Reward

LOGOS By all rights, Balaam should occupy a prominent place in the record of biblical history alongside Abraham, Moses, Elijah and all the other great prophets of God. But he doesn't. Instead, he is found among such tragic failures as Samson, Saul, and Judas—men who possessed vast potential for good, but squandered it. Balaam as a messenger of God, living apart from Israel, had a tremendous impact on the pagans around him. Unfortunately, a preoccupation with wealth and self-aggrandizement rendered all of his advantages useless.

Balaam's demise began with the arrival of the embassy from King Balak of Moab requesting his assistance against the militarily invincible Israelite invaders. The words of Balak's message suggested the respect with which Balaam's reputation was held throughout the civilized world—for Balaam's home in Mesopotamia was hundreds of miles across the desert from Moab. The message also reflected the desperation with which Balak viewed his situation. "A people has come out of Egypt; they cover the face of the land and have settled next to me. Now come and put a curse on these people, because they are too powerful for me. Perhaps then I will be able to defeat them and drive them out of the country. For I know that those you bless are blessed, and those you curse are cursed" (Num. 22:5, 6, NIV).

After receiving word that Balaam had consulted his God and subsequently declined, Balak redoubled his efforts. This time he struck at Balaam's Achilles' heel. "Do not let anything keep you from coming to me, because I will reward you handsomely and do whatever you say. Come and put a curse on these people for me" (Num. 22:16, 17, NIV).

Up to this point, Balaam had acted properly as a prophet of God. But his innate greed had been stirred. Here was an opportunity to translate his fame into riches as well. So he kept his options open and told the messengers, "Now stay here tonight as the others did, and I will find out what else the Lord will tell me" (Num. 22:27, NIV, emphasis supplied). If Balaam hadn't been blinded by the glitter of gold he would have realized that he really couldn't take the job in good faith. God had already stated that Balaam could not curse Israel—and that was the sole purpose that Balak wanted him for. The only purpose that Balaam's journey could possibly serve was to satisfy his greed.

Able only to utter blessings on Israel (Num. 23), Balaam devised a more effective means of undermining the nation's strength. He used the young women of Moab to entice Israel into idolatry and immorality. Though it caused death and disruption in the Israelite camp, Balaam's mission ultimately failed, and he underwent a swift transition from a famed and honored man of God to the ignominious victim of an Israelite sword (Num. 31:8).

Balaam's tragic life speaks directly to this generation—for we also are highly susceptible to the same confusion of priorities. His career attests to the unflinching truth of Christ's words: "No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money" (Matt. 6:24, NIV).

L. R. C.

A Single Cherished Sin

by Dorrett Mason

Ellen White says that Balaam was once a good man, but had given himself up to covetousness.¹ Apparently Balaam was dissatisfied with his life as God's servant. Secretly he yearned for world renown, wealth and prestige. However, his position as servant to the Most High did not satisfy these desires.

Outwardly, Balaam professed allegiance to God, but inwardly accepted Balak's offer. "He ventured to dally with temptation, and urged the messengers to tarry with him that night, declaring that he could give no decided answer till he had asked counsel of the Lord."² As a prophet, Balaam already knew God's plan for the Israelites. It was his duty to proclaim God's design, and to dismiss Balak's ambassadors the moment they approached him.³

Even upon Balak's second attempt to secure his services, Balaam feigned "conscientiousness and integrity, assuring them that no amount of gold and silver could induce him to go contrary to the will of God."⁴ The Lord, of course knew Balaam's heart and allowed him to follow his own will (Num. 22:20). "He did not seek to do the will of God, but chose his own course, and then endeavored to secure the sanction of the Lord."⁵

In defiance of God's command to accompany the Moabites only if they called for him, Balaam set off on his journey to meet Balak. Had it not been for the donkey, he would have been killed, for he was so determined to go on that he failed to see the angel blocking his path. When the angel confronted Balaam, he was quick to acknowledge his sin and to offer confession. "Terrified by the angel standing in his pathway with drawn sword, he acknowledged his guilt, lest he should lose his life. There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no conversion of purpose, no abhorrence of evil, and no worth or virtue in his confession."⁶

"The fate of Balaam was similar to that of Judas and their characters bear a marked resemblance to each other. Both these men tried to unite the service of God and mammon, and met with signal failure. . . . Balaam hoped to make the service of Jehovah the stepping-stone to the acquirement of riches and worldly honor. . . . Judas expected by his connection with Christ to secure wealth and promotion in that worldly kingdom which, as he believed, the Messiah would set up. . . . Both Balaam and Judas had received great light and enjoyed special privileges; but a single cherished sin poisoned the entire character, and caused their destruction.

"It is a perilous thing to allow an unchristian trait to live in the heart. One cherished sin will, little by little, debase the character, bring all its nobler powers into subjection to evil desire. The removal of one safeguard from the conscience, the indulgence of one evil habit, one neglect of the high claims of duty, breaks down the defenses of the soul, and opens the way for Satan to come in and lead us astray. The only safe course is to let our prayers go forth daily from a sincere heart, as did David, 'Hold up my goings in Thy paths, that my footsteps slip not' " (Ps. 17:5).⁷

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Psalm 139:23, 24

"Balaam hoped to make the service of Jehovah the stepping-stone to riches and worldly honor."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 439.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 440.

5. *Ibid.*

6. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 637.

7. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 452.

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☐ February 14
Tuesday

Today's Balaams

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Revelation
2:14-17

The seduction of the Israelites at Peor was such a devastating event that later Bible writers found it a convenient and powerful symbol for spiritual deterioration in general. The divine message given through the Revelator for the church at Pergamum included this reprimand: "You have people there who hold to the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to entice the Israelites to sin by eating the food sacrificed to idols and by committing sexual immorality" (Rev. 2:14, NIV).

According to Robert Mounce, it is likely that this passage refers to literal food sacrifices and sexual acts in connection with a form of idolatry which was being accommodated in some early Christian circles. But Mounce also observes that "Balaam became a prototype of all corrupt teachers who betrayed believers into fatal compromise with worldly ideologies."¹ So, even though no Christian leader today openly promotes idolatry or promiscuity, the memory of Peor remains a relevant warning against compromise with values alien to the gospel.

Sociologist Richard Quebedeaux argues that such compromise is at the heart of popular American religion today, sapping the true spiritual vitality of the church. He cites findings by pollster George Gallup which suggest that though "religion appears to be increasing its influence on society . . . morality—a concomitant of religion—is losing its influence. We may be outwardly religious, Gallup declares, but the secular world would seem to offer abundant evidence that religion is not greatly affecting our lives."²

What accounts for this superficiality in the apparently vital movements in modern American Christianity? Quebedeaux blames the TV evangelists and celebrities, the "stars" of popular religion for representing Christianity as a means to success, wealth, power, and instant happiness, thus promoting a self-centeredness inimical to the gospel.

"... [P]opular religion's de facto self-centeredness . . . maximizes self-awareness and self-development and minimizes self-sacrifice for others. . . . Modern American religion, very simply, doesn't care about doing anything for God. It wants only to use him. Even the popular exclamation "Praise the Lord!" is little more than a thank-you note to God for having been useful in helping 'me' acquire the things 'I' wanted. . . .

"... Thus there are no prophets on TV—only profits. . . . When taking precedes giving as a norm, people in relationship with other people literally become commodities, created and socialized to be bought and sold."³

The solution to this Balaam-like compromise with the world's concepts of power and happiness, says Quebedeaux, is "deep continuing relationships marked by give and take from the center of our very being itself, from the heart."⁴ The electronic church simply cannot nurture such relationships.

Balaam's legacy warns us against self-serving and manipulation under the guise of Christianity. The one who "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life" (Mark 10:45, NIV) calls us to follow his way.

D. F. M.

"Modern American religion doesn't care about doing anything for God. It wants only to use him."

1. Robert H. Mounce, *Revelation*, New International Commentary on the New Testament, vol. 18 (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1977), p. 98.

2. Richard Quebedeaux, *By What Authority*, (New York: Harper & Row, Publishers, 1982), pp. 146, 147.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 151, 152.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Pooling Your Resources

by Paula Wesner

HOW TO
Key text:
2 Corinthians
3:18

In the study of ancient Greek mythology the story of Narcissus is a frighteningly interesting one. Narcissus was an extremely macho, good-looking hunk who was caught up in the splendor of his own physique. He spent hour after hour gazing at himself in the reflective waters of a pool. Unfortunately, because this was his sole occupation, Narcissus starved to death.

Balaam, too, beheld himself in a pool—of iniquity. Those things reflected in his eyes were the acquisition of power, material possessions, pride, covetousness and greed. "The sin of covetousness, which God declares to be idolatry, had made him a time-server, and through this one fault, Satan gained entire control of him. It was this that caused his ruin."¹

Balaam spent more time gazing at his own desires than he spent looking toward the One who does not withhold any good thing (Psalm 84:11). Had Christ been reflected in his "pool" he would not have destroyed himself. How do we avoid the same fate?

A practical means of accomplishing this is by reviewing the self-destructing sins of Balaam and incorporating the positive opposites (antonyms) of those sins into our own lives.

1. Covetousness and Greed. Antonym: Generosity. Christ taught that, "He who has two coats, let him share with him who has none; and he who has food, let him do likewise" (Luke 3:11, RSV). All that we have has been given to us by our Creator. There is no greater satisfaction than to share these gifts, spiritual and material, with others in need.

2. Pride. Antonyms: Humility and Submission. The greatest lesson in humility was in the life of Christ. He who was King forsook honor, glory, and the power of the universe to come down to our level and live among us. He underwent the ultimate in humbling experiences "because he poured out his soul to death and was numbered with the transgressors; yet he bore the sin of many, and made intercession for the transgressors" (Isa. 53:12, RSV). A profound example for us to follow when we perceive mistreatment by others.

3. Selfishness. Antonym: Self-denial. "If any man would come after me, let him deny himself and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever would save his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 16:24, 25, RSV). The reward Balaam, Narcissus, and Judas gained for their selfishness? An early death. How blessed we are to have the promise of rich, abundant, eternal life as we mirror the image of Christ in the "pools" of our own lives, gazing at the cross rather than, as Narcissus did, at self.

¹ *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 440.

Paula Wesner is a graduate student in English at Andrews University.

February 16
Thursday

The Unaccepted Gift

by Janice Watson

OPINION

Key texts:

2 Corinthians 9:7

1 Samuel 16:7

I feel sorry for Balaam. He died such an ignominious death. And even now, centuries later, we remember him as a false prophet, an example of greed and avarice. It seems unfair. He was never really a rebel. For most of his life, he served God obediently, a likely candidate for immortalization in Hebrews 11 among the people of faith. What went wrong?

Looking at Balaam's actions we see little to condemn. He believed in God and God had worked through him. He had learned to go to God for advice and leadership. Balak sent for him because of his reputation as a worker of miracles or wonders.

When Balak's messengers arrived, Balaam did what any man of faith would do—turn to God for counsel. When God told him not to go, he stayed. When God told him to leave, he mounted his donkey and headed for Moab. Now there is that strange incident with the donkey; but how was Balaam to know the invisible angel was there? I admit he should have been kinder to the donkey, but is beating a donkey a sin? As soon as Balaam saw the angel, he confessed his mistake and offered to go back. But God refused his offer and told him to continue.

“He thought God would accept his good behavior in place of his total being.”

In Moab, despite the king's anger and tantalizing offers of riches, Balaam continued to obey God. He blessed the children of Israel and cursed the Moabites. He even predicted the coming of the Messiah. His faith seemed perfect. True, he was ambitious and covetous, but so were David and Samson. Yet they are known for their faith and he isn't.

Where did Balaam go wrong? In encouraging Balak to seduce the children of Israel into idolatry? But what led him to do it? How could a man of faith who at every step asked God's counsel turn so completely against God's people?

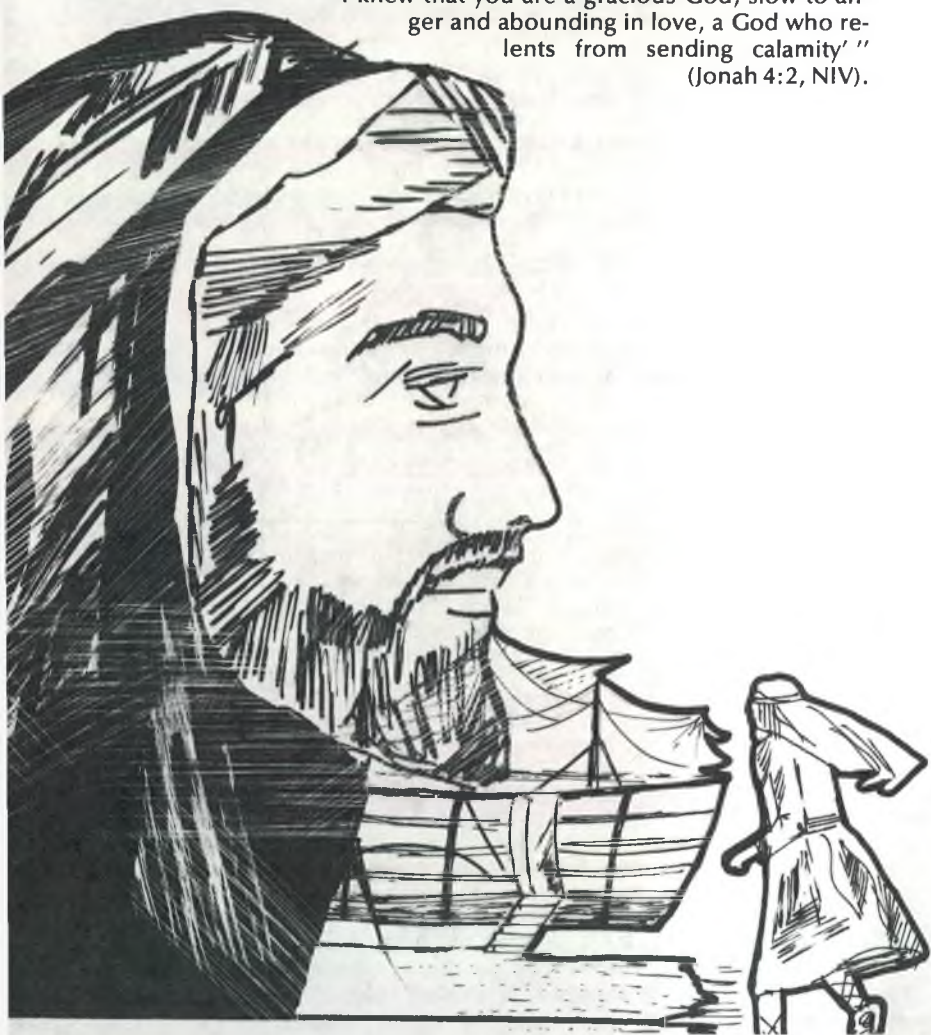
Balaam made his mistake early in the story, long before the Balak episode. He failed to realize a truth as old as the story of Cain: God only accepts gifts given from the heart. Balaam gave his obedience, his oratorical abilities, even his donkey; but he gave them grudgingly. He withheld his heart. His desires and wishes were not controlled by his faith. He thought God would accept his good behavior in place of his total being. So he tried to serve Balak without outwardly disobeying God.

In the end God gave Balaam his heart's desire. He let him do what he really wanted to do, and Balaam's life ended a tragedy. Poor Balaam—a good man outside for all the wrong reasons inside. If he had had his own example maybe things would have been different. Maybe he would have stopped worrying about the perfection of the gift—how complete his obedience and how strong his faith—and worried instead about the giver. He would have given freely and God would have accepted the gift of his life. Maybe he would even have made it to Hebrews 11.

1. Why do you think the Lord gave Balaam “permission” to pursue a course that ultimately was not for the best? Why do you think God allowed Balaam to pronounce only blessing when the prophet intended to curse? Was this interfering with human free will?
 2. Do you think the Opinion author is correct in seeing Balaam as largely faithful and obedient but for the wrong reasons? Has she correctly identified the root cause of his failure? Explain.
 3. Do you see similarities in the lives of Balaam and Judas? List several. Were their motives admirable? What was the “single cherished sin” that ruined both of them (Testimony)?
 4. Balaam didn’t seem to think he could gain worldly fame and riches by doing things God’s way, so he made some adjustments. Was he correct in that a true Christian life-style often fails to bring evident success? What about God’s promises of material blessings for those who serve him—such as Isa. 58:14?
 5. The Evidence article implies that TV preachers and born-again celebrities who stress Christianity was a way to happiness, wealth and success are modern Balaams. Is this too harsh a judgment? Do you think there are other ways the spirit of Balaam manifests itself in the church today? If so, what can be done about it?
 6. How can we help the Balaams in our church (possibly including ourselves)?
 7. What does the way God dealt with Balaam teach you about God?
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JONAH— RELUCTANTLY COMMITTED

“ ‘I knew that you are a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity.’ ”
(Jonah 4:2, NIV).



Lesson 8, February 19-25

Jonah and Jehovah

by Andrew Woolley

INTRODUCTION

It is hard to think of Jonah as committed. A number of other adjectives come to mind—timid, petty, hostile, petulant—but committed, dedicated, or fearless are not words readily suggested for the prophet of Nineveh. Some biblical scholars think the book of Jonah is an example of biblical satire, and one can easily understand Jonah as an object of tempered scorn.

If Jonah is a satire, and satire has a norm or standard against which its characters are tried, the norm in this book would have to be God's concern and unfailing mercy toward the sinner, both the hardened sinner and the sulking variety. Jonah's foible, when measured against this standard, would be his self-centeredness, his almost ludicrous caring for a shriveling piece of vegetation when the eternity of an entire nation was at stake. Another weakness of Jonah's would be his consistency, his constant attempt to escape and his pouting when his word is believed. This odd consistency is measured against a trait not often associated with Jehovah—inconsistency, a changeableness, the willingness to adapt to the whims and petty shifts in the course of

man's life.

The story's author employs literary devices to reinforce the self-centeredness of Jonah. All through the book, Jonah is contained, is cut off in some way from humanity. He is asleep in the hold of the ship while all others are fighting for their lives against the storm. He is contained in the great fish, cut off from all but God through prayers. Finally, he is contained under the vine, sheltered from the multitudes whom his message is transforming. Jehovah presents himself dramatically to Jonah, giving him the invitation to commit himself to the work of God, pulling him from his self-containment. It is Jehovah who sends the storm to bring Jonah up to the deck. It is Jehovah who causes the great fish to vomit up Jonah. It is Jehovah who makes the vine to die, forcing Jonah to look around and see the miracle which he has wrought as God's instrument.

Jonah presents the character of a different type of committed person, the person who has to be helped along in his commitment. It is the talent of a Jonah that God wants as much as he wants the confession of the entire city of Nineveh.

Andrew Woolley is Associate Professor in the Department of English at Southwestern Adventist College.

February 19
Sunday

The Petty Prophet

LOGOS Sometimes success as an evangelist seems to go hand in hand with an inflated ego. Jonah, the most successful evangelist in the Old Testament record, is a prime example. His preaching converted an entire city, but rather than rejoicing in the conversions he was furious because he thought his reputation had been damaged. This sort of egoism, along with a strong dose of narrow-mindedness, greatly hampered Jonah's commitment to God. But God's way of dealing with this petty prophet reveals God's compassion and the expansiveness of his purposes.

The Jonah of the book bearing his name can probably be identified with the prophet Jonah mentioned in 2 Kings 14:25, who lived in the eighth century B.C. The story is familiar. Jonah runs from God's request to preach a message of judgment to the Assyrian capital of Nineveh. On board a ship headed the opposite direction, Jonah is thrown (willingly) overboard in an effort to placate a violent storm sent by God. He is swallowed by a great fish and remains inside it for three days and three nights. After being vomited out on dry land, Jonah obeys God's repeated commission and preaches a message of destruction to Nineveh. The people repent and God spares the city but Jonah becomes angry because it makes him look like a false prophet.

Several points emerge out of this remarkable, paradoxical story. First we see Jonah's narrow-mindedness. His reason for fleeing from God's call was not so much fear, as it was simply that he could not bring himself to share the truth about God with that center of vile heathenism, called by the prophet Nahum "the city of blood" (Nah. 3:1). After God spared Nineveh, Jonah said, "O Lord is this not what I said when I was still at home? That is why I was so quick to flee to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jonah 4:2, NIV).

Jonah had his theory correct—he obviously knew all the right things about God. But he was so locked in to preconceived notions about how God operates, that he initially refused to be an agent of redemption for despised, oppressing Gentiles. As Jonah needed to break out of his narrow mold and realize that God's love was for everyone, so we must recognize that the expansive purposes of God sometimes call us to broaden our outlook.

To deal with Jonah's infuriation at having been proved a false predictor, God provided an object lesson to draw him out of his all-consuming self-interest. A vine grew up rapidly to shade Jonah's shelter outside the city. Jonah was quite pleased with the vine, and was thus exceedingly annoyed when God sent a worm to destroy it and the shade it provided (4:4-8).

God's response was, "You have been concerned about this vine, though you did not tend it or make it grow. . . . But Nineveh has more than a hundred and twenty thousand people. . . . Should I not be concerned about that great city?" (Jonah 4:10, 11, NIV). The vine meant a lot to Jonah. He was passionately concerned about it. How incomparably greater was God's intense concern for each individual in Nineveh, aliens to the covenant though they be. Such infinite concern and compassion beckons us to a commitment—that of sharing the concern and showing the compassion.

D. F. M.

In Our Best Interest

Selected by Melinda Mabaquiao

The Sign of Jonah

As the prophet thought of the difficulties and seeming impossibilities of his commission, he was tempted to question the wisdom of the call. From a human viewpoint it seemed as if nothing could be gained by proclaiming such a message in that proud city. He forgot for the moment that the God whom he served was all-wise and all-powerful. . . .

In the charge given him, Jonah had been entrusted with a heavy responsibility; yet he who had bidden him go was able to sustain His servant and grant him success. Had the prophet obeyed unquestioningly, he would have been spared many bitter experiences, and would have been blessed abundantly. Yet in the hour of Jonah's despair the Lord did not desert him. Through a series of trials and strange providences, the prophet's confidence in God and His infinite power to save was revived.¹

As the preaching of Jonah was a sign to the Ninevites, so Christ's preaching was a sign to His generation. But what a contrast in the reception of the word! Yet in the face of indifference and scorn the Saviour labored on and on, until He had accomplished His mission.

This lesson is for God's messengers today, when the cities of the nations are as verily in need of a knowledge of the attributes and purposes of the true God as were the Ninevites of old.²

The Purpose of His Plan

God does not require us to give up anything that is for our best interest to retain. In all that He does, He has the well-being of His children in view. Would that all who have not chosen Christ might realize that He has something vastly better to offer them than they are seeking for themselves. Man is doing the greatest injury and injustice to his own soul when he thinks and acts contrary to the will of God. No real joy can be found in the path forbidden by Him who knows what is best and who plans for the good of His creatures. The path of transgression is the path of misery and destruction.³

It is His purpose to impart peace and rest to all who come to Him for the bread of life. He requires us to perform only those duties that will lead our steps to heights of bliss to which the disobedient can never attain. The true joyous life of the soul is to have Christ formed within, the hope of glory.⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Jonah 2:9

"In the hour of Jonah's despair the Lord did not desert him."

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 266.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 274.
3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 46.
4. *Ibid.*, p. 47.

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February 21
Tuesday

Jonah's Nineveh and Ours

by Douglas R. Clark

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Matthew
28:19, 20

**"Going to
Nineveh today
means to
allow our
life's risks
to be
completely
directed by
the enormous
peril and
wickedness
which engulfs
the world."**

The book of Jonah provides us with an emotional collage of contrasting hues in the character of an ancient prophet. A brilliantly artistic creation, the portrait initially pictures a man terrified in the face of his Nineveh—and not without reason. Nineveh, "that great city," presented an insurmountable challenge, a most formidable task from which Jonah turned after calculating its dimensions. But the book speaks to us today, as well, forcing us, having looked up the street in its direction, to confront our own Nineveh.

In a series of stimulating homilies on Jonah, Hans Walter Wolff,¹ an eminent professor of Old Testament at the University of Heidelberg, Germany, suggests ways in which the modern church can discover its own Nineveh. According to Wolff, our task is no less formidable than Jonah's, our Nineveh no smaller. "The Christian himself surely fails to recognize Jesus' cause if he merely connects it with petty private and individual concerns and difficulties. Nineveh is that place which is pregnant with meaning for the world."²

This cause does not only entail "evangelism"—the spiritual saving of souls from damnation. It is not simply the religious dimension of individual's lives that demands our attention and evokes proclamation. Jonah was called to do more; Nineveh means more. "Jonah confronts Nineveh as we confront the power and problem centers of the contemporary world. Going to Nineveh today means for us to allow our life's risks and toil to be completely directed and determined by the enormous peril and wickedness which engulfs the world. The punch of the Bible becomes purely private and piddly when we do not allow our eyes to see what is happening in Moscow and Washington, in Asia and Africa, when we become blind to what worldwide misery results when man says, 'No!' to the sick and the elderly, when man says, 'No!' to the task of educating people here and in the third world, when man poisons his environment through unbridled industrialization, through the mismanaged management of creation, when we close our eyes to the demonic dangers inherent in the development of the psychopharmacological manipulation of man, to the world-wide spread of terrorism and the corresponding impotence of governments, and last, but by no means least, when we realize the grave shortage of genuine pastoral concern, the lack of a truly world-wide pastoral care.

"But Jonah isn't to cover the entire world. 'Go to Nineveh!' Go to that one place to whose immense and central suffering your eyes have been opened by God."³

The task is overwhelming; the most attractive route *does* lead away from Nineveh—Jonah's and ours. Security, the status quo, comfort, an undefiled atmosphere, peaceful surroundings—these all reside outside Nineveh's city limits. Jonah was right. He counted the cost and the risk was too great. And, were it not for God and his fish, Jonah would have lived happily ever after. But . . . there was Nineveh. There is Nineveh.

1. Hans Walter Wolff, "Jonah—The Reluctant Messenger in a Threatened World," *Currents in Theology and Mission*, 3, (1976) in three parts: "The Messenger Who Refused," pp. 8-19; "The Messenger Who Obeyed," pp. 86-97; "The Messenger Who Grumbled," pp. 141-150. See also his "Jonah—A Drama in Five Parts," pp. 4-7.

2. "The Messenger Who Refused," p. 10.

3. *Ibid.*

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**February 22
Wednesday**

Lessons From Jonah

by Barbara and Floyd Jones

HOW TO
Key text:
Jonah 3:2, 4;
4:4-8

How exciting and encouraging it is to have our memories refreshed about the God we serve from this study of Jonah. At least three lessons emerge which are applicable to everyday life.

1. **The great God of the universe uses ordinary individuals to carry his message.** The story of Jonah depicts an ordinary man with whom we can identify. We can understand his fears, his desires for self-esteem and his doubts. We are left with no illusions about him, no fanciful dreams or projections that make him quasi-divine. It is a source of encouragement and strength to know that if God used Jonah, he can use me!

God does not ask us to do what we *cannot* do. He does not call us to exceed our level of competence. What he bids, he provides grace to accomplish. To be called of God should result in an urgency to fulfill one's task.

2. **God does not hold grudges, but gives the disobedient a second chance.** Jonah learned that one's disobedience is not enough to make God turn his back. Despite our disobedience, God loves us and does not hold grudges because of our waywardness. We see this repeatedly in the scriptures with Abraham, Simon Peter, David, and Jacob, to mention a few. In all instances God provided a second chance. Certainly, in our lives we can see God's compassion and forgiveness. By faith we can seek God for a second chance. The words of a favorite hymn indicates God's response:

A second look He gave which said:

'I freely all forgive:

This blood is for thy ransom paid;

I died thou mayest live.'

God is Lord of the *Second Chance*. Thus, "The word of the Lord came to Jonah the second time" (Jonah 3:1).

3. **Finally, this loving compassionate God makes provision for the disobedient one to have temporary comfort as he finds his way back to his Creator.** Here we see a patient God leading a despondent, angry, ordinary creature to an understanding of his ways, and back to him. God had accomplished much through Jonah. Hence, Jonah's experiential knowledge was great. Jonah was the man for the times. Yet, because Nineveh was not destroyed, Jonah was angry. His prophecy had not been fulfilled. To illustrate to Jonah his continued love for him, God provided temporary comfort as Jonah sat on a hill outside of Ninevah. The temporary comfort was to help Jonah through the situation; it was to be a learning tool.

The temporary comfort was to give Jonah assurance of his permanent comforter, Jesus Christ. This gourd was to let Jonah and Christians today know that we are to trust Christ.

Trust is to be manifest even when we believe he hides his face from us. Thank God for the temporary gourds of life, but thanks even more for the worms that come to destroy them. They bring us to the place where we see our nakedness and flee to him, our permanent assurance and comforter.

Barbara Jones is Assoc. Professor of Chemistry at SAC. Floyd Jones is Patient Business Office Director at Huguley Hospital, Fort Worth, Tex.

☐ February 23
Thursday

The Jonah Trap

by Earl Allen

OPINION

Key text:

Matthew 6:34

I want to know what the future holds for me.

I need certainty, stability.

If I can be sure that Armageddon will occur in Iran, or that the Soviet Union is the King of the North, then all the other irritating little mysteries that plague my complicated life might fall into perspective. Having inside information as to what will happen in the future might help me make some sense of what otherwise seems just "one dumb thing after another."

When this subtle wish to get ahead of time (and perhaps God) siezes me, I fall into the Jonah trap. The Jonah trap is the trap Jesus warned against when he admonished his disciples: ". . . do not be anxious about tomorrow; tomorrow will look after itself" (Matt. 6:34, NEB). Falling into this trap is easy. All I have to do is find some scripture that backs up a particular wish of my own. Do I hope I can make a killing on the gold market? Well, I find a Bible text that predicts economic trouble that will skyrocket the price of my gold. Do I hope to be left alone in my individual righteousness by faith (or maybe works)? Then I find some advice from Ellen White that tells me I should move out to the country, thus avoiding the sinfulness of the awful city.

And right there perhaps Jonah and I have something in common. Nineveh of old and today's may be millenia apart in time, but they are spiritually the same city. It's easy to sympathize with Jonah's reluctance to go to Nineveh when I consider what a difficult place it must have been—noisy traffic in crowded streets; haughtily immoral people; even muggers attacking defenseless prophets in broad daylight. It's enough to make even a courageous person "anxious about tomorrow." So I, along with Jonah, take the easy way out by sailing for the ghetto in Tarshish.

But the easy way usually ends up being the hard way, and being "anxious about tomorrow" usually turns my anxieties into realities. Thus, with Jonah, I find myself facing the very city I was trying to get away from. And then we both fall into another variation of the Jonah trap. In his anxiety about tomorrow, Jonah heard God predicting that fire and brimstone would rain down on these grossly wicked Ninevites, thus vindicating his own (albeit reluctant) righteousness. I, meanwhile, try to predict the end of the world, pointing to the "signs of the times" to vindicate my pretensions to know exactly what God is going to do.

What happens when I, with Jonah, find that my predictions don't come to pass? Do I not (in my great disappointment) first get angry at God for having duped me, and then after calming down, take shelter under a "gourd" of hairsplitting explanations for what is now a "misinterpretation of Scripture"? Sooner or later even that "gourd" of explanations withers, and the sun of reality beats down on my unprotected head. Can I still remain angry after I hear God saying, "Should I not be sorry for the great planet Earth, with its four billion inhabitants who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and animals without number?" What an unexpectedly abrupt ending.

REACT
Lesson 8

1. Why did God select Jonah—of all people—for the mission to Nineveh? Was it partly for Jonah's benefit? According to the Bible, did Jonah learn anything from the experience?
 2. God did dramatic things to lift Jonah beyond his pettiness and egotism. Does God work with talented but egotistical people today? If so, what means does he use?
 3. The Evidence article suggests that going to Nineveh today means opposition to social and political evil as well as evangelism. Do you agree? What are the similarities between Jonah's commission and ours? Are there differences? What are your Ninevehs?
 4. Why do you think God allowed a vine to grow and shade Jonah, only to send a worm to destroy it the next day? What is the lesson in this aspect of the story?
 5. Was Jonah's worm a blessing or a curse? Do we have comparable "worms" in our lives? Are we cognizant of the purpose of such events?
 6. The Opinion author implies that Adventists have fallen into the "Jonah Trap" by stressing detailed predictions about the future. Do you agree? Can you think of specific examples? What does the story of Jonah tell us about how we should relate to our apparent misinterpretations of prophecy?
 7. What does the way God dealt with Jonah teach you about God?
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SAUL— A BREACH OF COMMITMENT

“To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry” (1 Samuel 15:22, 23, NIV).



Lesson 9, February 26—March 3

by Harold Wright

Breach of Faith

The true crime of Richard Nixon was simple: he destroyed the myth that binds America together, and for this he was driven from power.

The myth he broke was critical—that somewhere in American life there is at least one man who stands for law, the President. That faith surmounts all daily cynicism, all evidence or suspicion of wrongdoing by lesser leaders, all corruptions, all vulgarities, all the ugly compromises of daily striving and ambition. That faith holds that all men are equal before the law and protected by it; and that no matter how the faith may be betrayed elsewhere, at one particular point—the Presidency—justice will be done beyond prejudice, beyond rancor, beyond the possibility of a fix. It was that faith that Richard Nixon broke, betraying those who voted for him even more than those who voted against him.¹

In the book *Breach of Faith*, Theodore White tells the tragic story of a President, elected by the largest majority in history, being driven from office. There are many parallels between King Saul and Richard Nixon. They both had spectacular beginnings. Nixon could have become one of the greatest presidents. Saul had physical, intellectual, and spiritual qualifications to be one of the greatest kings of Israel. Both committed a breach of faith by setting themselves

above the source of their power and authority. Both ended in disgrace.

Both Saul and Nixon confused their own egos with the higher values which they set out to serve. They *knew* what was right and where they were going, so what did it matter if a few corners were cut? They wound up going in circles. Thinking they were following truth, they followed only their own egos. After isolating themselves from external reality, it was easy to believe whatever fiction necessary to maintain their dream.

Everyday people are fascinated with "how the mighty are fallen." That the great should display the same passions and frailties which we have is at once gratifying and frightening. It is gratifying because we can suspect only fate separates us from the ranks of the exalted. When those who have been put on a pedestal succumb to the same temptations which inhabit our mundane world, it makes them seem more like us, or better, we like them. But we are also frightened to realize, "If they can't make it, who can?"

When we see a pastor, teacher, or other "bright light" extinguished, we begin to worry about our own survival. This week we study the anatomy of such a failure. This spiritual autopsy will give insights that can help us stay alive.

INTRODUCTION

1. Theodore H. White, *Breach of Faith, The Fall of Richard Nixon*. (New York: Atheneum Publishers, 1975), p. 322.

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February 26
Sunday

A Perfect Failure

LOGOS

He was the perfect model of what a king should be. His classic features and noble bearing possessed the signature of greatness. At least the people gathered at Mizpah that day thought so.

He was physically imposing, "an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others" (1 Sam. 9:2, NIV). And his character had a multitude of kingly qualities. He showed his courage and decisiveness almost immediately. When the Ammonites put siege to Jabesh Gilead and threatened to gouge out an eye of each of the inhabitants as the price of submission, Saul reacted quickly and boldly (1 Sam. 11:5-11). Three hundred and thirty thousand men flocked to his standard, and after the siege was heroically lifted all Israel accorded him enthusiastic acclamation.

Here Saul displayed his ability to adapt to both adulation and criticism. When he was first declared king, "some troublemakers said, 'How can this fellow save us?' They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent" (1 Sam. 10:27, NIV). Now, after Saul had proved his mettle, "the people then said to Samuel, 'Who was it that asked, "Shall Saul reign over us?" Bring these men to us and we will put them to death.' But Saul said, 'No one shall be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel'" (1 Sam. 11:12, 13, NIV). Such a forbearing and non-retaliatory spirit is a rarity in absolute rulers.

But the most important trait Saul possessed was a spiritual commitment. Preparatory to his accession, God convicted him. "As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart. When they arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came upon him in power . . ." (1 Sam. 10:9, 10, NIV).

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Some forty years later the king of Israel stood upon Mt. Gilboa viewing with trepidation the advancing hordes of Philistines deployed against his own meager forces. Only the night before, his desperation had driven him to consult a witch regarding the outcome of this day's battle. What he had been told of the impending defeat devastated him. His heavy load of guilt wore down upon him. He remembered the many times when he had rejected the Lord's commands in order to do things his own way—Agag, the Amalekites, the sacrifice. . . . The list went on and on. Then there was his treacherous plotting against his loyal warrior, David. The memories all blurred into a horrible nightmare. Saul knew he was doomed—he knew this day was his last (1 Sam. 28, 31).

Was this the Saul that had been the divine choice for Israel's first king? Could this be the same man who had held such infinite promise at his coronation? Tragically, the answer is yes.

Saul had undergone a complete transformation. The career that began so brilliantly ended in disaster. Why? Saul failed to renew continually his commitment to God. He didn't take the time to remain friends with God. He wanted God to endorse *his* decisions rather than to implement *God's* decisions. As a result, he placed himself on a different wavelength—where God's counsel couldn't reach him. This communication gap inevitably led to his downfall. It isn't any different today.

L. R. C.

The Tragedy of Dependence Unlearned

by Kent Millard

A look at Saul's life to discern where he failed reveals one thing very clearly: the need of humble obedience to the will of God in all situations. If, in his youth, Saul had learned this, his life would not have ended in shame and failure.

"The history of Israel's first king presents a sad example of the power of early wrong habits. In his youth Saul did not love and fear God; and that impetuous spirit, not early trained to submission, was ever ready to rebel against divine authority. Those who in their youth cherish a sacred regard for the will of God, and who faithfully perform the duties of their position, will be prepared for higher service in afterlife. But men cannot for years pervert the powers that God has given them, and then, when they choose to change, find these powers fresh and free for an entirely opposite course."¹

"Had Saul felt his need of total dependence on God and walked in humility, he could have had the special blessing of God and success as Israel's leader. Unlike Moses, who though he was a great and mighty leader of Israel 'was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth' (Num. 12:3); Saul had forgotten that 'before honor is humility' (Prov. 12:33) and had not a high and exalted sense of the excellence and terrible majesty of God."²

"Saul's stubbornness in persisting before Samuel that he had obeyed God [See 1 Sam. 15:10-23], was as iniquity and idolatry. His love to carry out his own will was more desirable to him than to obtain the favor of God, or the approbation of a clear conscience. And when his sin was opened clearly before him, and his wrong definitely pointed out, his pride of opinion, his excessive self-love, led him to justify himself in his wrong course, in defiance of the reproof of Samuel, and the word of the Lord by the mouth of his prophet. Such obstinacy in a known transgression, separated him forever from God."³

"All the honour that a man could receive on the throne of a kingdom, would be a poor compensation for the loss of the favor of God. . . . God has given to every man his work, just as truly as he appointed to Saul the government of Israel, and the practical and important lesson to us is to accomplish our appointed work in such a manner that we may meet our life records with joy, and not with grief."⁴

TESTIMONY

Key text:

1 Samuel 15:17

"Men cannot for years pervert the powers that God has given them, and then find these powers fresh for an entirely opposite course."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 622.

2. *Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 1, p. 357.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 366.

4. *Seventh-day Adventist Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1018.

Suggested Reading
Patriarchs and Prophets, pp. 616-626.

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February 28
Tuesday

Self-Commitment

by W. Rob Sheppard

EVIDENCE

Key text:
1 Samuel 16:14

Saul, the man who in the beginning was "little in his own eyes" (1 Sam. 15:17), and upon whom "the Spirit of God came" (1 Sam. 10:10), was eventually forsaken by God. "Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul . . ." (1 Sam. 16:14). Why? What are the choices he made which led to such a tragedy?

Samuel outlined for the king the conditions for God's guidance. Both king and people were to fear (reverence) the Lord, listen to his voice, and serve him with all of their hearts (1 Sam. 12:14, 15, 20). But Israel's joy over having a visible leader and Saul's weakness for self-sufficiency and pride set the stage for the king to ignore God's conditions.

Saul's wrong choices became apparent after his first test by God. The king was to wait for seven days at Gilgal for instructions from Samuel. While Samuel delayed his arrival, the Philistines were amassing a large army. Meanwhile Israel's soldiers were defecting rapidly, and Saul's two previous successes led the impatient monarch to disregard God's commands (1 Sam. 11:11-13; 13:3, 4). The king trusted in himself and a downward spiral began.

God did not forsake Israel's ruler, however, and he was granted another opportunity. After Samuel cautioned the king to "listen to the Lord," God sent a second test. His instructions were to exterminate the bloodthirsty Amalekites. The king and his people again disregarded the Master's commands and spared the vicious king Agag and all of the good things of the land (1 Sam. 15:9). Exposed by the man of God, Saul sought forgiveness of the prophet, not of God. He feared the respected prophet's disapproval would cause him the loss of the people's respect, but he had no regard for God's feelings (1 Sam. 15:24-30).

Saul's choices are an indication of his spiritual disintegration which ultimately led the Spirit of God to leave him. He attributed his first victory to the Lord's might: "Today the Lord has accomplished deliverance in Israel" (1 Sam. 11:13). Unfortunately, we never read of such words proceeding from his mouth again; instead, note these statements:

"Cursed be the man who eats any food until evening that I may be avenged of my enemies" (1 Sam. 14:24).

"Saul came to Carmel, and behold, he set up a monument to himself" (1 Sam. 15:12).

"We saved the best to sacrifice to the Lord your God" (1 Sam. 15:15).

Saul established a devastating pattern in his life when he embraced the central principle of sin, i.e., self-seeking. His own words and actions erected a barrier which even the omnipotent, merciful God could not penetrate.

"The king trusted in himself and a downward spiral began."

Lessons From Saul's Tragedy

HOW TO
Key text:
Psalm 37:5-7

The scene was set. Samuel had told Saul that God no longer wanted him as king of Israel, with the ominous words, "[He] has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you" (1 Samuel 15:28, RSV). Saul jumped at every bump in the night after that. He knew the Lord was no longer with him and that his successor was already in the wings. He examined the men around him for their better traits, and the envy and hate in his heart grew daily.

After several years of this obsession, he and David returned from a battle to meet the Israeli dancing girls whose song said in effect, "Saul is okay, but David is fantastic!" Granted, it was rude of them to sing that to his face—even if it was true—but hearing their words, Saul realized that here beside him was that "better man."

Saul's story is not so far-removed from that of many well-meaning Christians. They concentrate on other people's traits that they covet, often to the point of obsession. If we can learn anything from Saul's tragedy, it might be:

1. Praise God for what he's given you. Saul had it all: looks, brains, courage, popularity, and best of all, the blessing of God on his monarchy. But in reading the story of his life, it becomes clear that the greatest defect in his character was his desire for praise and acclaim. God initially withdrew his blessing from Saul's kingship because, instead of following God's command concerning a battle, Saul played to the crowd. He did what was expedient, what was popular.

From the time he began to suspect that David would succeed him on the throne, his every action was dedicated to discrediting David in the eyes of the people and to re-cultivating the acclaim of the Israelites for himself. And then, just as now, it didn't work. You can't build yourself up by tearing someone else down.

If Saul had concentrated on praising God for the abilities he'd given him, he wouldn't have lost the kingdom.

2. Praise God for what he's doing through others. Saul could not bring himself to rejoice that through General David, some of Israel's enemies were being defeated, or that the people loved someone who was so honorable. He could only concentrate on himself and the fact that someone was more popular than he. It literally drove him crazy. He threw spears, he ranted and raved in the temple before the priests, he even schemed to sacrifice the future happiness of two of his daughters in a bizarre plan to "get" David.

3. Praise God for the future he's planning for you, and be patient enough to let him guide you into it. As typified by his lack of patience in waiting for Samuel before that infamous battle with the Philistines, Saul was always rushing ahead of the Lord and trying to work out his own destiny.

Solomon gave marvelous counsel which came too late for Saul to read, but which is such a help to the rest of us. He wrote, "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart, and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5, 6).

“My People, I Am Your Security”¹

by Terese Thonus

OPINION

Key text:
1 Peter 5:5-7

It has been said that absolute power corrupts absolutely. In these four words the entire life of Israel's Saul can be summarized. Thrust to the fore of national government by a wave of popular support, he felt confident in his power—that is, until Samuel announced that the kingdom would go to another. And David's appearance on the scene only made things worse. Saul's response was predictable: mount defenses, deny allegations, discredit and hunt down supposed enemies. The result? The admiration of his people turned to hatred and opposition, and his life ended in suicide.

The spirit of corrupting power is not dead, however. It is the central reality of many of the kingdoms of the world in our time. Take some modern-day expressions of dominance: the nuclear arms race, militarism, oppression of minority groups. Rather than participating in the biblical motif of power-as-love, the principalities subscribe to a philosophy of power-as-force. And we Christians are inevitably, inextricably involved. As the French theologian Jacques Ellul has so clearly stated: “The illusion of a Christian life attached to a convent or hermitage has vanished. . . . A major fact of our present civilization is that more and more sin becomes collective, and the individual is forced to participate in collective sin.”²

Yet corrupting power is not only an influence on a national scale. It has worked its ugly way into our personal and group relationships, and broken the bond of sacrificing love between employer and employee, teacher and student, administration and staff, the helper and the helped. Once having tasted the delights of authority and admiration, we may resort to compromises of any kind and with anyone to maintain our position. And once more, we are face to face with Saul—who, after all, was a rather ordinary man.

Into this chaos of corporate and individual corruption, God speaks from his base of loving power, assuring us that in him we may find the security we need, and thrusting us out into the world that belongs to us, if by chance there is still time to make a difference: “The will of the world is always a will to death, a will to suicide. We must not accept this suicide, and we must so act that it cannot take place.”³

“Once having tasted the delights of authority, we may resort to compromises of any kind to maintain our position.”

1. Title of a worship guide published by Sojourners Peace Ministries, Washington, D.C.

2. Jacques Ellul, *The Presence of the Kingdom*, (New York: Seabury Press, 1967. Originally published by Editions Roulet, 1948, as *Presence au Monde Moderne*), p. 12.

3. Ellul, p. 28.

March 2
Friday

82

Terese Thonus is an instructor in the Department of Modern Languages at Southwestern Adventist College.

1. Since God knew of Saul's hidden deficiencies, why do you think he selected him to be king?

2. In what contemporary situations are we tempted to act like Saul when he:

- a) offered the pre-battle sacrifice himself rather than waiting for Samuel.
- b) did not follow God's command to kill the Amalekite king and all the animals.
- c) became paranoid about David.

What scriptural principles can you suggest to help us act more wisely than Saul when faced with similar dilemmas?

3. In the Introduction, Harold Wright cites Saul and Richard Nixon as leaders who failed because they violated the moral demands of their office. How should we relate to leaders in our church and schools who in some way "breach faith" with their responsibilities? Should we

- a) necessarily seek their removal if one major mistake has been made public.
- b) refuse to cooperate with them if they remain in office when we think they shouldn't.
- c) be forgiving and patient, letting God take care of the management of his institutions.

4. Note the behavior pattern which led to Saul's downfall discussed at the conclusion of the Evidence article. Is it possible that an individual today, chosen like Saul to do an important work for God could fall into the same pattern? How? How does one avoid this devastating pattern?

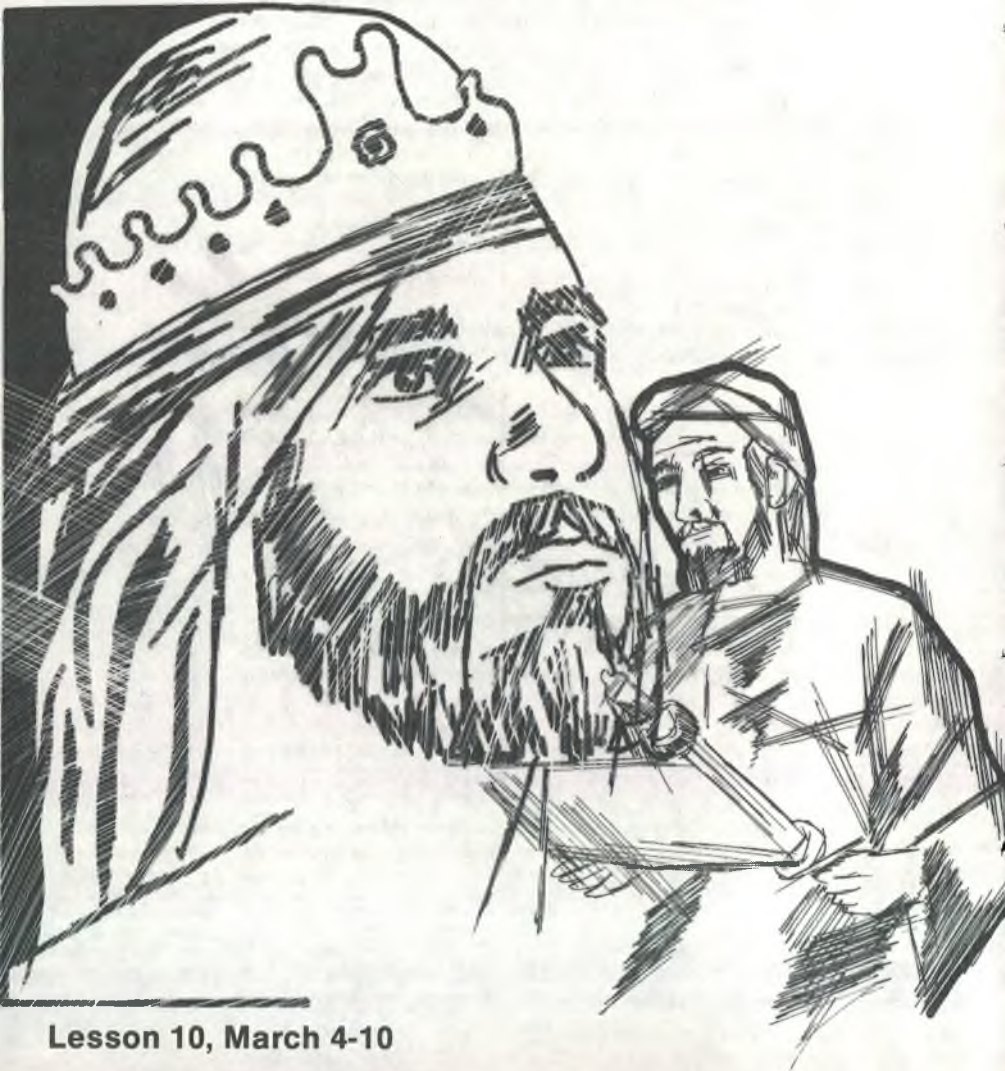
5. The Opinion article quotes Jacques Ellul in saying that sin is becoming more and more collective, "and the individual is forced to participate in collective sin." Do you agree? If so, give some examples.

6. If collective sin prevails in our civilization, is it possible to live by the principle of "power-as-love" rather than "power-as-force" in every aspect of our lives? Is every use of power-as-force necessarily a breach of commitment like Saul's? Does love sometimes involve use of force?

7. What does the way God dealt with Saul teach you about God?

JOSIAH— THE REFORMER

"The king stood by this pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book" (2 Chronicles 34:31, NIV).



Lesson 10, March 4-10

A Fifth-Grader, Pop, and Reformation

by Douglas R. Stuva

INTRO- DUCTION

"Stay in line and keep quiet," she commanded from the rear. "Now form a circle and shut up! A lady brought two cases of pop as a treat for you," she continued. The words gatling-gunned from her lips. "So don't mess around or you won't get any. Stay quiet and I'll pass the bottles around."

"I want grape!"

"I want strawberry!"

"I want grape too!" came hurried requests from the fifth graders.

"You'll get whatever I give you. Now shut up and be quiet. Stand still. No talking!"

We stood at this forced attention waiting for our bottles to make their way around the circle. There was no laughter or joy, only frowns and fear.

For a class of 20 fifth graders, she had turned the kindness of a friendly neighbor into a scar we would never forget.

Someone next to me whis-

pered to a friend which brought an immediate response from her. "All right, Mr. Stuva, I told you all to shut up," she bellowed across the room. "If you can't keep quiet, you can just go upstairs and I'll take your pop right now!" she screamed. "You need to learn to obey when you're told. Now stand straight and be quiet or I'll send you upstairs and you'll be staying after school. You hear me?"

I offered a fearful "Yes" in response.

Shaking outside, and mad inside, I snuck a glance at the person next to me. There stood her favorite pet, the guilty one who should have gotten the tongue lashing I had received.

The terminology may not have been there, but that day I learned about injustice. That day, I learned that injustice needs to be corrected. I learned about the need for reformation.

Doug Stuva is English/sociology/journalism instructor and director of religious activities at Dakota Adventist Academy.

☐ March 4
Sunday

Responsive to God's Word

by Marshall Bowers

LOGOS

From the time Josiah became king at eight years of age, his faithful example and his inspiring, energetic leadership caused the people outwardly to walk in the ways of the Lord.

He sought God while he was a youth. "Josiah was eight years old when he became king. . . . He did what was right in the eyes of the Lord and walked in all the ways of his father David, not turning aside to the right or to the left" (2 Kings 22:1, 2, NIV). Josiah is the only ruler concerning whom this statement "not turning aside to the right or to the left," is made. As early as the eighth year of his reign he began to seek after the Lord (2 Chron. 34:3).

Because Josiah was seeking to follow the Lord, he saw the need for change in his kingdom and enacted some bold reform measures. "Under his direction the altars of the Baals were torn down, he cut to pieces the incense altars that were above them and smashed the Asherah poles, the idols and the images. . . . He burned the bones of the priests on their altars, and so he purged Judah and Jerusalem" (2 Chron. 34:4-6, NIV). And he carried these reforms beyond Judah to the tribal territories of Manasseh, Ephraim, and as far north as Naphtali (vs. 6, 7).

Josiah's reforms did not stop with just getting rid of the false gods and their place of worship, but he repaired and restored the temple of the Lord, which had deteriorated during the reign of his grandfather Manasseh.

As they were restoring the house of God, "Hilkiah the priest found a book of the law of the Lord given by Moses" (2 Chron. 34:14). Immediately Hilkiah had the book taken to Josiah and Shaphan, the secretary, read it to the king. After hearing the Law Josiah tore his robes in anguish, realizing with new intensity how far Judah had deviated from God's will. Would the Law's prediction of national destruction if the people were disloyal to God now come true? Inquiry of Huldah the prophetess confirmed Josiah's greatest fears. A time was coming when God's anger would "be poured out on this place and not be quenched" (vs. 25, NIV).

But before that time (the Babylonian captivity), Josiah and his generation had time to return to the covenant relationship. The Lord's message to Josiah, through Huldah, was, "Because your heart was responsive and you humbled yourself before God . . . I have heard you (vs. 27, NIV).

So, Josiah assembled a great national convocation at the temple, where the newly rediscovered Book of the Covenant was read in the hearing of all. "The king stood by his pillar and renewed the covenant in the presence of the Lord—to follow the Lord and keep his commands, regulations and decrees with all his heart and all his soul, and to obey the words of the covenant written in this book.

"Then he had everyone in Jerusalem and Benjamin pledge themselves to it. . . .

"As long as he lived, they did not fail to follow the Lord, the God of their fathers" (vs. 29-33, NIV).

Throughout his life, Josiah showed that the committed life involved promoting reformation in church and society and a willingness to follow God's Word wherever it leads.

Walk in the Light

The corruptions of this degenerate age have stained many souls who have been professedly serving God. But even now it is not too late for wrongs to be righted and for the blood of a crucified and risen Saviour to atone in your behalf if you repent and feel your need of pardon. We need now to watch and pray as never before, lest we fall under the power of temptation and leave the example of a life that is a miserable wreck. We must not, as a people, become careless, and look upon sin with indifference. The camp needs purging. All who name the name of Christ need to watch and pray and guard the avenues of the soul; for Satan is at work to corrupt and destroy if the least advantage is given him.

My brethren, God calls upon you as His followers to walk in the light. You need to be alarmed. Sin is among us, and it is not seen to be exceedingly sinful. The senses of many are benumbed by the indulgence of appetite and by familiarity with sin. We need to advance nearer heaven. We may grow in grace and in the knowledge of truth. Walking in the light, running in the way of God's commandments, does not give the idea that we can stand still and do nothing. We must be advancing.

In self-love, self-exaltation, and pride there is great weakness; but in humility there is great strength. Our true dignity is not maintained when we think most of ourselves, but when God is in all our thoughts and our hearts are all aglow with love to our Redeemer and love to our fellow men. Simplicity of character and lowliness of heart will give happiness, while self-conceit will bring discontent, repining, and continual disappointment. It is learning to think less of ourselves and more of making others happy that will bring to us divine strength.

In our separation from God, in our pride and darkness, we are constantly seeking to elevate ourselves, and we forget that lowliness of mind is power. Our Saviour's power was not a strong array of sharp words that would pierce through the very soul; it was His gentleness and His plain, unassuming manners that made Him a conqueror of hearts. Pride and self-importance, when compared with lowliness and humility, are indeed weakness. We are invited to learn of Him who was meek and lowly of heart; then we shall experience that rest and peace so much to be desired.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
2 Corinthians
34:31

**"We
must be
advancing."**

Excerpted from *Testimonies for the Church*,
vol. 3, pp. 476, 477.

March 6
Tuesday

The Kingdom of God

by John Bright

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Deuteronomy
30:15-20

The reform of King Josiah was an event of epoch-making importance in the life of Israel, yet its true significance is too often missed by the Bible reader.

1. The story of the reform is to be found in II Kings 22-23, and it is clear from Ch. 23 what it set out to do. It was a thoroughgoing purge of all kinds of paganism. Specifically mentioned are foreign cults newly imported by Manasseh, including that in the valley of Hinnom where barbarous rites were practiced (vss. 10-12); the various native pagan cults, many of which were of very long standing (vss. 4, 6, 13-14), together with their sacred objects; the personnel of these loathsome rites, particularly the eunuch priests (vs. 5) and sacred prostitutes of both sexes (vs. 7). But far more drastic than this, we read (vss. 8-9) that Josiah, as Hezekiah had essayed to do before him, abolished even the shrines of Yahweh—God of Israel—in the outlying towns and sought to centralize all worship in Jerusalem.

As we learn from Ch. 22, the reform was given direction by a law book which was found in the temple (vs. 8) in the course of repairs there. . . .

Now it has long been generally agreed that this law book was some form of the code of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy is a reform law. Indeed, it might well be called a reform edition of the ancient *Lex Mosaiica*. . . . In any event the action taken by Josiah corresponds well to the Deuteronomic demands. With unparalleled vehemence Deuteronomy commands the destruction of all foreign cults (e.g., Deut. 12:1-3) and makes idolatry a capital crime (ch. 13). Alone of all the Pentateuch law codes, it explicitly forbids the worship of Yahweh at various places and directs that sacrifice be offered only at the one place which Yahweh chooses (12:13-14; 16:5-6). Furthermore, it declares over and over again with ringing eloquence that the very national existence depends upon the loyalty with which the people serve the covenant God and obey his will (6:1-15; 8:11-20; 11:26-28; 28; 30:15-20).

But a mere law book never made a reform—any more than the presence of a dust-covered Bible in the family parlor can of itself create character. In fact, be it noted, the reform was already under way when the law book was found. The motivation for it was already present in the hearts of the people. The reform was, in part, a facet of high hopes of independence and resurgent nationalism. There had undoubtedly been a popular revulsion at the excesses of Manasseh; there was a desire to put away all recollections of foreign rule, religious as well as political. The oscillation of apostasy and reform is no accident. As Ahaz the vassal had been an apostate, as Hezekiah the rebel had been a reformer, and as Manasseh the vassal had been again an apostate, it is no coincidence that Josiah, king of free Judah, should tread the path of reform. But Josiah's ambitions went beyond mere independence. . . . That Josiah extended his reform into the north, destroying the cult installations there—particularly the shrine of Bethel (II Kings 23:15-20)—can mean but one thing: he had *de facto* annexed the territory of Samaria. This was a day of high hope and great promise: perhaps the David ideal could be realized again, a free Israel once more united. . . .

Excerpted from John Bright, *The Kingdom of God*, (Nashville: Abingdon, 1953), pp. 103-105.

☐ March 7
Wednesday

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John Bright is a prominent Old Testament scholar who taught at Union Theological Seminary in Richmond, Virginia.

On Following the Role Model

by Douglas R. Stuva

This week we're studying a spiritual hero, Josiah. A role model. Someone whose footsteps we should follow, as the cliché goes.

The trouble is, we study, discuss, read, and watch movies about spiritual heroes all the time. But we seldom seem to follow the role being modeled. Then we preach at each other because we're not getting anything done, and sing songs about non-witnessing Christians being spineless. We hear comments that our church is sick, Laodicean, lukewarm, because we are not witnessing.

And the trouble with this is that we are only dealing with symptoms. *We don't need to be concerned about people not witnessing, we need to be concerned about people not having anything to witness about.*

A person who is excited about an A+ in biology, a new girlfriend, a new school, etc., can't keep his mouth shut. A person excited about the love of Jesus won't be about to either. Telling other people about Jesus, caring about the world and the people in it, is a natural outcome of connecting oneself to Jesus; of being changed by the life and love of this God-Man. So, step one in the "how to" on reforming society, spiritually or socially, is to connect oneself to Christ. Make that decision. Be united with God. Then you can move on.

1. Don't let yourself become a pious separatist. Don't let denominationalism destroy your Christian experience. Maintain friendships with non-Christians and non-Adventists. If you work with those who are different from you, don't leave so you can stay pure, keep working with them.

2. Don't stick your head in the sand. Realize the importance of world affairs, and what's going on around you. Don't, for instance, follow the delusion that nuclear war isn't an issue for Christians to face, because the Bible says the world will not be ended by a nuclear war. The Bible doesn't say *you* won't be ended by a nuclear war. It doesn't say your neighborhood or the United States won't be destroyed by a nuclear war, either. If a person can help save himself, his neighborhood, his country, or anyone else from destruction, it is worth his time and effort.

3. Develop diplomacy. As sports editor of my high school newspaper, a reporter handed me a story. I read it, looked at him, and crumpled it, then ordered him to do it right the next time. Needless to say, there was no next time for that story. I should have sat down with him and showed him the good points in his work, then pointed out what he needed to improve. Treat people right, and they will do the job for you and themselves.

4. Get the job done. Be a winner. Be a doer. Quit talking about what you're going to do, and do it. The prize of satisfaction and reward goes to those who, when they have a job to do, go out and do it.

HOW TO

Key text:
1 John 3:7

From Inside Out

by Chris and Melia Williams

OPINION

Key text:
Isaiah 29:13, 14

The other day while I was waiting for the attendant to bring my 450 SL Mercedes to the front of the country club, the world famous conductor I'd been talking with said, "Say, Chris, what marvelous plans do you have in store for your band, the Prairie Winds?"

"Well, John, I've decided the time has come for us to have a first class ensemble. Of course we have adequate potential, but to really make them shine, each student will wear the finest attire available and each will also receive a hand-crafted, 14-carat gold instrument, the best that can be obtained. Certainly these two things will achieve the excellence we've been working toward. Everyone knows that the right environment will produce the change that's desired."

Perhaps we can relate this parable to Josiah. This good king truly believed in God's Word and hoped if the outward was changed, the inward would also change. It seems silly to us to think a new outfit and a fancy instrument would change anyone's ability. It might inspire harder work for a time, but the inspiration would fade as would the newness of the instruments and attire. Similarly, Josiah's reformation changed symptoms but not the sickness. Soon after Josiah's death his people returned to the idols that had been erased from sight but not from heart and mind.

"He changed symptoms but not the sickness."

Does all this mean, then, that we shouldn't worry about changing our surroundings and outward appearance while trying to change our hearts and minds? What would you think if you entered a church where everything was dusty, broken and unkept? Or if those you worship with spoke of all the things that were right, and then did just the opposite outside the church building? Perhaps if we work continually on the inside—our ideas, actions, and beliefs—maybe the outside will gradually change until the two are reflecting the same thing—the character of Christ. For this is really what Josiah had in mind all along.

How often we have as a church baptized hundreds, even thousands and yet the symbolism of the baptism is just that, only a symbol. The converts don't wholly understand what they've committed themselves to. How many Weeks of Prayer have we gone through full of enthusiasm and zealotry for our Lord, yet even the next week, without reinforcement, we forget all we have learned and relinquish the high ideals of the Christian life. We delve into the intricacies of the Christian life and yet we miss the basis of it all.

Reformation? Of course reformation is essential in an imperfect world. Not just a hasty, even bizarre, change that sounds right or is convenient at the time, but a carefully thought-out plan and then even more careful leading of our people to this truth.

We as Seventh-day Adventists possess a distinctive outlook on history's course, the past and the future. We know this world will not end by nuclear disaster or some other such event. So why waste our time trying to reform the ideas of those around us? Will it really make any difference, or will our changing the life of just one person count toward the reformation of the world? These are serious questions we must continually ask ourselves and each other. Reformation is neither simple or quick, but the one thing we can be sure of is that by changing those around us we will reform ourselves in the process.

1. What do you think motivated Josiah to begin his work of reform? How do you account for Josiah's adherence to the right in view of the evil practices of his father and grandfather?
 2. Is our church in need of reform? If so, is it our responsibility to do something about it? Or are such responsibilities strictly those of the leaders?
 3. If we sense a need of reform in a particular area, what principles should be kept in mind as we attempt to carry it out? What does Josiah's example suggest?
 4. The Opinion piece suggests that exterior reform essentially has only a cosmetic effect. Is this true? Do external environmental factors make no contribution to reformation at all? If reform comes from the inside out, are well-intentioned New Year's resolutions and promises to God always inappropriate?
 5. Since we believe that the return of Christ will bring about the ultimate reformation of the world, is there any point to devoting our energies to reforming society? Should we be concerned with nuclear disarmament, for example, if we are confident, from biblical teaching that the world won't completely destroy itself?
 6. If we *are* to engage in social reform, should we focus mainly on changing individual lives, who will then have a positive impact on society? Or should we seek to reform the corporate structures of society as well?
 7. Josiah's career has a most baffling ending. He was killed fighting the Egyptians (2 Chron. 35:20-24) in no obvious contradiction of God's will. Why did God allow such an untimely demise, when Josiah was one of the few kings in that era who served him faithfully? Is there a plausible explanation? Need there be?
-

SAMSON— A TRAGIC HERO

“O Lord God, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, only this once . . .” (Judges 16:28, RSV).



Lesson 11, March 11-17

by Lynn Neumann McDowell

The Hair Affair

INTRODUCTION

There they lay coiled askew around a hairdresser's chair—my locks of 17 years. I couldn't remember a time when I hadn't felt their weight brushing my back or swishing in a ponytail. I would go out at noon to Inspiration Point behind the boy's dorm, not for the view, but because I like the clean tug of the breeze at my hair. Standing face to with wind, long tresses streaming behind me, I imagined myself cutting quite a romantic figure. Like the girls in shampoo commercials.

Now, ten days before my high school graduation, I sat stunned as a hairdresser scratched her brush over my pixie cut saying, "There—doesn't that feel better?"

Those weren't quite Delilah's words after Samson got his new coiffure, but I can partially imagine the feeling in the pit of his stomach when Samson realized that his pride and glory—the visible sign of his connection with God—was cut off. It's sad to lose something you value, be it three pounds of hair, a friend, or your innocence. But for Samson, the loss was complete.

Samson had every opportunity for his mental and spiritual growth as well as for the physical. From his conception to his youthful exploits in Timnah, Manoah's son made it apparent that he was no common Obed, Josiah, or Benjamin. Always good with riddles and a gifted speaker, Samson eventually wound up as a judge of Israel for twenty years.

Yes, everyone knew that God was with Samson, but unfortunately, his visiting of Philistine towns got to be a habit. There

came a point when God "turned away from him" (Judges 16:20, Jerusalem Bible). Perhaps watching all that talent dissipate got to be too much after awhile. But here the real beauty of Samson's relationship with God shines through.

While going round and round in the prison mill Samson had plenty of time to retrace his past, abundant opportunity to relive his encounters with Yahweh. In Samson we find a man who has become so well-acquainted with God's character that he knows he can reach out at any time and find God there.

Samson didn't bother to preface his prayer with, "Forgive me, Father, for I have sinned." No. Just ". . . remember me; give me strength again. . . ." (Judges 16:28, Jerusalem Bible). And Yahweh was there, filling Samson's deep wish to reunite with him and complete the mission as a freedom fighter for Israel.

I love the clever tenacity of God. It shows up in a verse that's sandwiched between Samson's haircut and his remembrance of God. Artistically speaking, it's a dangler—bait strategically placed to make the reader perk up and say, "Now why is that there? It must be significant." It is.

Little by little, God reminds Samson of his former glory. He sets out to restore their relationship by giving Samson a physical reminder of his past. Immediately—imperceptibly at first—"the hair that had been shorn off began to grow again" (Judges 16:22, Jerusalem Bible, emphasis supplied).

Lynn Neumann McDowell is a freelance writer and English M.A., living in Calgary, Alberta.

March 11
Sunday

The Strong Man Who Wasn't

LOGOS The story of Samson is a saga of squandered potential. Few men have translated greater opportunities into more dismal results. Admittedly, Samson performed a number of awe-inspiring feats—but these must pale before the accomplishments that God intended him to achieve had he allowed for divine direction. Here is a man who intimidated thousands single-handedly, yet could not even control his most basic desires.

Samson was earmarked for greatness even before he was conceived. God prepared his heredity and environment so as to yield the greatest chance for success in his appointed mission. An angel told Samson's mother, "Now see to it that you drink no wine or other fermented drink and that you do not eat anything unclean, because you will conceive and give birth to a son. No razor may be used on his head, because the boy is to be a Nazirite, set apart to God from birth, and he will begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of Philistines" (Judges 13:3-5, NIV).

This calculated forethought produced positive results—at least initially. "He grew and the Lord blessed him, and the spirit of the Lord began to stir him" (Judges 13:24, 25, NIV). But as Samson grew strong his willpower grew weak. He became more controlled by passion than principle. This led him to marry a Philistine woman against the explicit counsel of God and the wishes of his parents. Nevertheless, God was able to use Samson's marriage to meet his purposes ". . . [T]his [the marriage] was from the Lord, who was seeking an occasion to confront the Philistines" (Judges 14:4, NIV).

But Samson lost sight of his objective. Even though he judged Israel for a time (Judges 15:20), he never seriously pursued his designated mission. Instead of leading the general revolt against the Philistines, he was busy settling personal scores and trying to escape hostile vendettas. Sure, he was killing Philistines, but to him that was purely incidental. He became obsessed with the realization that he was virtually invincible among men and therefore devoted his energies to satisfying himself. This led him to Delilah, and in her all his self-serving choices culminated in his downfall. "Then the Philistines seized him, gouged out his eyes and took him down to Gaza. Binding him with bronze shackles, they set him to grinding in the prison" (Judges 16:21, NIV).

The tragedy of Samson would be complete if the story ended here. But fortunately it doesn't. Instead, it closes on a positive, albeit bittersweet, note. The sober recognition of his folly sank in on Samson as he languished in his dark prison. So when God gave him another opportunity, he was ready. Summoned as the entertainment at a Philistine party celebrating his capture, Samson brought the house down, literally. More than three thousand of the enemy nobility, along with Samson, died as a result (Judges 16:23-30).

God forgave Samson, because he recognized his mistakes and confessed them. And even though he paid for them with his life, he bowed out in triumph. He had learned his lesson. In fact, it almost seems to be Samson who cautions, "Be self-controlled and alert. Your enemy the devil prowls around like a roaring lion looking for someone to devour" (1 Pet. 5:8, NIV). And Samson knows!

L. R. C.

Out of the Strong Came Forth Weakness

God's promise that through Samson he would "begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines," was fulfilled; but how dark and terrible the record of that life which might have been a praise to God and a glory to the nation! Had Samson been true to his divine calling, the purpose of God could have been accomplished in his honor and exaltation. But he yielded to temptation, and proved untrue to his trust, and his mission was fulfilled in defeat, bondage, and death.

Physically, Samson was the strongest man upon the earth; but in self-control, integrity, and firmness, he was one of the weakest men. Many mistake strong passion for a strong character; but the truth is that he who is mastered by his passions is a weak man. The real greatness of the man is measured by the power of the feelings that he controls, not by those that control him.

God's providential care had been over Samson, that he might be prepared to accomplish the work which he was called to do. At the very outset of life he was surrounded with favorable conditions for physical strength, intellectual vigor, and moral purity. But under the influence of wicked associates he let go that hold upon God which is man's only safeguard, and he was swept away by the tide of evil. Those who in the way of duty are brought into trial may be sure that God will preserve them; but if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later.

The very ones whom God purposes to use as his instruments for a special work, Satan employs his utmost power to lead astray. He attacks us at our weak points, working through defects in the character to gain control of the whole man; and he knows that if these defects are cherished, he will succeed. But none need be overcome. Man is not left alone to conquer the power of evil by his own feeble efforts. Help is at hand, and will be given to every soul who really desires it. Angels of God, that ascend and descend the ladder which Jacob saw in vision, will help every soul who will, to climb even to the highest heaven.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Proverbs 28:26

"Man is not left alone to conquer the power of evil."

Excerpted from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 567-568.

☐ March 13
Tuesday

When Vows Are Broken

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Hebrews
11:32, 33

In the course of his tumultuous career, Samson managed to violate every one of his vows as a Nazirite.¹ On his way to Timnah, where his first Philistine flame lived, the mighty Samson had ripped apart a young lion. Returning later to marry the girl, Samson gulped down some honey that he found in the lion's carcass. This was violation number one: Nazirites weren't even to touch that which was unclean, like dead animals (see Num. 6:6). The second violation probably came at the wedding feast in Timnah. The word translated "feast" (*misteh*) in Judges 14:10 implies a drinking bout, and Nazirites were pledged to abstain completely from alcohol. The final and most decisive violation came when Delilah badgered the secret of his strength out of him (Judges 16:4-22)—the cutting of his hair severed him from the only vow that remained intact.

Beyond his vow-breaking, Samson was hardly a paragon of Christ-like virtue. The only thing he seemed to like as much as killing Philistine men was sleeping with Philistine women (Judges 16:1, 4-22). So it comes as something of a surprise that this violent, lustful man is included by the author of Hebrews among those who did great things for God "by faith" (Heb. 11:32).

Samson—faith hero or tragic profligate? Christian interpreters have presented diverse views. Augustine, for example, grouped Samson with Moses and Daniel, and many have even seen him as an allegorical type of Christ. A seventeenth century publication, listed nine ways in which Samson resembled Christ, including this one: as Samson escaped from ambush after his night with a prostitute in Gaza by carrying off the city gates, so Jesus arose from a grave guarded by Roman soldiers. On the other hand, a much earlier figure, Clement of Rome, used Samson's story as an argument for chastity, calling him one "whom a woman brought to ruin with her wretched body, and her vile passion."²

Perhaps we can view Samson as an example of both tragedy and faith. The story contains both warning and promise. The warning is that broken vows mean pain and self-destruction to us as literally and unavoidably as they did to Samson. The promise is that God does not forsake even those who most scandalously violate their commitments. Samson emerges as a faith hero by taking hold of this God in the final, dramatic scene of his life (Judges 16:28). He had broken his vows, but he didn't break his connection with God. Samson's message to those who find themselves, like he, inextricably caught in a messy situation is: Don't let go of your relationship with God, no matter what you've done. Open yourself to his leading and working.

"By telling and re-telling this marvelous story of Samson and his loves, those who found themselves in trying circumstances discovered renewed hope. Thus they proclaimed the greatest secret of all: God heeds the cry of those who recognize their own helplessness. Like Samson of old, Israel frequently found herself in need of divine remembrance, and joined the ancient hero in a single request. 'Remember me, O Lord.' She did so at great risk. Failure to raise her voice for remembrance carried even greater risk."³

D. F. M.

1. Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible, vol. 5, Merrill C. Tenney, ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), pp. 249, 250.
2. James L. Greshaw, Samson (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1978) pp. 140, 141.
3. Ibid., p. 151.

March 14
Wednesday

Don't Cut Your Hair

HOW TO

Key text:
John 15:4, 5

At first appearance a How To article based on the life of Samson seems easy to write. After all, Samson's mistakes are rather obvious, and the lessons to be learned are clear. First, don't drink alcohol. Second, don't date/marry unbelievers. And third, don't indulge in the alluring, sensuous pleasures that lead to ruin. Follow these steps and all will be well. . . . Or will it?

Samson, like the rest of us, had probably heard many a sermon and chapel talk on this list of "don'ts." And being a Nazirite he was supposed to adhere to a strict discipline. Yet his tragic story is one of squandered potential. This is because Samson's mistakes were deeper than breaking a set of rules. Something more was wrong. The "rule" breaking was only a symptom of a greater ill.

A successful spiritual commitment goes beyond a list of "dos" and "don'ts." Weightier principles are involved. This was the heart of Samson's problem. His ignoring of the principles was the cause of his breaking the "rules."

So what are the principles that lead to a faithful commitment?

1. Develop a vibrant relationship with God. Spend time with him, learn about him, and share him. Though God worked with Samson at times, there was no real relationship between them. Samson was too busy developing a relationship with himself.

2. Develop self-control and self-discipline. This is the hardest lesson to learn—one that Samson never mastered. The key to acquiring these attributes is to serve others in humility, counting them of more value than yourself. Put their interests, desires and needs before your own.

3. In all things be temperate. This again was one of Samson's weak points as he devoted much of his time indulging in his favorite pleasures. The result is obvious. The more healthy and pure a life you lead the better your connection with God will be.

At one time Samson must have at least partially held to these principles. But gradually, step by step, he relinquished them all. The total break was symbolized by his allowing his hair to be cut. Then, until he desired otherwise, God could no longer help him. But in the prison of regret his commitment returned and his hair grew back. And again God was able to use him. But how much greater could Samson's effectiveness have been if his hair had not been cut, if his commitment had not been broken. Thus, the last principle can be summarized as:

4. Never cut your hair. Once your commitment and relationship with God has been established, don't break it.

E. R. M.

Eyeless in Gaza

by John McDowell

OPINION

Key text:
1 Samuel 16:7

No question about it. The story of Samson is entertaining—a central character with unusual ability, beautiful women, a riddle, amazing stunts, seduction, betrayal, irony, and enough adventure to keep the likes of Clint Eastwood happy. On a first reading of Judges 13-15 the story seems to be all plot. Everything is here for an action-packed script—from an angel announcing the birth to the dramatic finale of Samson pulling the house down at a great Philistine party.

With all the action in the story, it is curious that when John Milton wrote his dramatic poem about Samson, he left all the adventure out. In fact, very little *happens* in *Samson Agonistes*. It's all conversation—mostly between Samson and various people who come to visit him "Eyeless in Gaza."¹ After reading the adventures of Samson several times one comes to discover, as Milton did, that all the bravado—the famous riddle, the burning of the foxes' tails, the carrying off of the city gate, the killing with a jawbone of an ass—masks a more important conflict.

Samson's main conflict is not with the Philistines (one has the sense that he'd rather leave them alone—see Judges 15:7, RSV), but it is with himself, his ego, his passions, his mission as a Nazirite and as Judge of Israel. He falls to Delilah only after he tells her about himself, his mission, and his relationship with God. The saddest line in the story is when he wakes, finds his head shaved, and says, "I will go out like the other times, and shake myself free." The text continues, "And he did not know that the Lord had left him" (Judges 16:20, RSV).

Samson knew full well that his strength was not really in his hair. He knew that his hair was a symbol, a visible manifestation of a relationship that he had now abandoned. Samson, his strength gone, has his eyes gouged out and he is taken to the prison mill in Gaza. The tragic irony of the story is that although blind he begins now to see spiritual things in perspective.

Milton develops the theme of Samson's spiritual regeneration because he saw this as the most important aspect of the Samson story. Milton has Samson, in his discussion with various visitors, think through his fall and his faith in God. Samson comes to accept responsibility for his actions, and even to Delilah he is able to say, "I to myself was false ere thou to me."²

At the end of the story, when called upon to be sport for the Philistines at their party, Samson prays the prayer of a repentant sinner, "'O Lord, remember me . . .'" (Judges 16:28). His prayer is similar to the one prayed by the thief on the cross (see Luke 23:42). The cry, "Remember me . . ." is a prayer that God always hears.

Although Samson brings the roof down on his head, he gains a spiritual victory. Thus, in spite of his life-style, Samson is counted in Hebrews 11 as being among the faithful, as being one of the great "cloud of witnesses" (Heb. 12:1, RSV). Samson's story illustrates that God is not as concerned with outward behavior as he is with what motivates that behavior. God makes the same point clear to Samuel, "'For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart'" (1 Sam. 16:7, RSV).

"The cry,
Remember
me . . .
is a prayer
that God
always hears."

1. John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*, Line 41.
2. *Ibid.*, Line 824.

1. After reading Numbers 6:1-8 and Judges 13:3-7, how would you say Samson's Nazirite vows were like and/or unlike the following:

- monastic vows
- regulations for an athlete in training
- Adventist health principles
- other _____

What do you think was the purpose of Samson's Nazirite vows? Are Adventists called to a commitment in any way analogous to that of a Nazirite?

2. Do you think it was fair that God determined Samson would be a Nazarite before Samson had any say in the matter? Was his wild behavior perhaps a reaction against an overly-restrictive upbringing? Looking at Samson's life as a whole, do you think it was more "predestined" than the average life?
3. What do you think was the key(s) to Samson's downfall?
- fast women
 - implusiveness
 - his own amazing abilities
 - ego
 - intemperance
 - other
4. Why do you think Samson was included among the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11?
5. The Testimony states, "if men willfully place themselves under the power of temptation, they will fall, sooner or later." How did Samson's life illustrate this principle? Do you think Mrs. White's counsel applies to the following:
- living in large cities
 - going into bars in an effort to befriend and even evangelize non-Adventists
 - beach evangelism
6. What does the way God dealt with Samson teach you about God?
-

JOSHUA— THE COMMITTED CAPTAIN

“ ‘Be strong and of good courage; be not
frightened, neither be dismayed; for the Lord
your God is with you wherever you go’ ”
(Joshua 1:9, RSV).



Lesson 12, March 18-24

Can You Imagine?

by Patti Hansen Tompkins

INTRODUCTION

Bumper stickers don't ordinarily excite me. If they aren't faded, peeling, outdated, or otherwise useless, they are hard to read without getting dangerously close to the vehicle ahead.

But I recently spotted a bumper sticker with a simple white-on-blue message that *did* excite me. It wasn't hard to read from a distance. Just one word. *IMAGINE*. But that one word, appearing in my peripheral vision and imbedding itself into my consciousness, made an impact. I began to imagine. And I thought what a wonderful, creative gift imagination is and how it can be used as a tool to sharpen our understanding.

Young children have an advantage over adults, because their imaginations haven't yet been spoiled by adult realities. They dream in wonder and innocence. Through such imaginings, Bible stories come alive. We adults encourage children to imagine through Nativity pageants, songs about David and Goliath, and sandbox scenes of Jacob and Esau. The children empathize when Joseph and Mary are turned away by Bethlehem innkeepers. They hear the stone whiz through the air to fell the giant. They feel Esau's hairy arms and smell the simmering pottage.

Let's take a cue from the kids and spend a few minutes using our senses to imagine Joshua and his experiences. Read the story in Scripture. It contains a wealth of picturesque scenes, mind-boggling miracles, heart-stopping emotions.

Imagine an 80-year-old man on horseback, leading his people into an enemy nation, knowing it must be conquered by warfare. Imagine battle after battle for seven years. Imagine having to defeat 31 kings before the land is finally conquered.

Imagine the logistics of crossing the Jordan. Imagine two million people on foot, carrying their belongings, leading an assortment of nervous animals, walking on land made dry because of their faith.

Imagine being asked by the Lord to march in a seemingly arbitrary manner around a fortified enemy city. Imagine being told to kill the enemy, burn their city, and destroy their cattle.

Imagine the emotions. Ecstatic victory and humiliating defeat; outrage at being taken in by a clever ruse; joyful anticipation after 40 years of wandering to finally be close to a permanent home.

Imagine Joshua's awesome leadership responsibilities. Circumcising all males born in the past 40 years. Overseeing the search for sin in the camp and meting out the necessary punishment.

Imagine an entire nation responding to one man's upraised hand.

Imagine the miracles.

Can you imagine it? Can you feel it? Can you catch something of what it all meant? Can you understand that it would have been impossible with a man of lesser commitment?

Imagine where we'd be if we had the same kind of commitment. Maybe we, too, would be in the Promised Land.

Patti Hansen Tompkins is a freelance editor-writer living in Altamonte Springs, Fla.

☐ March 18
Sunday

No Exceptions

LOGOS

Joshua has always been one of my heroes. His positive attitude, bold initiative, and courageous acceptance of responsibility have all contributed to my perception of him as a model leader. What really impresses me about Joshua, however, was his unflinching adherence to God's will. It represents a most refreshing and reassuring contrast to the periodic failures of other individuals we've studied this quarter.

Joshua's habit of always being on God's side is exhibited from his first mention as one of the twelve spies sent on the reconnaissance into Canaan (Num. 13). Although he and Caleb saw the same walled cities and the same giants as the other ten, they brought back a very different report. What the others perceived as obstacles, Joshua and Caleb saw as opportunities—situations where God's power could be manifested. They were ready to follow God anywhere.

Joshua's trust in God remained firm after his promotion to leader of the Israelites. God admonished him, **"Be strong and courageous, because you will lead these people to inherit the land I swore to their forefathers to give them. Be strong and very courageous. Be careful to obey all the law my servant Moses gave you; do not turn from it to the right or to the left, that you may be successful wherever you go. Do not let this Book of the Law depart from your mouth; meditate on it day and night, so that you may be careful to do everything written in it. Then you will be prosperous and successful. Have I not commanded you?"** (Joshua 1:9, NIV). Joshua responded in characteristic fashion, telling his people, **"Get your supplies ready. Three days from now you will cross the Jordan here to go in and take possession of the land the Lord your God is giving you for your own"** (Joshua 1:11, NIV). There was no pause to confer with his technical consultants, no development of complex contingency plans—Joshua just boldly moved forward to do God's bidding.

Although Joshua's greatness may be somewhat obscured by Moses' long shadow, God didn't overlook Joshua's consistence. He demonstrated his appreciation by meeting with Joshua face to face to give him specific instructions for the siege of Jericho (Joshua 5:14, NIV).

Joshua was brilliantly successful in leading Israel through the conquest of Canaan. But his greatest moment came after the battles were won. He demonstrated a heartfelt burden for Israel to continue the commitment to God that was the basis for their success. Joshua challenged the people to **"choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve"** (Joshua 24:14, NIV). Then, once again, he threw his powerful influence in the right direction—God's direction. **"But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord"** (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

From beginning to end, Joshua's life attests to the truth of his immortal declaration. But even more, it sets before us an inspiring example of consistent commitment. He relays to us the encouraging message that we too can experience a similarly constant walk with God. In this way, the resounding success of Joshua can also be ours.

L. R. C.

Joshua's Success Secret

Selected

by Krista R. Woodruff

Joshua was now the acknowledged leader of Israel. He had been known chiefly as a warrior, and his gifts and virtues were especially valuable at this stage in the history of his people. Courageous, resolute, and persevering, prompt, incorruptible, unmindful of selfish interests in his care for those committed to his charge, and, above all, inspired by a living faith in God—such was the character of the man divinely chosen to conduct the armies of Israel in their entrance upon the Promised Land. . . . It was with great anxiety and self-distrust that Joshua had looked forward to the work before him; but his fears were removed by the assurance of God, "As I was with Moses, so I will be with thee: I will not fail thee, nor forsake thee."¹

The Lord has a great work to be done in our world. To every man He has given *His* work for man to do. But man is not to make man his guide, lest he be led astray; this is always unsafe. . . . What was Joshua's victory? Thou shalt meditate upon the Word of God day and night.²

. . . Joshua had received the promise that God would surely overthrow these enemies of Israel, yet he put forth as earnest effort as though success depended upon the armies of Israel alone. He did all that human energy could do, and then he cried in faith for divine aid. The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort. Those who achieve the greatest results are those who rely most implicitly upon the Almighty Arm. The man who commanded, "Sun, stand thou still upon Gibeon; and thou, Moon, in the valley of Ajalon," is the man who for hours lay prostrate upon the earth in prayer in the camp at Gilgal. The men of prayer are the men of power.³

When Joshua was nearing the close of his life he took up a review of the past for two reasons—to lead the Israel of God to gratitude for the marked manifestation of God's presence in all their travels, and to lead them to humility of mind under a sense of their unjust murmurings and repinings and their neglect to follow out the revealed will of God. Joshua goes on to warn them in a most earnest manner against the idolatry around them. They were warned not to have any connection with idolaters, not to intermarry with them, nor in any way put themselves in danger of being affected and corrupted by their abominations. They were counseled to shun the very appearance of evil, not to dabble around the borders of sin, for this was the surest way to be engulfed in sin and ruin. He showed them that desolation would be the result of their departing from God, and as God was faithful to His promise He would also be faithful in executing His threatenings. . . .⁴

Joshua's work for Israel was done. He had "wholly followed the Lord;" and in the book of God he is written, "The servant of Jehovah."⁵

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Philippians
2:12-13

"The secret of success is the union of divine power with human effort."

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 481, 482.
2. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 993.
3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 509.
4. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 1000.
5. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 524.

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March 20
Tuesday

Commitment, a Two-Way Street

by Randy S. Tompkins

EVIDENCE

Key text:
Joshua 1:5

The story of Joshua demonstrates what a committed life can accomplish, but in a less obvious way it also reminds us of an important dynamic in the relationship between God and man—commitment is a two-way street.

Perhaps no one outside of Moses better understood the revelation of God. Joshua was firsthand witness to the mighty Exodus. He was by Moses' side on Mt. Sinai when the law was given to the Israelites. It was Joshua who pointed out the rebellion in the camp, symbolized by the golden calf. Through these and other experiences, Joshua became convinced of God's love for his people and his desire to fulfill his promises. He came to a realization of what a life of commitment would mean to himself, but he had yet to witness what it would mean to his God.

At Moses' death, Joshua was called to lead the people to possession of God's long-promised land. He was prepared, for he had already seen what God could do. But Israel was not to claim the Promised Land without bloodshed. The Lord commanded that Israel conquer Canaan and destroy its inhabitants. The intent was to create a new kingdom in which God could teach his people the principles of his character without the evil influences of the Canaanites.

In the story of Ai, we learn a familiar lesson about the need for continued dependence of God. Joshua blew it, and it wouldn't be the last time. His commitment was not without human fault, and he soon found himself in trouble again.

The Gibeonites, in a desperate effort to save themselves, tricked Joshua and the elders of Israel into an agreement to let them live. Other Canaanite kings, hearing of the covenant, planned revenge. The Gibeonites certainly were no fools, and immediately asked Joshua for assistance. They knew full well of God's intent to give all of Canaan to Israel, but they also knew that Joshua was a man of his word.

Many of us would have welcomed the annihilation of a people who had deceived and humiliated us. But Joshua, demonstrating his integrity to the covenant, rallied to Gibeon's defense. He marched his army all night and attacked the next morning.

Here the story takes an unexpected twist. Even though God desired the total destruction of the Canaanites, he elected to save the lying, cheating Gibeonites because of Joshua's covenant with them. God's commitment to Joshua was tangibly evidenced in the form of hailstones to rout the enemy. Realizing even then that time was too short, Joshua petitioned the Lord to extend the day (Joshua 10:12, 13). God then chose to perform one of the most astonishing miracles ever witnessed in the natural realm just to keep his promise to Joshua, "I will not fail you or forsake you" (Joshua 1:5, RSV).

The experience of Joshua illustrates the overwhelming result of a two-way commitment. Today, as in Joshua's day, God responds to his servants in their own limitedness. He reaches us where we are, for that is where he first committed himself to us long ago. When we decide to return that commitment—even in small measure—God does great things.

"Joshua illustrates the overwhelming result of a two-way commitment."

Suggested reading: Paul P. Enns, *Bible Study Commentary: Joshua* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1981).

**March 21
Wednesday**

104

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Being a Leader

Moses was a tough act to follow, "For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deut. 34:12, NIV). Rarely do you find an understudy as capable as the person he replaces, but Joshua was an exception! He was the right man at the right time for the job. As Prime Minister under Moses, and later as Moses' successor, Joshua revealed wonderful qualities of leadership—courage, resolve, faithfulness, and steadfastness.

Joshua's commitment as a leader reveals several important characteristics worthy of emulation. Consider the following:

1. Start each day early with God. While others are still sleeping, you can get a head start by communing with God early in the morning. You need that special time with your Creator to lay plans for the day, to dream of great challenges, and to prepare for opportunities that will come during the day. Joshua liked to begin early (see Joshua 3:1; 6:12, 15; 7:16; 8:10). This gave him the time he needed to stay ahead of the game and to build an advantage over the enemy.

On the headstone of W. K. Kellogg's grave in Battle Creek, Michigan, sits a bronze replica of a little bird pulling at a worm. The inscription reads, "The early bird gets the worm." Such a motto inspired Kellogg, and its point undoubtedly contributed to Joshua's success as well.

2. Confront the enemy before he confronts you. Consider the temptations and challenges you will face in life; determine ahead of time what your stand will be. What is your position on honesty, purity, modesty, good health, etc? Once you're feeling the pressure and emotions of a situation, it's usually too late to make an objective, reasonable decision. Joshua didn't wait on the west bank of the Jordan for the army of Jericho to come to him. He confronted the enemy at its strongest position—the fortress of Jericho—and won. Don't wait to be overwhelmed by temptation before you decide what stand you will take. Do it now!

3. Base your decisions on truth, justice, and God's will, not on what is popular or politically expedient. Too many people wait to see what the rest of the group thinks before they take a stand. That's extremely dangerous! Godly leaders "will not be bought or sold." They will not "fear to call sin by its right name." And they "will stand for the right though the heavens fall."¹

Joshua took his stand first, before the rest of the crowd, then invited the people to join him: "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve. . . . But as for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

HOW TO
Joshua 1:6-9,
16-18

Joshua— Patient Commitment

by F. Clifford Port

OPINION

Key text:
Numbers 14:7-9

To walk in the footsteps of Moses, to bridge Jordan with faith alone, to conquer Jericho with trumpet blasts and shouts—what awesome challenges Joshua faced! But somehow I suspect that his greatest test came years earlier, on the day he, Caleb, and the other spies returned from their reconnaissance of the Promised Land. It was a day of great excitement, lofty hopes, and overwhelming fear.

The spies all confirmed God's promise of a rich and fertile land. Who could argue with a two-man-sized bunch of grapes? But the people listened to the faithless ten who shook with fear: "All the people we saw there are of great size. . . . We seemed like grasshoppers . . ." (Num. 13:31-33, NIV). Caleb and Joshua pleaded in vain: "The land we passed through and explored is exceedingly good . . . the Lord . . . will lead us into that land, a land flowing with milk and honey, and will give it to us. . . . And do not be afraid of the people of the land, because we will swallow them up. Their protection is gone, but the Lord is with us" (Num. 14:7-9, NIV).

Caleb and Joshua were right. They gave an honest report, and stood by their convictions. But they were shouted down and threatened with stoning.

"However rebellious and unworthy Israel might be, the nation was still guided by the Fiery Pillar."

How do you suppose Joshua felt as he turned his back on the bountiful land he had visited, turned back to the barren desert, with only the promise that in 40 years he might enter the Promised Land? There is no indignation quite so satisfying to indulge as righteous indignation, and Joshua had been quite right! A man of shallow faith and marginal commitment might have degenerated into cynical disillusionment, might have folded his tent and slipped away with his family to cross Jordan alone. But Joshua realized that however rebellious and unworthy Israel might be, the nation was still guided by the Fiery Pillar. And Joshua stood by Jehovah and his people.

Scripture doesn't reveal a great deal about Joshua's role during the wilderness wandering. It was undoubtedly difficult to push from his mind thoughts of how utterly unnecessary this miserable sojourn was. But day after dusty day, year after dreary year, he persevered. And when the mantle of Moses fell on Joshua's capable shoulders, the generation that grew up during those wilderness years acknowledged his commission. His credentials had long since been established, and Israel was ready at last to follow him through the swollen waters of Jordan.

Joshua, not without faults, became deeply discouraged by the defeat at Ai, and later allowed himself to be deceived by the Gibeonites. But his commitment never faltered. When at the end of his life he assembled the tribes and their elders at Shechem and challenged them to choose for themselves between Jehovah and the gods of Canaan, he expressed his own position without equivocation: "As for me and my household, we will serve the Lord" (Joshua 24:15, NIV).

The final testament to Joshua's commitment and the power of his example is the simple record that "Israel served the Lord throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him . . ." (Joshua 24:31, NIV).

March 23
Friday

106

F. Clifford Port is chief pilot for the Adventist Health System/Sunbelt.

1. What were the traits that made Joshua a great leader? Should we expect all of these traits from our leaders today? If so, how should we deal with those who fall short of this standard?
 2. What do you consider to be Joshua's greatest strength? Does the strength of Joshua which you identified correlate with a weakness of yours? If so, can you find a possible solution among the How To suggestions?
 3. What does Joshua's story say to us about the relationship between obedience and success? Between disobedience and failure?
 4. When, if ever, should we abandon our own human efforts in favor of total dependence on divine power? In your opinion, what is the proper combination of these two ingredients for success? Keep in mind the key points in Joshua's career—crossing the Jordan, conquest of Jericho, battle with the five kings, etc.—as you answer.
 5. Was Joshua right in maintaining the covenant with the Gibeonites after it was discovered that they tricked him into it? Does integrity demand that you always keep your promises, even if it appears you were taken advantage of when the agreement was made?
 6. Why do you think God held the entire camp of Israel, including Joshua, responsible for Achan's sin (see Josh. 7)? Is there a sense in which we share the responsibility for the sins of fellow believers, or is each individual accountable solely for himself?
 7. Joshua pled with Israel not to have any connection with idolators, lest they be engulfed in sin (Josh. 23:7). In what ways can we adhere to this counsel, yet live and work and witness in our world?
 8. Do you think Joshua's call for a choice between Yahweh and other gods (Josh. 24:14, 15) is relevant for today? If so, what gods other than Yahweh do you find competing for your worship? Is it possible to have a god, or be polytheistic, without realizing it?
-

BENEFITS OF THE COMMITTED LIFE

"And my God will meet all your needs according to his glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 4:19, NIV).



Lesson 13, March 25-31

The God of Grace and Surprise

by Ray Tetz

INTRODUCTION

It was not without pain that Naaman climbed down from his horse and surveyed the muddy river before him. It seemed as if no experience was so humiliating that it would not find its way into his life. First the disease which spread like fire over his once strong body. Then to be reduced to such hopelessness that a journey into a two-bit country like Israel would actually be considered. And now to find himself descending into a muddy ribbon of water which wouldn't pass for a creek back home. All in hopes of a cure.

It's hard to believe that anything happened to Naaman's heart in that river. It doesn't seem as if God was too concerned about his faith in the process of healing him. One can almost hear the old warrior grumbling with every successive dipping, and reaching for a towel after the seventh, certain that it was all in vain. And then came the surprise.

The surprise of his life was when he wiped away the muddy water and found baby soft flesh instead of sores. When he looked at his feet and counted all of his toes. When he raised his hands over his head without pain for the first time in months. The surprise of finding healing and grace where he least expected.

I think it was the surprise which changed his heart. Which caused him to leap on his horse and gallop back to the prophet's house. There he found himself praising a new God—an activity he was not especially familiar with. Naaman—surprised by grace—left

everything behind him in that muddy river. And motivated by a powerful new love for a powerful, graceful God, found his way back to Syria with his health restored and his faith newborn.

Why would God heal such a man? Why would God honor this heathen general? Why did God ignore the structure of kings and power, and work instead through a slave girl, a corrupt servant and Naaman's own soldiers? Why have him dip in the river at all?

What was God trying to do? From the biblical record, only one thing changes: Naaman is healed and finds faith in Yahweh. Which seems to be the one thing for which God is willing to pull all the stops. It seems clear that dispensing his grace into a needy world is one of the things which God does with abandon—free from our structures and prejudices.

One likes to imagine that years later—after dozens of successful campaigns against the enemies of his king, including the people of God when necessary—the surprise stayed with Naaman. The joy of counting his toes and admiring his young beautiful hands continued to surprise him into seeing God's grace again. And making his way back to his garden, to that little patch of earth he had brought home from the prophet's house, Naaman would kneel down and raise his strong arms and pray hosannas to the God of grace and surprises. And he would ask for the grace to be found in his life another day.

Ray Tetz is an Associate Pastor at Eagle Rock Church in Los Angeles, and an Associate Youth Director for the Southern California Conference.

March 25
Sunday

Good Guys Always Win

LOGOS

This quarter we have been studying the lives of individuals who represent some form of commitment. Some of these were Jesus, Abraham, and Moses—all of which illustrate steadfast commitment. There was also Balaam, Samson, and Saul, who illustrate the results of a partial or broken commitment.

With the advantage of our historical perspective it is easy to theorize about the lives of these individuals, noting the results of faithfulness or faithlessness, and develop a simplistic "good guys win, bad guys lose" philosophy. However, when confronted with the realities of life, and when trying to cope with daily stresses this outlook seems to be of little worth. And in the heat of trial or the pain of sorrow Billy Joel's statement on moral living sounds true, "Only the Good Die Young."

How do "good guys" win? The obvious, easy answer points to a glorious future reward. But what are the present, tangible benefits of a committed life?

First of all "winning" for the Christian does not mean a smooth, easy life. A committed life is not a "get out of jail free" card, or the promise of a painless comfortable existence. In fact, persecution is considered a blessing. "Blessed are you when people insult you, persecute you and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of me. Rejoice and be glad" (Matt. 5:11, 12, NIV).

Second, a Christian "wins" only on God's terms. The rivers of Damascus would have been ineffective in curing Naaman's leprosy. He had to follow God's command and wash in the Jordan (2 Kings 5: 1-14). But when the committed Christian follows God's will, in peace or persecution, God supplies every need. The Israelites, on a 40-year trek through a hot, arid desert, lacked nothing. Food was supplied in the form of manna (Ex. 16), water was brought out of the rocks (Ex. 17), and clothing did not wear out (Deut. 29:5).

In all situations, whether it be persecution, being blessed by God, or following his plan, the Christian is blessed because of the presence of God. "Lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the world" (Matt. 28:20).

Because of God's continual presence, the committed individual is freed from insecurity, fear, and stress. "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid." "I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 14:27; 16:33, NIV).

Though the committed life involves sorrow and hardship, true commitment remains unchanged through the peace and courage of Christ living within. "We are afflicted in every way, but not crushed; perplexed but not driven to despair; persecuted, but not forsaken; struck down, but not destroyed. . . . So we do not lose heart. Though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day" (2 Cor. 4:8, 9, 16, RSV). Though sometimes the "good" do die young, they always win.

E. R. M.

The Invitation

There are many whose hearts are aching under a load of care because they seek to reach the world's standard. They have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse. The continual worry is wearing out the life forces. Our Lord desires them to lay aside this yoke of bondage. He invites them to accept His yoke; He says, "My yoke is easy, and My burden is light." He bids them seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and His promise is that all things needful to them for this life shall be added. Worry is blind, and cannot discern the future; but Jesus sees the end from the beginning. In every difficulty He has His way prepared to bring relief. Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet. . . .

Those who take Christ at His word, and surrender their souls to His keeping, their lives to His ordering, will find peace and quietude. Nothing of the world can make them sad when Jesus makes them glad by His presence. In perfect acquiescence there is perfect rest. The Lord says, "Thou wilt keep him in perfect peace, whose mind is stayed on Thee; because he trusteth in Thee." Isa. 26:3. Our lives may seem a tangle; but as we commit ourselves to the wise Master Worker, He will bring out the pattern of life and character that will be received into the Paradise of God. A renovated race shall walk with Him in white, for they are worthy.

As through Jesus we enter into rest, heaven begins here. We respond to His invitation, Come, learn of Me, and in thus coming we begin the life eternal. Heaven is a ceaseless approaching to God through Christ. The longer we are in the heaven of bliss, the more and still more of glory will be opened to us; and the more we know of God, the more intense will be our happiness. As we walk with Jesus in this life, we may be filled with His love, satisfied with His presence. All that human nature can bear, we may receive here. But what is this compared with the hereafter? There "are they before the throne of God, and serve Him day and night in His temple: and He that sitteth on the throne shall dwell among them. They shall hunger no more, neither thirst any more; neither shall the sun light on them, nor any heat. For the Lamb which is in the midst of the throne shall feed them, and shall lead them unto living fountains of waters: and God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes." Rev. 7:15-17.

TESTIMONY

Key text:
Matthew
11:28-30

**"As through
Jesus
we enter
into rest,
heaven
begins here."**

Excerpted from *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 330-332.

March 27
Tuesday

Gathering the Benefits

by Morris Venden, selected by Jim Ponder

EVIDENCE

Key text:
John 6:48-63

The Israelites' experience with the manna in the wilderness illustrates, as Morris Venden shows, some crucial lessons on how we can personally receive the benefits of the committed life.

Jesus used the manna to represent a great spiritual truth. "I am that bread of life. Your fathers did eat manna in the wilderness, and are dead. This is the bread which cometh down from heaven, that a man may eat thereof, and not die. I am the living bread which came down from heaven: if any man eat of this bread, he shall live for ever: and the bread that I will give is my flesh, which I will give for the life of the world. The Jews therefore strove among themselves, saying, How can this man give us his flesh to eat?" (John 6:48-52).

Cannibals would have easily misunderstood His words . . . even the disciples were confused. But Jesus explained, "The words that I speak unto you, they are the spirit and they are life." (John 6:63).

If you have ever tried to figure out what's tangible about living the Christian life, you've discovered three things: God's Word, prayer and service for others. . . .

It seems to me that the analogy of John 6 contains one of the greatest lessons for the people of God wandering in the wilderness today. Let's start with the first clue from . . . Exodus 16:16. "This is the thing which the Lord hath commanded, Gather of it every man according to his eating." Suppose that I hear about some great theologian who studies his Bible and prays for four hours a day, and I say, "I guess I'd better do that too." I try it, and it doesn't work for me. Long before the four hours are up, I fall asleep.

Charles Atlas, it is said, could do two hundred pushups. I collapse after doing ten. Maybe someday I will be able to do two hundred. But not if I just sit around waiting for it to happen. I have to keep doing my ten in the meantime. "Gather of it every man according to his eating." But at least, gather and eat.

The context of verses 16 to 18 is that the heads of families went out to gather enough manna for their families . . . no more than they could eat. . . . Have you ever been in a situation where the head of the family assembles everyone for family worship. . . ? The father reads for forty-five minutes. Or . . . prays clear around the world, and some of them fall asleep on their knees. Perhaps the father wonders why nobody has any interest in family worship—when he has been choking them to death. "Gather of it every man according to his own eating."

But although the heads of the family could collect the manna, when it comes to eating it, everyone had to do it for himself. The baby has to be fed, yes. But he's the one who has to chew it, or gum it, or whatever he does with his Gerber's baby food. He . . . has to assimilate it. It's impossible for one person to have spiritual life for another. Eating is a private, personal affair.

"It's impossible for one person to have spiritual life for another."

Excerpted from Morris Venden, *From Exodus to Advent* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1980), pp. 36-40.

☐ March 28
Wednesday

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Morris Venden is pastor of the College View Church in Lincoln, Nebr. Jim Ponder is associate pastor, White Memorial Church in Los Angeles.

The Meaning of Commitment

by Jim Clifford

I had just finished my second piece of toast and was eyeing the loaf of bread for another when the words on the package jumped out at me. They said, "committed to a natural and better way of life."

I asked myself, What does it really mean to be committed? If a person or organization is committed to a natural and better way of life how are they different? Are they healthier than other people? Do they live longer? Do they get sick less often? Commitment in the case of the bread means the bakery doesn't use sugar, preservatives, or other unhealthy additives in the making of their bread. They are committed to a healthful way of living.

We have been talking about the benefits of a committed life this quarter. But how can we receive these benefits? To receive the benefits we must make the commitment. And to be committed means to:

1. Believe in what we say we are committed to. Each of us has questioned our commitment at some time. Moses wondered about his when he saw the Red Sea in front of him, the Egyptian army behind him and a million Israelites yelling at him. I would imagine at that moment he was tempted to run like he had when he killed the Egyptian forty years before. But he believed God would take care of him and his people. He believed in spite of all the evidence to the contrary. If we are committed to God's plan for our lives then we will believe he knows what he's doing when setbacks come our way. This belief gives an inward peace that is truly satisfying.

2. Act on what we believe in. Jesus certainly did this. He had doubts at times whether his mission to save mankind would ever be accomplished. But he acted. He called men to follow him believing they would carry on the work of telling the world about him. When David was anointed by Samuel to be the next king of Israel both he and Samuel had their doubts, but David believed and acted. He didn't look very convincing to Saul when he offered to fight Goliath, but he believed and acted. And God used him in an incredible way. We have beliefs that seem to get no further than into our minds. What we need is to believe God and act on our commitment.

3. Live by principle, not feeling. When someone is committed to something they give it their best effort; they keep on striving toward their goal. The going may get rough, the excitement may wear off (it usually does), but they keep on persevering. It is difficult to live by principle rather than feeling. When you look at people who received the benefits of a committed life you realize this is what they did. Jesus asked for the cup to pass (feelings) but he went on to Calvary (principle). We need to learn the meaning of living by principle in our own lives.

HOW TO

Key text:
Psalm 37:5, 6

The Greatest Need

by Morton M. Woolley, M.D.

OPINION

Key text:
Philippians 4:8

"Man's greatest desire is not a stress-free life, but a truly meaningful life."

"If you don't know where you are going, any road will get you there!"

"But Dad, you don't seem to understand. The majority of my friends are trying to get out of commitments. They're not really interested in making more commitments!"

The bright college sophomore felt assured that he had convincingly ended his discussion regarding commitment with this final observation:

"My friends see that commitment brings them stress, grief and anxiety. Who needs that?"

Patiently, the young man's father listened to his son's persuasive argument that noncommitment is the stress-free way to live. They then discussed commitment to family, church, school, friends and God.

Viktor Frankl, in his book *Man's Search for Meaning*, proposes that man's greatest desire and need is not a stress-free life, but a truly meaningful life. If his work and relationships are meaningful, life is a constant joy. God has created man with a brain which inevitably formulates the question, "What is life, what is life for, why am I here and what should I be doing about it?" Meaninglessness is the ultimate illness. Its sequelae are depression and death.

Frankl observed prisoners in Auschwitz who had everything taken away from them. They had no clothes, they were on a starvation diet and all their earthly possessions had been confiscated. However, some of these individuals survived because they realized that life is more than clothes, food and possessions. Stripped of all of life's usual support systems, these individuals maintained that life has meaning, which carried them through the devastation of concentration camp.

In his book *Adaptation to Life*, Harvard psychiatrist George E. Vaillant studied the characteristics of "successful" men. The most evident commitment which he found in these successful individuals was altruism. Meaningful altruism is basic to the Christian ethic, and a commitment to the welfare of others is the road to fellowship with God and man. Christians who are genuinely happy are committed to a cause which equals—or slightly exceeds—their ability.

1. The Introduction suggests that it was the surprise of healing that prompted Naaman to a faith commitment. Do you agree? Does God give everyone this kind of surprise?

2. Do you think that suffering is truly an inevitable component of the committed life? Doesn't God promise believers peace, joy and the abundant life? If everything is going well, does that mean you aren't truly committed?

3. Is it proper to serve God because we want to receive the benefits of the Christian life, or should our motives be entirely unselfish?

4. Does commitment increase or reduce stress?

5. Are the following in any way valid indicators of commitment to Christ:

- amount of time spent on entertainment
- amount of money spent on entertainment
- amount of money given to church
- number of hours spent in uncompensated labor for the church
- amount of time spent in personal devotions

6. Does commitment really bring meaning to life? If so, how?

Coming Next Quarter:

KNOWING GOD

1. Believing That He Is
Key Texts—Heb. 11:6; John 1:9; Job 38:28,29; John 5:39; 1 John 4:16
2. How God Is Known
Key Texts—1 Cor. 2:14; Rom. 1:20; 2 Peter 1:21; John 20:29
3. Naming God
4. The Voice of Nature
5. God's Ultimate Revelation
6. The Witness of the Spirit
7. Testimony in Stone
8. Symbols of Salvation
9. The Families of God
10. Temples for God's Spirit
11. Misconceptions about God
12. Known by God
13. A Saving Knowledge

This quarter's writers include E. E. Cleveland, Ron Halverson, Ward Hill, Benjamin Reaves and Morris Venden.

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