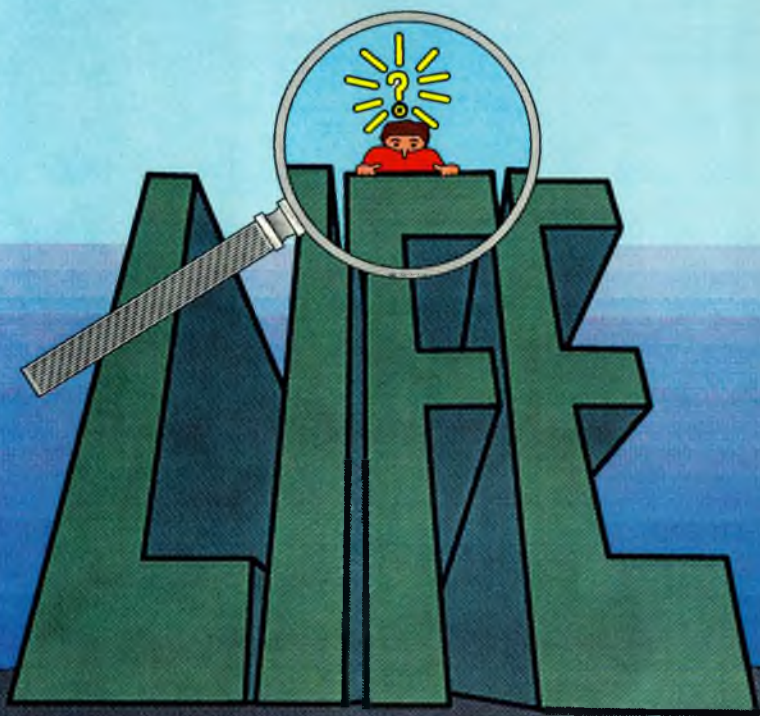


COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

General Conference Church Ministries Publication January-March 1990

Matthew: God With Us, God for Us

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MATTHEW

THE KING HAS COME



LEO R. VAN DOLSON

GALATIANS

THE BATTLE FOR FREEDOM



OWEN GANE

January-March, 1990
Vol. 13, No. 1

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**Department of
Church Ministries
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Seventh-day Adventists
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Place orders with Pacific
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Staff

Editorial Director: George E. Knowles
Editor: Graham Bingham
Managing Editor: Laurell Peterson
Editorial Secretary: Lynn Bratcher
Pacific Press Editor: Lincoln Steed
Marketing: Bob Gorton
Sales Office: Shirley Sayers
Publisher: Pacific Press,
Nampa, Idaho

Editorial Team

Graham Bingham, Chairman
Lynn Bratcher, Secretary
Charles Brooks
Karen Flowers
Richard Fredericks
Erwin Gane
Marsha Frost
Randal Wisbey

Reading Committee

Graham Bingham
Charles Brooks
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Frank Holbrook
David Jarnes
George E. Knowles
Israel Leito
Tim Poirier
Ted Wick
Randal Wisbey

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for Us
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CONTRIBUTOR PROFILE

LOMA LINDA UNIVERSITY—LA SIERRA CAMPUS, RIVERSIDE, CALIFORNIA

Lessons 1 - 3

Campus editor: Steven G. Daily

Contributors:

Steven G. Daily	Lyell V. Heise	David A. Pendleton
V. Bailey Gillespie	Rigo Gallegos	Kent Rogers
Shannon Gillespie	Paul Mallery	Juanita Singh
Madelynn Haldeman	Kenneth W. Morgan	Justin S. Singh
		Thomas Steineke

OAKWOOD COLLEGE, HUNTSVILLE, ALABAMA

Lessons 4, 5

Campus editor: Bernard Benn

Contributors:

Ellen Anderson	Morris A. Iheanacho	Philip Nixon
E. E. Cleveland	Lionel Martell	Sandra Frederick Price
Larry Hasse	James H. Melancon	Agniel Samson
		Mervyn A. Warren

SOUTHWESTERN ADVENTIST COLLEGE, KEENE, TEXAS

Lessons 6 - 8

Campus editor: Victor F. Brown

Contributors:

Ivan Bartolome	Shirley Hervig	Becky Parrish
Victor F. Brown	Glenda Jolliffe	Nora Peppers
Thomas G. Bunch	Ron Jolliffe	Michelle Presley
Werner Eluiud Gil	Sharon H. Leach	Angel Manuel Rodriguez
Lauretta Hailey	Jerry Mahn	W. Rob Sheppard
		Janice Yakush

ADVENTIST HEALTH SYSTEM WEST

Lessons 9, 10

Editor: Mark Newmyer

Contributors:

Diana M. Anderson	Frank Dupper	Michael Jackson
W. D. Blehm	Harald Giebel	Mark Newmyer
G. Edward Bryan	Richard A. Gingrich	Stephen Payne
Richard Caraboolad	George Alan Hein	Adrian Zytoskee

**WALLA WALLA COLLEGE,
COLLEGE PLACE, WASHINGTON**

Lessons 11 - 13

Campus editor: John C. Cress

Contributors:

Linda Abdel-Malek
Darold Bigger
Ernest Burse
Keith Canwell
Nancy Canwell
Ben Cawthra

John C. Cress
Henning Gulddammer
Holly Hurlbert
Daniel Kaempff
Tamma-lynn McDonald
Michele Molstead

Gary Tetz
Don Wessels
Cynthia Westerbeck
Teresa Wiedemann
James Williamson
Larry Witzel

THIS QUARTER'S ARTIST

Mark Bond, our artist for this quarter, just graduated in December with a B.S. degree in corporate communications from Southwestern Adventist College.

He is planning to continue in the field of graphic design in the Orlando area, his home for 14 years.

Mark has been doing layout, design, and typesetting at a print shop during his junior and senior years of college, and he feels that God has led him into the right field.

He has experimented with many art mediums but chose to use computerized art for this quarter's lessons. Through the mixture of words and pictures he has tried to convey the concepts behind each lesson.

Mark first got interested in the computer as a graphic tool during a semester internship with *Insight* magazine at the Review and Herald Publishing Association in 1988. Since then he has logged more than 2,000 hours on the Macintosh computer, using it for typesetting and other art forms.

Besides art, Mark's first love is music. He spends much time playing for Sabbath schools, churches, and camp meetings. In August 1989 he performed with Bob Martin and the group Empty Vessels at the Pathfinder Camporee in Pennsylvania.

Someday he hopes to own his own free-lance graphic design firm and to be active in a local church youth group.

GETTING THE MOST OUT OF THE COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

Facts You Should Know

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

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

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

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

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

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

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

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

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most "scholarly" article of the week.

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

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

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

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views are expressed that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions.

God With Us, God for Us

By Graham Bingham

Ordinary Susie meets Boy Knockout while standing in line at the college bookstore. She notices that he's witty, generous, popular, dashing. Her heart is aflutter, and she's at his command.

He asks her out and, for the next month or so, they're nearly always together on campus. Every day she wakes up finding it hard to believe that Boy Knockout has fallen for her.

Her idyllic dream begins cracking when a friend warns, "Don't get too attached. He has a history of sweeping girls off their feet and then leaving them when they don't meet his expectations."

On the next date Susie keeps looking for reassuring glances, listening for convincing words, hoping she measures up.

The fearful moment arrives. He meets another girl, and hope crumbles. He's kind and courteous to Susie, but still she knows. The special smile is gone. The hand-holding is only friendly, the voice matter-of-fact. In desperation Susie tries to win him back. Finally she senses it's no use and gives up in desolation.

Is God anything like Boy Knockout? No string of adjectives can adequately describe God. He's truly everything. He makes you feel special in times of close fellowship. But does time cause His love to wear thin? Can you be assured He will still love you when you're less than you'd like to be?

If you expect God to give you the brush-off when you fail or do wrong, you're probably afraid to put your faith in Him. But if you see Him as One who keeps loving no matter what, then you can feel free to rejoice in a relationship that will continue forever.

This quarter's lessons on the Book of Matthew will help you see that God never goes back on His promises. In his Gospel Matthew reveals that the things God had been doing throughout the Old Testament in the choice of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, David, etc., were related to and continue in the life and work of Jesus Christ. Matthew wants us to know that in Jesus, God is not only *with us* but *for us*.

God loved us before we were born. He demonstrated His love by sending Jesus to die for our sins. His love is therefore guaranteed, not only for this life but for all eternity.

I stood on a lonely hillside
And viewed the cross on which He had hung.
The words still echoed in my ear:
"It was for you that this was done.

For your sins, I paid the price.
My gift of life is free.
To you I give eternal life
If you will follow Me."

Lesson 1, December 31, 1989—January 6, 1990

Global Impact



“For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6, NIV).

Sunday, December 31

You Get What You Expect: A Personal Journey

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 1 and 2

I grew up facing an interesting contradiction. My parents reared me to believe that God is real. But they also reared me to believe that things in the world are the result of natural causes. Put the two together, and you encounter a unique paradox. I believed just as strongly that the miracles of the Bible took place, but I would doubt them if I saw them today.

To make matters worse, I also believed Satan was active in the world. As Larry Gelbart wrote in the movie *Oh, God*, "What about all that hou-ha with the devil a while ago from that movie [*The Exorcist*]? Nobody had any trouble believing that the devil took over and existed in a little girl. All she had to do is wet the rug and throw up some pea soup and everybody believed. The devil you could believe. But not God."

So why was I willing to believe that (a) God was active in Bible times, (b) Satan is active now, but (c) God is not active now? Is it just me, or do you sense a contradiction?

Unfortunately, I don't have the time or space to describe the events that brought me to a major

shift in my worldview. But, through a series of personal experiences with God and Satan, my worldview has changed. I now believe that God is active in today's world in a positive way.

For example, I once thought that God spoke only to the prophets and people in Bible times (and to Ellen White, of course). But about a year ago I decided that God probably speaks to us much more often than we realize. Since then, I have been looking for God to speak to me, and wonder of wonders, He does! Not with a booming voice of thunder, and not always when I want Him to, but when He wants to, through the still small voice of the Holy Spirit.

This week is the perfect chance to make a resolution about your worldview. Do you expect God to be active in your life? Or do you expect God to be distant? Do you expect answers when you pray, or do you expect silence (or worse yet, only the answers you want)?

Do you expect every event to have a natural cause, every sickness to run its course, and every insurmountable obstacle to bring your life to a halt?

Do you expect miracles? Christ's coming to the earth as a baby is a miracle that continues to change the worldview of those who believe in Him.

by Paul Mallery

Paul Mallery is a senior psychology major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Matthew—The Young Adventist's Guide to the Messiah

LOGOS

Theme: Worldviews—*What impact does our philosophy of life and world perspective have on our belief and ethical system?*

Why is Matthew placed first in the collection of New Testament stories about Jesus? He was not the first to write. I think Matthew comes first because he wrote to the Jewish mind, and that, after all, was the mind of the early Christian church.

Matthew feels the shame of national bondage to a foreign overlord. He knows the pain of being among God's chosen people, yet enslaved in his own land. Matthew had been seduced by that Roman overlord and served time as a puppet tax collector.

So when it comes to presenting the story of Jesus to the Jews—perhaps even cynical Jews, who are going to take some convincing about this Jesus of Nazareth, Matthew is equal to the task. He has soaked up the sense of longing and expectancy that saturates the later prophets of the Old Testament. The joyful story of Jesus the Messiah flows from his heart and pen like a song of victory.

Matthew understands Jewish respect and reverence for the Scriptures. He gives the Scriptures a place of honor in telling

his story. He understands the Jewish longing for a permanent kingdom to outshine the kingdoms of all hated oppressors. So his story of Jesus is the story of a kingdom, where Jesus is given the place of honor.

For all his macho tax-collecting bravado, he knows the universal appeal of a child. Unlike Mark and John, who introduce Jesus as a man, Matthew introduces Him as a tiny baby.

If Matthew were writing today, I think he would entitle his book "The Young Adventist's Guide to the Messiah."

Like the Jews of old, young Adventists have haunting dreams of the arrival of the Messiah. They have hoped for His coming for so long. They have been whipped to heights of fervor. They have sunk to lows of despair while waiting the fulfillment of those dreams. Their teachers and parents trained them intensively in doctrine and prophecy. Yet I wonder whether, while studying the word and searching for its meaning, they may have missed a meeting with THE WORD.

That's one thing you have to say for Matthew. His approach to his Bible (the Old Testament) seems to be this—"Tell me the story of JESUS."

Take a look at the first two chapters of Matthew. In the first 17 verses, he reminds us that

by Lyell V. Heise

Lyell V. Heise is senior pastor of the La Sierra Collegiate church, Riverside, California.

Jewish salvation history culminates in the birth of Jesus. Abraham and the patriarchs, David and the kings, are the ancestors of the true King—Jesus Christ.

With his Old Testament Bible open before him Matthew notes the following: Matthew 1:21—the baby has an Old Testament name—Joshua in Hebrew, Jesus in Greek, meaning “the LORD saves.”

Matthew 1:23—Isaiah’s prophecy of the virgin and child find fulfillment in the birth of Christ (Isa. 7:14).

Matthew 2:6—Micah’s hopes for Bethlehem are realized (Micah 5:2).

Matthew 2:15—Hosea’s lament over Israel, coming out of Egypt, is transposed into a prophetic word about Jesus.

Matthew 2:18—Jeremiah’s account of the wailing of the mothers as their children go into exile, is a forerunner of the pain of Bethlehem’s mothers when Herod slaughters their children (Jer. 31:15).

Matthew’s “Young Adventist’s Guide” tells us that the Bible focuses on Jesus. For young Adventists that has not always been obvious. Thank you, Matthew. Remind us again, as we await the Messiah’s return, that our Bible, both Old and New Testaments, focuses on Jesus. Save us, Matthew, from a worldview that sees certain danger in every international computer hookup, demons in every extreme right- or left-wing organization, and omens in every Wall Street wobble.

As a “Young Adventist’s Guide” Matthew puts Adventist

history and heritage into proper perspective. Our forefathers and pioneers led us toward Jesus. And when the archives have been plumbed to their depths, and the historical documents combed for their treasures, let it be known that today’s Adventists are inspired by their history, not enslaved by it. As Jesus said, “ ‘Abraham rejoiced at the thought of seeing my day’ ” (John 8:56, NIV). The best days are in the future, not in the past.

“The Young Adventist’s Guide to the Messiah” does today’s young Adventist great honor. It dignifies childhood and youth by recounting the childhood of Jesus. It reminds church leaders everywhere that they ignore the needs of children and youth at their own eternal peril. Jesus has forever sanctified the simple concerns of children, the questioning minds of youth, the energies and emotions of teenagers. What he has sanctified, let no one else belittle or ignore. And let every young Adventist be slow to sound the thoughtless phrase “God does not understand me and my needs!” Remember Jesus, as presented by Matthew, in “The Young Adventist’s Guide to the Messiah.”

Why do you think the Magi left everything behind to follow a star? (See Matthew 2:1-12.) What kind of world view does their action suggest they possessed?

If your father came to you and said that he had seen a new star and was going to follow it, what would you think?

How are you like the Magi? Unlike them? How have you searched for Jesus? What did you find?

Tuesday, January 2

A Different Worldview in the Adventist Pew

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 1:18

I am not one unrealistically to glorify our Adventist pioneers or automatically assume that they were better people than we are today. But neither do I believe that the founders of the Advent movement were unsophisticated, naive, and superstitious individuals who were spiritually immature compared with contemporary Adventists. Many Adventist "intellectuals" are embarrassed by what appears to be extreme and fanatical charismatic excesses in our early Adventist history. The strong emphasis on faith healing, prophetic utterances, physical manifestations of the Holy Spirit, and visionary experiences contrast markedly with Adventist worship today. It is easy for us to look back at our pioneers as having an ignorant and unhealthy dependence on the miraculous, which we have thankfully outgrown.

In the past century a similar embarrassment was felt by many Christian thinkers who concluded that the Incarnation and Resurrection cannot be taken seriously. "Pregnant by the Holy Spirit" is not an easy concept to defend for people who take pride in intellectual sophistication. Yet this is the story that Matthew would have

us believe in the first two chapters of his Gospel. The question is, As Adventists can we believe this story with its supernatural worldview and still deny the incarnational work that the Holy Spirit desires to do in our lives in these last days (see Joel 2:28, 29)? Ellen White's reflections on this subject may be helpful in answering such a question.

"As the 'former rain' was given, in the outpouring of the Holy Spirit at the opening of the gospel, to cause the upspringing of the precious seed, so the 'latter rain' will be given at its close, for the ripening of the harvest. . . . 'Be glad then, ye children of Zion, and rejoice in the Lord your God: for he hath given you the former rain moderately, and he will cause to come down for you the rain, the former rain, and the latter rain.' Joel 2:23. 'In the last days, saith God, I will pour out of my Spirit upon all flesh.' 'And it shall come to pass, that whosoever shall call on the name of the Lord shall be saved.' Acts 2:17, 21."*

REACT

How does the work of the Holy Spirit in the Adventist Church today compare to the Spirit's work in early Adventism and the New Testament church?

**The Great Controversy*, p. 611.

by Steven G. Daily

Steven G. Daily is the pastor of the New Life church, and chaplain at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Wednesday, January 3

Peace Child*

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Isaiah 9:6

Missionary Don Richardson, in his compelling book *Peace Child*, tells of the laborious and dangerous process by which he finally discovered “analogies of redemption” hidden deep within the culture of the Sawi tribe of Western New Guinea.

The Sawi were a tribe who idealized violence and treachery. In trying to tell them the story of Jesus, Don found their only vigorous response came when he told the story of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus. And the horrifying fact was that Judas seemed to the Sawi to be the hero—a super Sawi!

Warfare and fighting were central to Sawi life. Don came within a hair’s breadth of giving up his mission to the Sawi. But they promised to make peace if he would stay with them. He witnessed the peacemaking, and in the process found the key to their hearts and to their eternal salvation.

He discovered that there was only one transaction that could break the cycle of treachery and violence. If a man would give the child of his own body to one of his enemies, then that man could be trusted. To that man would be given the authority to preserve the peace, in the name of the child he had surrendered to his erstwhile enemies.

Don watched the heartbreak of fathers and mothers, as they gave up their sons to enemy warriors. He watched the fearful faces of the tribesmen as they placed their hands on the head of the tiny baby, pledging to claim and to keep the peace that the child had bought. It was a fragile peace at best. Although the villages would do all in their power to preserve the life of the child, infant mortality rates were high, and babies died with alarming regularity.

But armed with this fabulous insight into the inner world of the Sawi, Don brought them the news of a great God in heaven who wanted peace with the world he had made—a world in rebellion. This God knew, like the Sawi, that there could be no peace without the Peace Child. He searched the world for a suitable child, but found none except His own precious Son. The people were so ungrateful that they killed the precious Peace Child, an act of unspeakable shame for a Sawi. But the wonderful news is that the Peace Child returned to life. Now He lives eternally. Sawi mothers can keep their babies close to their breasts. Jesus Christ, the eternal Peace Child, guarantees our peace with one another and with the great God.

This Peace Child is the child of Matthew’s Gospel, the Prince of Peace of Isaiah, and the joy and salvation of the Sawi in New Guinea.

*Don Richardson, *Peace Child* (Glendale, Calif.: Regal Books, 1974).

by **Lyell V. Heise**

Lyell V. Heise is the senior pastor of the La Sierra Collegiate church, Riverside, California.

Thursday, January 4

The Birth of the Christian Worldview

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 1 and 2

The subject of this week's lesson, worldview, is a term often heard tossed around in classes on anthropology or world religions. It refers to one's orientation to the world, one's conception of the nature of ultimate reality, and the system of beliefs around which one orders one's life. The scripture for this week is Matthew 1 and 2. Why these two chapters? The answer is that we to a great extent derive our worldview from an understanding of our origin. Hence, if we are to discuss a Christian worldview, the story of the birth of Jesus Christ is an excellent place to begin.

In these two chapters we have Matthew's argument for belief in Jesus' Messianic status. He attempts to convince the reader of this by arguing that Jesus' birth is a fulfillment of prophecy. He reports that Jesus' genealogy goes back to King David; that Jesus was born of a virgin, in accordance with the prophecy of Isaiah; that there were Wise Men from the East, who were aware of the prophecy of the Messiah and who were themselves searching for Jesus; that King Herod's killing of male infants in Bethlehem was a fulfillment of the prophecy of Jeremiah; and that Jesus' adolescence in Nazareth was also a fulfillment of prophecy.

Once one accepts Matthew's proposition that Jesus' birth is the fulfillment of prophecy, and that Jesus is in fact the Messiah, it then becomes imperative to determine what the Messiah was to accomplish. Simply put, it was to "save his people from their sins" (Matt. 1:21). This is the foundation of a Christian's worldview—God's salvation is for *all* people. But there is more:

1. **Faith.** The Christian worldview consists of faith—faith as (1) trust in God and (2) beliefs about God. Relying on past experience, the Christian trusts that God will keep His word and fulfill His promises. God kept His promise to Mary: she gave birth to Immanuel just as He said she would. At the same time, by keeping His promise to Mary, God kept His promise to all of humanity. Because we can trust God to keep His promises, we can also believe what He says about Himself.

2. **Loyalty.** The Christian worldview entails loyalty and obedience to God. His directives are not arbitrary. God in His infinite wisdom sees the future, with its innumerable possibilities, and He knows what is best for us. Joseph was loyal and obedient to God, and benefited greatly by carrying out God's commands. Despite personal reservations, he married Mary and reaped the benefit of being Jesus' stepfather. And by obeying God's instructions to flee to Egypt, he saved the lives of his entire family.

by David A. Pendleton

David A. Pendleton is a history and political science major and student body president at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Friday, January 5

Incarnational Living

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 1:18

“Pregnant by the Holy Spirit? Right!” was the general reaction of the students in a reenactment of the incarnation of Christ during a student church service last December. Our version was a bit different, since it was set in modern times and Mary and Joseph attended Loma Linda University. We tried to depict the attitude of the university toward a girl who claimed to be pregnant by the Holy Spirit. The students were very unsympathetic to Mary and moved to have her expelled when national papers published headlines like, “Pregnant Teen Claims Spirit Did It: God Declines Comment.”

I often wonder what our reaction would be if the Incarnation were to occur in our time. Would our reaction be any different from that displayed by the Jews 2,000 years ago? This week’s study covers the birth of Christ and sheds light on “Incarnational Living,” or “Living the Spirit-filled Life.” Since the Seventh-day Adventist Church is a conservative denomination, we are often skeptical of anything supernatural. Many of us try to explain such events away through science or simply dismiss them as the work of Satan, often quoting verses like “Satan himself is transformed into an angel of light.” Too often a slow, progressive recovery from an illness is considered

God’s work, while quick, miraculous healings by professed miracle workers are considered Satan’s. It is true that many of the extraordinary events we observe are inspired by Satan. The New Age movement, advocating secular humanism and spiritualism, is strong. Many other movements that have a satanic nature are popular in modern society. Yet to claim that every supernatural or miraculous event is inspired by Satan is denying God’s power in the world. It’s dangerous to be so skeptical.

Actually, it is quite ironic that faith built upon belief in a divine God and the supernatural birth of His son is so resistant to acknowledge His power in the world. Not only is it ironic but dangerous. The Adventist Church looks forward to the outpouring of the latter rain preceding Christ’s second coming. With skepticism many will regard the latter rain as simply the work of Satan and not recognize it as a demonstration of God’s power.

Examining the results of an event, or a ministry, is the only safe way to determine whether it is inspired by God or by Satan. Christ states that we will be able to tell the difference between His followers and Satan’s “by their fruits.”

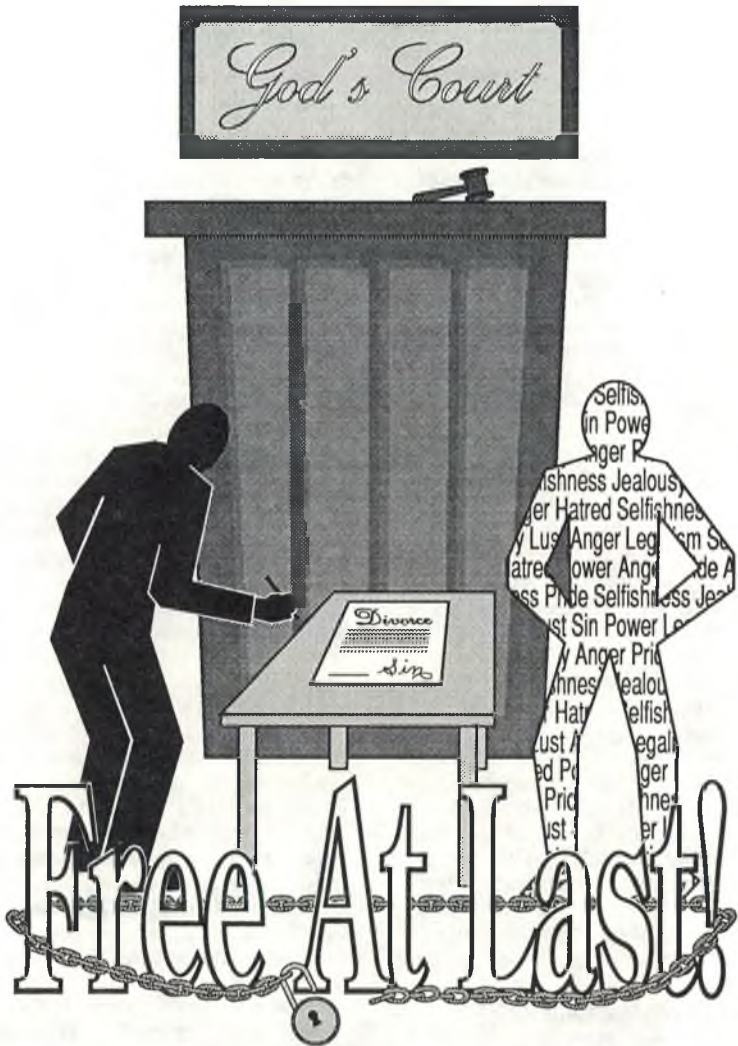
When we have a knowledge of the Bible and a vital relationship with Christ, we will be able to distinguish what is of Satan and what is of God.

by Thomas Steineke

Thomas Steineke is a psychobiology major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 2, January 7 - 13

Free at Last



“ ‘I baptize you with water for repentance. But after me will come one who is more powerful than I, whose sandals I am not fit to carry. He will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire’ ” (Matthew 3:11, NIV).

Sunday, January 7

Freedom Always Has Its Limits

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 3

Do we ever think of what freedom means and how it affects our lives? Being free means we can drive what we like where we like; it means that we may read anything we wish and write whatever publishers will print. It means never fearing for our lives at the hands of the government, and it means we may worship however we choose. Freedom means that we are able to believe anything and become anything we choose.

But we are not completely free in every respect. We each have boundaries around our lives that guide our freedom and help mold our decisions. Those limitations come in many different shapes and sizes: Parents, money, education, and affections. We are limited by the laws of the communities in which we live, by the laws of the State, and, on a larger scale, we are restricted by the laws of the country to which we pledge allegiance. We are also held in check by the boundaries of our religion and our own personal values. But, however binding these sorts of limitation are, we still consider ourselves lucky because of the freedom we possess. So freedom is really the privilege of making choices within certain boundaries.

John the Baptist, the focus of this week's lesson, was born with certain boundaries, some the

same as our own. He was limited by his father's position and his family's religion. The situation surrounding his birth created restrictions because of the expectations of others. John was also called by God to prepare the way for Christ—thus his freedom was restricted by the direction his life would take to fulfill that purpose.

We also have restrictions within our boundaries of freedom. The Bible stipulates limitations on what to believe, how to conduct our lives, and how to build and maintain relationships with others. There are guidelines for marriage, divorce, family life, and restrictions on love and obedience. These limitations are for our own good, but we still have the freedom to accept or reject them. When we choose to allow God into our lives we take on a higher calling with limitations of its own. But these restrictions provide a path that will lead to heaven.

There is a song that explains the life of Christian freedom: "I'm but a stranger here, Heaven is my home. Earth is a desert drear, Heaven is my home. Danger and sorrow stand round me on every hand. Heaven is my fatherland. Heaven is my home." We, like John, have responded to God's call and are shown the way to heaven. We have our freedom to choose God's way or someone else's way. Like John, we should choose the way Christ walked. In Him we are free. He is our freedom.

by Shannon Gillespie

Shannon Gillespie is an English major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

The Peacefulness of Freedom

LOGOS

Theme: Freedom—*Making your own decisions and exploring various options for yourself are signs of maturity in young adulthood. But freedom is a tricky topic. We are free to do, to be, and to become, not free to ignore, to violate, or to exploit others.*

1. The Preaching of John the Baptist (read Matthew 3:1-6)

“The voice of one crying in the wilderness: Prepare the way of the Lord, make his paths straight” (Matt. 3:3, RSV).

John the Baptist offered the world something it needed: repentance and forgiveness. These are essential elements in peacefulness—for one does not have inner peace unless such assurance is experienced firsthand. The same is true with freedom. It is experienced only when there is a sense in which we feel free to choose and make our own decisions. John’s call to the people in the wilderness provided just such a personal gift.

John did not offer kingship or honor. These were the things ordinary kings could provide. Fore-runners of dignitaries often promised personal favors to those who pledged support for the authorities. But the kingship announced by the bearded, locust-eating, leather-girdled man shouting in the desert was one of inner satisfaction. John proclaimed, “Get rid of your sins, cast off that

which binds you—get free!” And freedom was personal in this case. A Saviour was coming who would personify freedom at the deepest level. Freedom from sin, freedom from nagging guilt, freedom from the binding power of plans gone wrong and promises unfulfilled. The freedom offered by John the Baptist through God’s Son was freedom to be oneself, to act for others, and to move beyond the binding strangulation of selfcondemnation.

Baptism was the sign and the seal of this freedom, demonstrating to others that the freedom Jesus provided was accepted and acknowledged. Joining in a death to come, burying one’s sins in the depths of the sea, going under the water to rise in new life were all representations of the free life John offered people.

If you could cast any of your friends or family in the role of John the Baptist, whom would you select? Why?

2. The Message of John the Baptist

“Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees; every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire” (Matt. 3:10, RSV).

Beginning to act as though you are free is proof that you have been released from bondage. John was a stern realist when it came to understanding right and wrong. The freedom he pro-

by V. Bailey Gillespie

V. Bailey Gillespie is professor of theology and Christian personality, and chairman of the church and ministry department at Loma Linda University’s school of religion, Riverside, California.

claimed was modeled in the life of Jesus—the One to come. We argue about the various shades of guilt; and the complexities of our lives often confuse the issues we try to solve. John saw clearly that there is a significant difference between right and wrong. He insisted that men must live on the right side of those choices. Freedom to be yourself always means freedom to be responsible to those things that are morally true, authoritatively revealed, and Christlike.

What was John the Baptist like? How do you feel about him and the role he performed? Who did the people of his day think he was (see also 2 Kings 1:8)? What does it mean to “repent”?

3. The Response to John the Baptist

“I baptize you with water for repentance, but he who is coming after me is mightier than I, whose sandals I am not worthy to carry; he will baptize you with the Holy Spirit and with fire” (Matt. 3:11, RSV).

When one has experienced the filling of the presence of God through the indwelling of the

Holy Spirit, then one feels a new sense of motivation and purpose. This is another sense in which freedom is experienced. John must have been excited and personally exhilarated at the prospect of announcing the coming of the Saviour of the world. That is why he uses such explosive language. God baptizes not with mere water, but with fire. God consumes sin. He casts it away. The sinner is finally free—at last. Fire refines and purifies. The ancient refiner kept the silver in the crucible and the flame burning until all base materials came to the top and could be skimmed off. Then, when all agitation and movement had ceased, and when he could see his face reflected in the silver as if in a mirror, the silver was considered refined. That is just like the refining fire of baptism in Christ. Baptism in Christ grants access to new life. That life frees us to become new persons and gives inner peace because the guilt of sin is removed.

What people have been like John the Baptist in your life? How did they prepare you to meet Jesus? In whose lives have you played the role of a John the Baptist?

Freedom and the Fallen Mind

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 3:11

Matthew 3 introduces the message of John the Baptist, which condemned sin, called for repentance, and proclaimed new freedom through the promised Messiah. The powerful religious and political establishment of that day had no time for such a message. Their distorted perceptions of truth caused them to reject both John and Jesus.

Even the Baptist himself had preconceived ideas about the Messiahship of Christ that prevented him from understanding the kind of freedom Jesus offered. But he was perceptive enough to recognize that Jesus was not a man like himself. John said that Jesus would baptize with "fire and the Holy Spirit." Maybe there is confusion in Adventism today about how we are to express Christian freedom behaviorally because we put so little emphasis on the "baptism of the Holy Spirit." We have forgotten that "spiritual things are spiritually discerned" and this is particularly true of the freedom that comes through Christ. Ellen White says:

"The light of the glory of God must fall upon us. We need the holy unction from on high. However intelligent, however learned a man may be, he is not qualified to teach unless he has a firm hold on the God of Israel. He who is connected with Heaven

will do the works of Christ. By faith in God he will have power to move upon humanity. He will seek for the lost sheep of the house of Israel. If divine power does not combine with human effort, I would not give a straw for all that the greatest man could do. The Holy Spirit is wanting in our work. . . .

"What we need is the baptism of the Holy Spirit. Without this, we are no more fitted to go forth to the world than were the disciples after the crucifixion of their Lord. Jesus knew their destitution, and told them to tarry in Jerusalem until they should be endowed with power from on high. Every teacher must be a learner, that his eyes may be anointed to see the evidences of the advancing truth of God. The beams of the Sun of Righteousness must shine into his own heart if he would impart light to others.

"No one is able to explain the Scriptures without the aid of the Holy Spirit. But when you take up the Word of God with a humble, teachable heart, the angels of God will be by your side to impress you with evidences of the truth."*

REACT

1. To what degree should the church dictate specific standards as opposed to letting the Holy Spirit convict us?

2. Should God's people be seeking the "baptism of the Holy spirit" (Acts 8)?

*Selected Messages, book1, p. 411.

Steven G. Daily is the pastor of the New Life Church, and chaplain at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Wednesday, January 10

A Sense of Freedom

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 3:16, 17

Love, real love, if it is to be wholesome and complete, has to be freely given. The coming of Christ to this world demonstrates such love. John the Baptist proclaimed it, and God acknowledged it with His famous inauguration statement, "This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased."

During the sacrificial services of the Old Testament, especially during the periods of the first and second Temples in Jerusalem, young adolescents were required to examine the concept of God as love in a personal way as they were brought to the Temple for the first time. It must have been a traumatic experience to watch and participate in the slaughter of the "best" animal, one that may have been cared for and nurtured by the adolescent. When young people saw the lamb bleed to death before their eyes, I am sure some doubts about God's love entered their young minds. How could a God permit such sacrifice, so senseless, so savage? But with introspection, perhaps they could see the basis of God's character. If the Temple sacrifice did indeed represent salvation from sin, then sin must be a terrible thing. So terrible that it required the shedding of blood. God in love gave people the possibility of misunderstanding the sacrificial system of the Old Testament in order to

risk communicating freedom from sin.

People must come to their own conclusions about how bad sin is. I would imagine that often this seemingly cruel activity was dramatically instructive in an understanding of the sin problem. Many an early adolescent learned for himself how bad sin was when he had to participate in the death of a lamb. He just may have left this service with a new understanding of himself and a new appreciation of God. Or, on the other hand, he may have hated God for what seemed to him such a vicious act. God risked misunderstanding for the sake of love. Freedom was more important than coercion and knee-jerk response. Obedience would follow freely if love could be seen as the basic force that motivated obedience.

Freedom to choose for right or wrong is at the foundation of faith. A belief or trust would be unnecessary if there were no personal choices. There would be no weighing, shifting, or testing function—the dynamic process that provides growth and experience in religious life. And there would be no freedom to choose love. Love demands freedom.

REACT

How do you think John the Baptist felt when he learned later that Jesus came into the world not to judge sin in His generation, but rather to save the sinner?

by V. Bailey Gillespie

V. Bailey Gillespie is professor of theology and Christian personality, and chairman of the church and ministry department at Loma Linda University's school of religion, Riverside, California.

Pointing to Jesus

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 3:7-10

To many, John the Baptist was an unusual man who lived in the desert, wore camel's-hair clothing, and ate interesting things like locust pods and wild honey. But he was much more than that. He proclaimed the basic message of the gospel of Jesus Christ. He showed people the way to God.

As John preached the gospel, there were four main reactions and responses. The first response was one of not listening to what was said. This was the response of the Pharisees. They considered themselves righteous, so when anything new came along that threatened their belief system they were automatically against it. This placed them in the worst of spiritual conditions, because it closed their minds to the workings of the Holy Spirit.

The second reaction came from those who listened to what was said, but refused to respond to what was presented. They just followed the crowd.

The third group responded to what was said, but would not make a full commitment to it. They listened with open minds, and even accepted what was said, but they were so occupied with personal concerns that they re-

fused to change their lifestyle.

The fourth group comprised those who listened, accepted, and acted on what they heard. They were willing to follow the Baptist's example. He believed what God told him, and acted on his beliefs by preaching to all who would listen.

The heart of the gospel is coming to know Jesus Christ. This involves four steps:

1. Admit. The Pharisees were not able to admit that they were sinners. But a person must admit that he/she is a sinner before God can save him/her.

2. Submit. A person has to be willing to submit himself to doing the will of God. When you do this you will then begin to think of others before yourself and to put God's plans before your own.

3. Commit. Surrendering one's life to God involves commitment. This commitment is symbolized in baptism.

4. Transmit. The person who commits his life to Christ will want others to know what he has found and will be eager and proud to tell all who are willing to listen.

REACT

If an individual or a group feel they have God's special favor more than do others, which of the above steps have they failed to take?

by Kent Rogers

Kent Rogers is a student at the school of religion, Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Friday, January 12

Freedom From Words

OPINION

Key Text: Galatians 3:23-29

There is a story that almost every student in general psychology gets to read. Used as a situation-ethics problem, it helps to highlight some questions we need to ask. The story is about a young man whose wife becomes ill—ill to the point of death. The young man does as much as he can for his wife, but her health steadily declines. Then he hears of a medicine available from a certain pharmacist not far away. He goes to the pharmacist to see how much the medicine will cost. He is told that it costs \$12,000. Since he does not have that much money he tries to collect funds from different sources and scrapes together \$10,000. He goes back to the pharmacist with the money, but the pharmacist wants \$12,000 and no less. The young man is left with two options: (1) He can allow his wife to die, or (2) somehow steal the medicine. Which would you do?

As a Christian, one has to think about the choice he or she would make in a similar situation. Should a person break one of the Ten Commandments by stealing the medicine or should you allow your wife, husband, or friend to die. It is not an easy decision.

As I read Matthew 3, I stopped to think about what it meant to be baptized with the Holy Spirit. How does it affect a person's life—ideas,

values, actions? What should a Christian do when he is confronted with a situation similar to our story? I was reminded of a passage I studied in Bible class. "But before faith came, we were kept in custody under the law, being shut up to the faith which was later to be revealed. Therefore the Law has become our tutor to lead us to Christ, that we may be justified by faith. But now that faith has come, we are no longer under a tutor. For you are all sons of God through faith in Christ Jesus. For all of you who were baptized into Christ have clothed yourselves with Christ. There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for you are all one in Christ Jesus. And if you belong to Christ, then you are Abraham's offspring, heirs according to promise" (Gal. 3:23-29, NASB).

Christ spoke about the heart of the law when He said, "You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your mind" and "You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:37, 39, NASB). With this in mind, how would you answer the following REACT questions.

REACT

1. What would you do in the above situation? What do you think Christ would have done? Are there really only two options?

2. Is Paul saying in Galatians that the law is no longer valid?

by Rigo Gallegos

Rigo Gallegos is an anthropology major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 3, January 14 - 20
Melting Point

?!?!?



“It is written: “Man does not live by bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God” ’”
(Matthew 4:4, NIV).

Sunday, January 14

Divine Majority

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 4

On two images from the concept of democracy—*majority and individual choice*—lie the secret of all human victories against the forces of evil. The majority! What power it has over individual choices! At one time or another our logic accepts the argument “Everybody does it,” especially when we want to brush aside a nagging fear, a persistent warning from within, or a conviction; or when we lack the courage to stand alone.

But somehow this majority logic makes us feel alone and defeated in quiet moments of truth. It cheats us of our identity, power, and jubilation. Yet there is another majority, if you want the security of large numbers—the hosts of heaven and unfallen worlds. This majority puts no pressure on us, in that it is not visible to the eye and it speaks to us only through the still small voice of conscience. Besides, it is in our power to silence this voice and sear the conscience. But this unseen majority empowers us and supports us to win the battle within, the battle of choice. Our self-worth increases with each decision for God, for that decision is truly an independent, individual, free choice.

Elisha’s servant saw a mere fraction of the host of heaven (2 Kings 6:17) and was convinced of the reality that “those who are

with us are more than those who are with them’ ” (verse 16, NIV). John the beloved puts it another way, “The one who is in you is greater than the one who is in the world” (1 John 4:4, NIV). It says to me that the Holy Spirit within us represents the heavenly majority—that greater number, mightier in power than all the human forces combined with the powers of darkness. Paul exclaims, “If God is for us, who can be against us?” (Rom. 8:31, NIV).

Alone, in the wilderness of temptation, without the visible presence of heaven, Jesus showed us how to trust in that invisible majority and conquer. Next time you are tempted to say, “Everybody does it,” remember, it’s a myth. When we cross the party line alone and join Christ, we make an independent free choice and align ourselves with the divine majority. Emily Dickinson speaks of this choice as one that decisively closes the door to temptation:

The Soul selects her own Society—
Then—shuts the Door—
To her divine Majority—
Present no more—
Unmoved—she notes the
Chariots—pausing—
At her low Gate—
Unmoved—an Emperor be
kneeling
Upon her Mat—
I’ve known her—from an ample
nation—
Choose One—
Then—close the Valves of her
attention—
Like Stone—

by Juanita Singh

Juanita Singh is a graduate student in the department of curriculum and instruction at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Monday, January 15

Trusting God

LOGOS

**Theme: Secularism/
Humanism**—*How do we stand firm in light of pressing social forces that seem to tear down the fabric of our spiritual and religious life?*

1. Bread (read Matthew 4:1-4)

Bread keeps your body alive, but it doesn't necessarily keep your mind and spirit healthy. The big question concerns itself with the spiritual and mental food. The answer is found in Jesus' words " "but on every word that comes from the mouth of God." " "

Now precisely what does that suggest? One must read at least five chapters of the Bible every day? Probably not. In the first century the Word of God was not readily available to all people. Furthermore, most people were illiterate and could not read the Hebrew Scriptures, even if they had been available. So the question is indeed pertinent.

But if it doesn't just mean daily reading of the Scriptures, what does it mean? What was available of the Christian message that people could always keep in their minds since they did not have Bibles on their night tables to which they could refer?

Since the cross is the center of the Christian teaching, it must inform us of God's message to the world. The New Testament helps us understand what the message

of the cross is all about. For example, John 3:16 insists that God loves the world and the cross proves that love.

Luke 15 teaches us about God's acceptance of repentant individuals. We can come just as we are and begin the process of becoming Christlike. His unconditional love affirms our value and worth, information that is as important to our emotional and psychological health as bread is to our physical health.

In fact, our spirit, or attitude, about ourselves in a large part determines how healthy our bodies will be. We can understand, then, why Jesus makes the statement that "man does not live by bread alone."

2. Jesus Hungered

What was Satan really suggesting to Jesus when he tempted Him to turn stones into bread? If you are hungry, eat. And Jesus was indeed hungry. But Jesus resisted the temptation and insisted that there is more to life than satisfying the stomach. The stomach must be satisfied, but apparently not at the expense of sacrificing the more important food for the spirit.

But we still don't know what Jesus means by His answer. The words "If you are God's son" provide the clue. God did not command that the stones be turned into bread so that Christ could eat. Apparently, since God had planned for Christ to be in this particular place at this time, God

by Madelynn Haldeman

Madelynn Haldeman is a professor in the school of religion at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

must also have had plans for His nourishment. What Satan is suggesting to Christ is that God is obviously a bad guy; He doesn't love You, nor does He care what happens to You.

Satan was subtly suggesting that Christ was dispensable in God's sight and was not of any value. Jewish sons were considered of great value in Judaism. No Jewish father would allow his son to go hungry, particularly when the father had the means to provide food. How much greater the slur on the character of God, who is credited with loving sinner and saint alike, since He appears not to care at all for His *own* Son.

Christ did not feel moved to prove that He was God's Son by performing a miracle. But He did feel it necessary to declare His faith in the God of heaven. And that statement of faith declared that man does not live by bread alone. He was really saying that, no matter what He might look like after His 40-day fast, He knew He was valuable to God, and that His Father would provide for Him at the right time.

3. Faith

In what way could this temptation possibly be applicable to me and you today? Since we cannot turn stones into bread, we need to search out how this temptation can come to us. First, no one will probably be led into the wilderness to fast for 40 days and then endure Satan's personal temptations. Second, this temptation, with its focus on trusting God, comes to us in very subtle ways.

For example, let us look at something that appears relatively insignificant to most of us—our vocabulary or speech. I am not referring to the usual "slang" or "swear" words that our mothers and fathers remind us to shun. No. Actually, something far more profound or noteworthy than that.

This is not to imply that one ought not to be careful in such matters.

But let us look at the issue in this way: When you told God that you believed in Him and in what Jesus did for you on the cross, your pastor probably baptized you. Part of the meaning of that baptism was symbolically to remove you from the powers that rule the world and to transfer you into God's "household." In other words, the rite of baptism holds tremendous symbolism.

The New Testament teaches us that we all leave the "old life" dominated by demonic spirits and enter the "new life" under the control of our new Master and Lord. Baptism symbolizes this experience. But faith is what makes the symbol a reality.

When we are transferred into God's household we are given new citizenship papers and new names. We are told that each of us is now a new creation. Our new names include such descriptive words as saints, sons and daughters, elect, chosen. But the truly sad part in all of this is that we really don't believe these things that God says about us. Now we are getting down to the issue of trusting, or believing, God, aren't we?

You are all familiar with the words and expressions that you daily use in describing yourself or the way in which you do certain things. Perhaps you are asking just what does faith, or trusting God, have to do with my vocabulary or speech? Actually, everything. Let's look at it this way. In our everyday speaking, we are so prone to put ourselves down. Phrases such as I won't amount to much, I'm such a klutz, I'm really stupid, I can never do anything right, I'm always bad, everyone hates me, and I know I won't make it are probably all too familiar to you. We even have the

nasty habit of using expressions that amount to judgments about other people's standing before God, as well.

We all need to know that faith is exercised or expressed when we speak. We are conditioned to think that it has to do only with what we do. But faith, or believing in what God says, particularly about us, means that we insist on saying good and positive things about ourselves and others as though these things were accomplished facts.

You see, your words express belief in God's words. God says you are of great value and worth. He died for the right to say it boldly. And yet you and I keep on insisting in our daily expressions that we are worthless and of no value. I wonder how we dare express such a low point of view about ourselves when God considers us indispensable to His kingdom.

The New Testament teaches us, "According to your faith be it unto you," and be assured that every time we insist on making a statement about ourselves, either negative or positive, that expression of faith is fulfilled. If your words reflect what God thinks of you, what He has declared you to be, be assured that God will bring to pass precisely what He has promised. However, if you insist on using the language of the old life and of the old master, be assured that this faith is also rewarded, and you will stay or be exactly what you are expressing in words.

We must be positive in our outlook, in our speech, in the evaluation of ourselves and others, and about the events and circumstances of our lives. Faith is established in this way, and you will discover that the so-called "biggies" in life aren't so big after all when you truly believe that God is for you and not against you.

REACT

1. Divide into small groups of three or four and discuss with one another what would be the top three temptations on the following list:

- Chocolate: All you can eat
- Classy car: Fastest car in town
- Body: Perfect 10
- Rest: Six months off to do anything or nothing
- Date: Miss World/Mr. Universe
- Vacation: Six weeks in a tropical paradise
- Money: \$1 million dollars
- Fame: The lead singer of a world-famous rock group

2. If an agent from a foreign power wanted you to turn over state secrets, how might he or she attract your attention and get you to listen?

3. What is the human need at the heart of each of the three temptations Jesus faced? How do you see these needs manifested in your life? How does Satan use these to tempt you?

Tuesday, January 16

The Last Temptation of Christ

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Revelation 14:12

This week we focus on the temptations that were presented to Christ in the wilderness. In every case the devil attempted to lure Jesus into declaring His independence from His Father. He tempted Christ to act on His own, through His own power, for His own purposes. The last temptation of Christ was not a fantasied fling with Mary Magdalene, but to choose this world and its power in place of God and the power of the Holy Spirit. According to Ellen White this will also be the last temptation for the followers of Christ.

“The Son of God was assaulted at every step by the powers of darkness. After His baptism He was driven of the Spirit into the wilderness, and suffered temptation for forty days. . . .

“He withstood the temptation, through the power that man may command. He laid hold on the throne of God, and there is not a

man or woman who may not have access to the same help through faith in God. Man may become a partaker of the divine nature; not a soul lives who may not summon the aid of Heaven in temptation and trial. Christ came to reveal the source of His power, that man might never rely on his unaided human capabilities.

“He who had been expelled from heaven fought desperately for the mastery over the One of whom in the courts above he had been jealous. What a battle was this! No language is adequate to describe it. But in the near future it will be understood by those who have overcome by the blood of the Lamb and the word of their testimony.”*

REACT

1. What temptations in life cause you to act independently from Christ and the Holy Spirit? Why these particular temptations?

2. To what do you think Ellen White is referring when she speaks of a great revival of primitive godliness at the end of time—led by Adventist youth?

*The SDA Bible Commentary, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1082.

by Steven G. Daily

Steven G. Daily is the pastor of the New Life church, and chaplain at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Wednesday, January 17

“Christ Conquers”

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 4:1-11

The First Temptation

To understand the temptations of Christ, we must examine the background of the cosmic struggle between the “light of the world” and the “power of darkness.” The baptism of Jesus recorded in Matthew affords us the proper context in which to start looking for clues. For example, the voice of God is heard publicly rather than privately. Notice the change of the word “Thou” in the Gospel of Mark to the word “This” in Matthew, in the phrase “This is my beloved Son.” Satan challenges this public declaration, recognizing in the words that God has inaugurated Christ’s personal ministry. Satan, therefore, directs his first temptation to these words of God in order to test their validity and to discover their precise meaning. Thus, in the first temptation, Satan infers that his understanding of the “son” indicates a worker of miracles. Although Christ will work many miracles throughout His ministry, He will never perform one to benefit Himself. His power will always be exercised for others. But Christ sees through the sophistry of Satan and replies that trusting God is the bottom line for the Son of God.

Second Temptation

Satan uses Christ’s insightful answer to the first temptation as the point or focus of the second

temptation. He seems to ask Christ: Are You really serious in this matter of trusting God? If so, then why don’t You carry through with such tenacious trust in God’s Word? And with the words of Scripture, Satan now tempts Christ to tempt God. A clever trap of Satan’s. But as in the first temptation, Christ resisted because the Son of God is obedient to the will of the Father. God has not commanded Christ to climb the pinnacle of the Temple. Therefore, why jump?

Third Temptation

The devil, being confused by the obedient Son of God and His perfect trust in the Father, tries one last temptation that is calculated to destroy Christ. Cosmic rule will be Christ’s if He will worship Satan, who can grant Him rule over all earthly kingdoms.

This temptation was indeed subtle. By giving obedience to Satan, Jesus could rule over the kingdoms of this world. And just think of all the tragedy that He could avert by taking over the kingdoms of this world. There would have been no Nero, the persecutor of the Christian church, no Napoleon, no Hitler, no Holocaust, no Nagasaki or Hiroshima. But Jesus saw through Satan’s sophistry. For Jesus the means can never justify the end. He says, “Away from me, Satan! For it is written: “Worship the Lord your God, and serve him only” ’” (Matt. 4:10, NIV).

by Madelynn Haldeman

Madelynn Haldeman is a professor in the school of religion at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Thursday, January 18

Call to Discipleship Entails Discipling

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 4:19

During the period extending from the second century B.C. through the first century A.D., there was a keen awareness among the Hebrews concerning the coming of the Messiah. They knew and believed in the prophecies of His coming to earth and looked forward to their fulfillment. When John the Baptist pointed his listeners to the "Lamb of God," thus announcing Jesus to be the "anointed One," the hearts of many people were ready to receive Him. When Jesus called Peter and Andrew, the record says, "They . . . left their nets, and followed him." Later on He called James and John, and they too "immediately left the ship and their father, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-22).

To Peter, Andrew, James, John, and others, the call of Jesus was an instance of being chosen by the longed-for Messiah. So they left their occupation, their loved ones, their community, their hopes and aspirations, everything they had, and followed Him. Earthly connections and possessions became meaningless. To them the presence of the Lord was "fulness of joy" (Ps. 16:11).

In this day and age many people are making the pursuit of happiness their major goal in life. But true happiness comes from

seeking God first. When you have God you have genuine happiness and everything else, for He is the source of life and every good thing, including happiness. But the call of God is accepted only by those who long to know God, by those who are ready to follow Him. To follow a leader means to imitate him, and Jesus confirmed this concept when He said to His disciples that "everyone who is fully trained will be like his teacher" (Luke 6:40, NIV). The call to discipleship is essentially an invitation to be like Jesus and share in the work of discipling. After the disciples received the commission from their Lord to invite others to follow Him, it was said of them that they "turned the world upside down" (Acts 17:6).

When the call to discipleship comes to a believer today, how is he to respond to that call? Does the Saviour demand of him to respond in the same manner as His disciples did? The point is "Who has the heart? With whom are our thoughts? Of whom do we love to converse? Who has our warmest affections and our best energies? If we are Christ's, our thoughts are with Him, and our sweetest thoughts are of Him. All we have and are is consecrated to Him."*

The call to discipleship entails a commitment to follow Christ. It is also a call to discipling. How does an individual believer carry out the task of discipling? By fol-

by Justin S. Singh

Justin S. Singh is currently completing a Doctor of Education degree in administration at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

lowing the Lord and His example. It is a great temptation for humans to look to humans as their models. When the apostle Paul said, "Follow my example," he did not stop there but added, "as I follow Christ's" (1 Cor. 11:1, NEB). Jesus said, "Follow Me." The call is to follow the Lord. Look to Him as the perfect model.

In looking to Jesus as our model we will not stumble. Then calling others to follow the Lord becomes exciting and rewarding. As we keep looking unto Jesus, and as we follow Him, we will be compelled to invite others to a relational experience with our Lord that is both a privilege and a responsibility.

*Steps to Christ, p. 58.

Friday, January 19

The Call to Self-Acceptance

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 4:19, 20

By accepting the basic view of “grasshopper theology” (which holds that man is a wretched, loathsome creature, incapable of anything even remotely good), traditional Evangelicalism has attempted to use the example of the call of the disciples as the “proper” response for any Christian to the call of Christ. The application is simple: all humans are wretches, full of selfish dreams and wrong ideals who, like Peter, must forfeit everything that is theirs if they are to be worthy of following the Lord. For Peter, it meant dropping his net; for the policeman, it may mean turning in his badge; for the business student, changing his major to theology. In essence, God is calling each of us out of whatever it is we have selfishly gotten ourselves into!

There are, however, some difficult problems with such a line of thought. You see, while it is true that apart from Christ we are hopelessly lost, it is also true that *God doesn't make junk!* Each of us that has been made in His image has immense value and abilities, and to imply otherwise would be an insult to the Creator. God Himself says that we are to love our neighbors as ourselves. How are we possibly to do that if

we ourselves are worthless? It is indeed far past time that we improve our self-images. We are valuable children of the most-high God, a fact that is illustrated in the very act of His calling *us* to follow *Him!*

From what is it that God is calling us, if not everything that we have come to know in our human experience? In what sense are we to “drop our nets” and follow? Without a doubt, the Lord does at times call one of His children to alter radically his or her ways and means of life; but is this the rule, or the exception? I believe it is the latter.

What we are being called away from is *not* everything that we do or have that is special to us (note that I am not speaking of things that would be considered immoral), but rather the *reasons* we have or do these things. At issue is what motivates us. The Christian work ethic, when misapplied, can lead us to believe that it is what we do (and how well we do it) that gives our lives value and validity. But this is no different from the righteousness-by-works mentality of the Pharisees. God longs for us to see the futility in such reasoning. We don't need to look toward our activities to find self-worth, for we already have it by virtue of *who* and *whose* we are—children of the living King! So come, let us drop our nets and follow Him!

by Kenneth W. Morgan

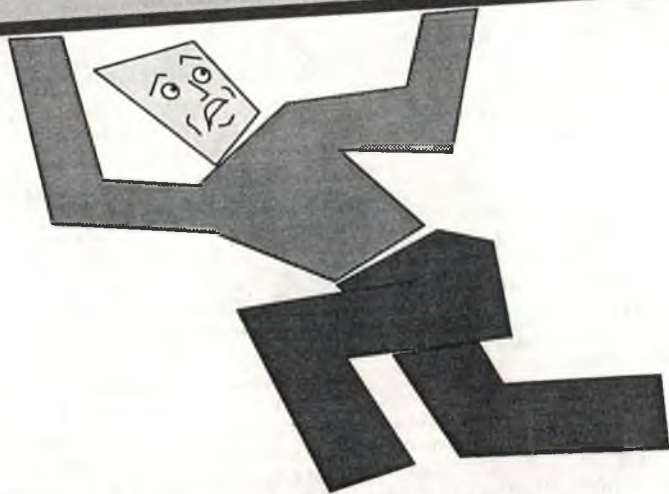
Kenneth W. Morgan is a physics major at Loma Linda University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 4, January 21 - 27

The New Authority

AUTHORITY

Is it getting you down?



"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" (Matthew 7:28, 29, NIV).

Sunday, January 21

The Real Thing?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 5 - 7

Johnathan, a junior business education major, listened to the assignment. "Before class tomorrow, I want you to evaluate a minimum of three textbooks in your chosen field. Note the strengths and weaknesses of each, then select the one that you consider to be the best resource for the subject matter presented. Be prepared to discuss its pros and cons and to defend your selection to the whole class. Class dismissed."

With the wide selection of business texts on the market, Johnathan thought to himself, "No problem."

The next day when Johnathan presented his selection to the class, he defended his choice by stating that the text presents the subject matter in a simple-to-complex manner; objectives are presented at the beginning of each chapter and summaries at the end; and the content leads students through a process of interesting, explanatory, and relevant experiences. He was especially impressed with the author, who is an expert in her field.

The teacher responded, "What makes this author an expert?"

Johnathan was quick on his feet, "She is well known for her research and publications and is a recognized leader in the field of business. She is a renowned speaker and is often quoted as a

leading authority on the subject matter."

Johnathan was taken back at the teacher's response: "Darwin has conducted considerable research on the subject of man's beginnings and has written many scholarly papers presenting his views. He is a sought-after speaker and often quoted as an authority. Does this mean that Darwin is an expert or authority on the creation of man?"

The teacher's response stimulated Johnathan's thinking. He pondered—How do you really recognize an expert? Are there times when we should challenge authority? test authority? accept authority? validate authority? submit to authority?

Jesus' warning: "Beware of false prophets, which come to you in sheep's clothing" (Matt. 7:15) is certainly applicable today. Recognizing truth and authority in a world of theories, expositions, research findings, and scholarly presentations is not easy. The texture of sheep's clothing is so soft, so real, it is difficult to discern the wolf within.

How did Jesus deal with authority figures of His day? What methods did he use to challenge their teachings? In Matthew 5-7, what direct and/or indirect messages did Jesus give to the recognized experts of His day? Were there times when Jesus could have challenged authority figures but did not? Why? Why not?

by Sandra Frederick Price

Sandra Frederick Price is head of the business and information systems department at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

What Is Authority?

LOGOS

Theme: *When nurtured by the rich soil of goodness, justice, mercy, and love, authority is not only necessary but a delight for the Christian who believes in the Supreme God of heaven.*

Take a trip, with your mind's eye, back to an unknown mountainside where Jesus finds a level space that offers a pleasant gathering place for the vast crowd pressing to get "box seats" to His wisdom. Seating Himself on the grass, He is accompanied also by His twelve disciples, who sit closest to drink in His every word that we today have recorded in our Bible (Matt. 5-7).

That which Jesus Christ spoke on that late summer day in A.D. 29, about midway through the three and one half years of His ministry, has been called the Sermon on the Mount. It is also known as "Sinai of the New Testament" because it holds the same significance for the Christian church as Mount Sinai held for the Jewish nation. From Sinai, God through Christ proclaims the moral law, while from an unknown mountain in Galilee, Jesus reaffirms the moral law by explaining and clarifying its principles and making them practical for daily living.

Notice that near the beginning of this classic statement we call the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:21-44), our Lord speaks a series

of contrasting *authoritative* pronouncements introduced by the words "But I say unto you" (verse 22) and repeats that expression five more times in verses 28, 32, 34, 39 and 44. While the Jewish rabbis were citing tradition as their authority for interpreting life and the law, Jesus Christ was speaking on His own authority as the divine Son of God. "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).

For the Christian, authority reveals itself at three levels:

1. Divine Authority (read Matt. 5:17-20, 48; 6:9, 10)

The Bible proclaims God and His law as the standard of all authority. When Lucifer first rebelled against God in heaven, "God could have destroyed Satan and his sympathizers as easily as one can cast a pebble on the earth; but He did not do this. Rebellion was not to be overcome by force. Compelling power is found only under Satan's government. The Lord's principles are not of this order. His authority rests upon goodness, mercy, and love; and the presentation of these principles is the means to be used. God's government is moral, and truth and love are to be the prevailing power."*

Nevertheless, trust in God's authority is sometimes betrayed by our human tendency to see nar-

By Mervyn A. Warren

Mervyn A. Warren is chairman of the department of religion at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

rowly and to want matters our way, as humorously described by the following story: There was a Californian speeding along mountain roads in his convertible sports car. He was driving too fast for one corner and shot right over the edge of the cliff. The car top was down and, as the story goes, the driver managed to grab hold of a stunted tree as the car tumbled thousands of feet into the canyon. "Help," he called, as he hung on, dangling above the canyon. "Can anyone hear me?" All he got back was an echo. "God, can You hear me?" he called again. The clouds rolled together, and a deep voice said: "Yes, I can hear you." "Will You help?" "Yes," answered God, "I will help you. Do you believe in Me?" "Yes, yes, I believe in You." "Do you trust Me?" "Yes, yes, I trust . . . but hurry up, please." "If you trust me, let go of the tree." (A lon-n-n-g silence.) "Can anyone else hear me?"

How much authority do you really allow God to have in your life?

2. Human Authority (read Matt. 5:10-16, 38-42)

Inasmuch as we are citizens of the world, governed by earthly rulers, we must relate our lives to their authority—the extent of which is usually determined by legal statutes established by the governed. Civilized governments in modern times range anywhere from democratic to autocratic. In 1 Timothy 2:1, 2, the apostle Paul admonishes us to acknowledge earthly rulers.

The human level of authority to which we relate includes also parents and others who are responsible for us under certain circumstances (see Eph. 6:1-9).

3. Personal Authority (read Matt. 6:25-34)

Freedom of choice roots itself in the power of every person ultimately to decide for himself or herself. With freedom, however, comes responsibility, that is to say, you bear full responsibility for your choices. In *Campus Life* (September 1984) Verne Becker says, "In our freedom to choose, we have an awesome amount of power. Power that can be used or abused. We need to understand the effects our power of choice can have on our lives." The author then offers several characteristics of choice:

a. *Choices indicate value* (demonstrate in some way what we feel is most important or desirable);

b. *Choices have direction* (carry us either toward or away from our goals);

c. *Choices have consequences* (create circumstances that limit further choices . . . good or bad);

d. *Choices build on each other* (cause it to be easier to make another choice . . . good or bad);

e. *Life is made up of a few big choices and a billion little ones* (even big choices in life are the culmination of many small ones);

f. *Our ability to meet life's challenges depends on how well we handle the little choices* (it is the little choices of life, not the big ones, where the battles are won or lost);

g. *Choices must be active in order to be effective* (must make them ourselves and act on them ourselves. We get in trouble when we allow circumstances or other people to make choices for us).

As you relate to authorities and exercise Christian decision-making, remember the words of Jesus: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness" (Matt. 6:33, NIV).

*The Desire of Ages, p. 759.

The Way He Reached the Hearts of the Lost

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 4:25— 5:2

Jesus knew that He was God's man for every person. As such, His life was an example and pattern for living that denied any sense or feeling of either the potency of self or the importance of self. He was on a mission for God. Matthew portrays the dramatic, formal beginning of that mission with the Testament of Matthew 5-7, which presents Jesus and His Words as a veritable fountain of life.

"One fountain for the poor in spirit. The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God."¹

The importance of the denial of any and every feeling of self-sufficiency may be seen through the eight or nine beatific statements in Matthew 5. They reflect benefits that *come* and not benefits that are self-generated. They seem to testify that feelings of self-sufficiency lead to self-deception and that self-deception leads to self-exaltation. And self-

exaltation excludes one from the presence and the kingdom of God.

"There is constant temptation to exalt self, and we must watch much against this evil. We need to be on guard continually lest we manifest the spirit of overbearing, criticism, and condemnation. We should . . . not reveal anything . . . that will dishearten and discourage those with whom we come in contact. . . . It is natural for some to be . . . dictatorial, to lord it over God's heritage; and because of the manifestation of these attributes, precious souls have been lost to the cause."²

Jesus testified that He had come to seek and to save what was lost (Luke 19:10). Notwithstanding the groaning of the whole creation as it awaited the redemption of God (Rom. 8:22), humanity, God's fallen children, are the primary aspect of creation that were targeted for redemption. Bypassing any sense of personal authority, Jesus patiently focused the will of God for the recovery of the creatures made in His own image.

REACT

How is it possible for sinful man to experience a transforming presence in the presence of Jesus, and why is it not possible for this experience to be achieved other than in the presence of Jesus?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 300.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 223

by James H. Melancon

James H. Melancon is an associate professor of New Testament at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Wednesday, January 24

You Have Heard That It Was Said . . . But I Myself Say to You

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 5:21, 22

Chapters 5-7 in Matthew are pivotal. Referred to as the Sermon on the Mount, they comprise the first of five extended discourses of Jesus found in Matthew's Gospel. The chapters set the stage for an understanding of the rest of the Gospel by underscoring the centrality of Jesus' authority.

It seems evident that one of Matthew's primary concerns in chapters 5-7 was to show that Jesus, the Son of man, was a divine majesty, fully invested with the authority of God. Six times in chapter 5, Jesus invokes the right of His own authority over against every other authority, including the authority of written law. He does this via a single, sharply focused antithetical statement (a counter statement) in each of the following passages: Matthew 5:21, 22; 5:27, 28; 5:31, 32; 5:33-37; 5:38, 39; and 5:43-47. Collectively, these passages are called the Matthean Antitheses. Their structure calls for an unequivocal consent to a single and unimpeachable authority: the authority of the "Words of Jesus and Jesus Himself."

A close look at the anatomy of the Matthean Antitheses is quite revealing. The Antitheses focus

on Jesus' unrelenting posturing toward the freedom of people. In the mind of Jesus the idea of freedom remains a delicate transmission from God to humans. This accounts for the open-ended language of the Antitheses: "You have heard that it was said . . . But I Myself say to you . . ." Open-ended: no suggestion of an appropriate or acceptable response. This is an ethical statement from God who, ever unwilling to coerce the will, endorses freedom as it relates to the matter of our response to His authority. And little wonder! God's is not the authority of a despot, benevolent or otherwise.

Each Antithesis begins with a brief thesis statement and concludes with a counter or "anti" thesis [antithesis] statement. The aspects of thesis and antithesis constitute an incomplete scenario. Two opposing views without resolution. And this is a deliberate contrivance by Jesus. Jesus' antithetical "But I Myself say to you [Greek: *Ego de lego humin*]" is a technical, intensive form, which highlights His own divine authority. It comprises an authority riddle that successive hearers must solve individually for themselves.

A functional aid to a solution to the riddle may be at hand in the *Encyclopedia Britannica* article: "Hegel, Georg Wilhelm Frie-

by James H. Melancon

James H. Melancon is an associate professor of New Testament at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

drich." Hegel's dialectical system may have been inspired by the Matthean Antitheses. He takes the thesis-antithesis scenario to its logical conclusion by proceeding to a synthesis: a choice away from "what was said" through "But I Myself say" to "What is your choice?"

Proposition and counterproposition bring one face to face with the moral demand to choose. It is by one's choice ["Choose you this day whom ye will serve." Joshua 24:15] that one's intentions come to light.

Christians in society are faced by a rapidly eroding respect for authority. Of necessity they must hear afresh, again and again, the words ["But I Myself say to you . . ."] of Jesus. Then they must assess that, unless they respond to Christ's authority, He will remain external and foreign to them. They must proceed from what others

have said [thesis] to what Jesus says [antithesis], and then decide what they intend to do about what Jesus says [synthesis].

The choice is yours. Choose.

REACT

1. What is the significance of the statement ("You have heard that it was said . . .") and the counterstatement ("But I Myself say to you . . .") about the relationship of Jesus to the authority of God and the unchanging nature of His law?

2. Does our freedom to respond or not to respond to God in any fashion compromise the divine sovereignty of God?

3. Does freedom to respond or not to respond presuppose a modicum of sovereignty for humans? If "Yes," define the limits of our sovereignty. If "No," then why the freedom either to respond or not to respond?



Thursday, January 25

Facing a Crisis of Authority

HOW-TO

Key Text: Proverbs 3:5, 6

The presence of authority structures is vital in both macro and micro arenas of human existence. Parents, other important people, and government, form important authority structures in our society. We cannot escape them. Often a crisis of authority exists where these structures are oppressive or where antiauthoritarian attitudes challenge or disregard them.

In such crisis the need for God-direction in decision making becomes crucial. How can Christians make right choices in face of conflicting authorities? Here are some suggestions:

1. *Acknowledge God as the central authority.* This acknowledgement places God in the rightful position in the life. He is Creator, Redeemer, and Sustainer. He has the right to rule. The Holy Scriptures declare: "O Lord, you are worthy to receive the glory and the honor and the power, for you have created all things. They were created and called into being by your act of will" (Rev. 4:10, TLB). An acknowledgement of and full surrender to Christ as Saviour and Lord eliminate any choices that would be in conflict with God's will. In Him we must live and have our being. Our key text admonishes: "Never forget the things I've taught you. If you want a long and satisfying life, closely follow my instructions.

Never forget to be truthful and kind. Hold these virtues tightly. Write them deep within your heart. If you want favor with both God and man, and a reputation for good judgment and common sense, then trust the Lord completely; don't ever trust yourself. In everything you do, put God first, and He will direct you and crown your efforts with success" (Prov. 3:1-6, TLB).

2. *Unite with God's divine plan and power.* God says, "My purpose is to give life in all its fullness." (John 10:10, TLB). By His power we may do everything God asks, with the help of Christ who gives strength and power. (Phil. 4:13). "Know ye not his servants ye are to whom ye obey; that to whom ye yield yourselves servants to obey, whether of sin unto death, or of obedience unto righteousness?" (Rom. 6:16). Jesus says, "Remain united to me, and I will remain united to you. A branch cannot bear fruit by itself; it can do so only if it remains in the vine. In the same way . . . you can do nothing without me" (John 15:4, 5). We must depend on Christ in order to live a holy life just as branches depend on the vine for growth. Apart from Him we have no life. Away from Him we will have no power to grow in grace and holiness and to turn from sin. We will grow and bear fruit when we live in Him. We will be like a tree planted by a river."¹ This choice is ours alone to make. We cannot escape authority. "Choose ye this day

by Ellen Anderson

Ellen Anderson is an assistant professor in the psychology/social work department at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

whom ye will serve" (Joshua 24:15).

3. *Place your life under the authority of the Word of God.* When we take time each day to seek guidance from the Word of God, it becomes a never-failing guide. The admonition comes to "study to show thyself approved unto God." This leads first to an intellectual assent to truth and then to a decision to act according to God's rules for right living. This was Christ's method. He hid the Word in His heart that He would not sin (Ps. 119:11). Often He would stave off temptation with "It is written" (Matt. 4:4, 7, 10). We too must "be filled with knowledge of his will in all wisdom and spiritual understanding; that ye might walk worthy of the Lord" (Col. 1:9, 10).

4. *Make Christ first.* "Our fitting and proper response to His love and confidence should be to give priority in all facets of our

lives to His will and His work."² "Give yourself fully to God in the morning. Make this your very first work. Let this be your daily prayer: "Take me, O Lord, as wholly Yours. I lay all my plans at Your feet. Use me today in Your service. Live with me, and let all my work be done in You."³

Each morning we need to consecrate ourselves to God for that day, tell Him about our plans, and follow as He guides. And as we do this our life will be shaped more and more like the life of Christ.⁴

REACT

1. Is it possible to maintain individual freedom while being fully submissive to divine authority? Why or why not?

2. In what ways does God's Word address more than the ideal and help us make choices in a less than perfect world?

1. Ellen G. White, *Knowing Him Better* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1982), p. 69.

2. Godfrey T. Anderson, *Walk God's Battlefield* (Nashville: Southern Publishing Association, 1971), p. 120.

3. White, p. 70.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Friday, January 26

The Exercise of Authority, a Humble Christian Duty

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 5:5

While reading Matthew 5 through 7 in an effort to understand Christ's admonitions concerning authority, this reader began to see a startling contradiction. Teaching as one who had authority, and not as their teachers of the law, Christ described His followers as peacemakers, meek and poor in spirit, who suffer persecution gladly, even turning the left cheek to one who has struck the right cheek. They bless their enemies and give their cloaks to those who have sued for their coats. They give alms, but not in public; they pray privately, but never demonstrate their holiness with erudite public prayers. Brushing aside the wealth of this world, they seek to treat others in the way that they want to be treated.

But does this description consider leadership qualities? Christ must have overlooked the matter of authority when preparing His list of Christian behaviors. The qualities mentioned surely are fit only for those destined to be followers; they are unthinkable encumbrances for persons of authority. Could leaders exhibiting such behavior ever command respect within the organized

church, civil government, business institutions, the classroom, or even the pulpit?

The answer to the dilemma is simple. There is no contradiction between Christian character and realistic qualities of leadership. The same qualities of character that make good followers also make good leaders. A Christian leader establishes at the foundation of his personality the qualities Christ outlined in these chapters of Matthew. He stands humble before God and before those he leads; he does not seek to seize the will of any human being, but respects the human equality of all persons.

Authority based on an assumption of special privilege or superiority, and upheld by abusive behavior, breeds a system of evil. In this system a leader attempts to steal what God has given no person the right to take—the wills of those with whom he or she should work in peace.

Christian authority is not a device to steal what God Himself would not take from humanity. Christian authority, based on meekness of spirit and respect for human equality, draws the wills of people together to accomplish any task, in the same manner that Christ's disciples worked once they understood this truth.

by Larry Hasse

Larry Hasse is professor of history at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 5, January 28—February 3

It Pays to Serve Jesus

What Is The
Meaning Of



“On hearing this, Jesus said, ‘It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. But go and learn what this means: “I desire mercy, not sacrifice.” For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners’ ” (Matthew 9:12, 13, NIV).

Sunday, January 28

A Radical Thing

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 9:12, 13, NIV

"Well, are you going or not?"

The question rang in Gary's ears.

"I'm not sure," he stammered.

"I mean, I just can't see myself going there. If only it were something else—anything else but an AIDS hospice. After all, it's their own fault. They sinned, and now God is punishing them. It's got nothing to do . . ."

"Punishment! From God?" Pastor Clay interrupted. "I suppose God uses Legionnaires' disease to punish people who attend conventions or maybe Alzheimer's disease to punish people for getting old."

"That's not the same thing,"

Gary replied. "Those people got AIDS of their own free will. Besides, do you know what my friends would think if they knew I was spending Sabbath afternoons in the AIDS ward? I can't think of a better way to send my social life right down the tubes."

Pastor Clay's eyes widened in disbelief. "Social life? What my friends may think? Should concerns such as these be the force behind our Christian commitment? I must say, Gary, I'm surprised and disappointed to hear you talk like this."

Gary hung his head. "I'm sorry, Pastor. I didn't mean for it to come out like that. It's just that I never dreamed I would

ever do anything like this."

"I know, Gary. That's the problem. No one seriously thinks that God loves a person with AIDS." Pastor Clay began thumbing through his Bible as he continued. "Do you remember the story of the leper who came to Jesus after He gave the Sermon on the Mount?"

"Sure. It's in Matthew 8. But what's that got to do with anything?"

"Christ was surrounded by a multitude, healing some of them, when the leper approached. Ellen White says in *The Desire of Ages*, page 263, that 'at the sight of him the people fell back in terror.' But Jesus? Jesus did a radical thing. Not only did He allow the man to come, but He also touched him; and Matthew 8:3 tells us, 'Immediately his leprosy was cleansed.'

"Now if you think superstition and ignorance make it difficult to operate in today's society, you can't begin to imagine what it must have been like in Christ's day. But our Saviour looked past this man's terrible condition, which branded him the worst of sinners, an outcast, the scourge of mankind, and saw a soul worthy of healing and redemption.

"Did Jesus care that He might lose some followers? I don't think so. "You see, Gary, the question each of us must answer is: Are you going to continue as you always have, or are you willing to do something radical?"

by Philip Nixon

Philip Nixon is associate dean of men at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Facing the Challenges of Discipleship

LOGOS

Theme: Purpose in Life—*What is the meaning of existence, and how does the religious person interface with the myriad options in which to find that meaning?*

Matthew 8 and 9 lie between the first two of the five Matthean discourses: the Sermon on the Mount and Jesus' missionary discourse. They form a collection of ten miracles arranged in three series. Each group culminates with a teaching on the implications of discipleship.

1. Jesus' Messiahship

Jesus' Messiahship is manifested by His authority over sickness, nature, evil spirits, and sin.

a. Jesus exerted Messianic authority by His words.

There was no dichotomy between His words and His wonders. The same words that proclaimed the justice of the kingdom in the Sermon on the Mount were those that generated faith. They brought health, calmness, exorcism, and forgiveness. Both in creation and redemption, Jesus' words revealed God's saving authority. By creating, God saved His creatures from nothingness; by redeeming, He saved them from annihilation.

Jesus spoke: "So be it done" (8:13) and lepers were cleansed (8:3), sick were healed, even at a

distance (8:5-13), evil spirits were cast out (8:16, 32), demonic forces were subjugated and calm overpowered the raging sea (8:26), sins were forgiven (9:1-13), issue of blood stopped (9:20-22), blind recovered their sight (9:28-31), and dumb, their hearing.

In Jesus' times, leprosy was one of the major causes of banishment. What are some of the modern "leprosies"? How can Jesus "cleanse" us from our social ostracism?

b. Jesus exerted Messianic authority by His touch.

He touched the leper and cleansed him immediately (8:3). He touched Peter's mother-in-law and she arose to minister (8:15). He touched the maiden's hand and she came back from the dead (9:25). He touched the blind men's eyes and they "were opened" (9:29, 30). Such was His wonder-working authority that health came forth just by a person's touching His garments (9:20-22).

How can we touch Jesus' garment or be touched by His healing hands?

Of what can He heal you?

c. Jesus exerted Messianic authority as an expression of His merciful sovereignty.

Matthew presents Jesus as a transcendental Saviour and merciful Lord. Jesus deserved the leper's and ruler's worship (8:3; 9:18). However, He was attentive to human needs and concerns

by Agniel Samson

Agniel Samson is associate professor of biblical languages and New Testament at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

(8:14; 9:2, 23). Even His christological titles were indicative of His compassionate heart. The leper and the centurion implored Him: "Lord" (8:2, 6, 8). When the disciples realized they were perishing, they came to him, praying: "Lord, save us" (8:25). The demon-possessed called Him "Son of God" (8:29). The blind men cried out desperately: "Son of David, have mercy on us" (9:27). He spoke words of authority and performed miracles because "he was moved with compassion" (9:36).

To what specific circumstances of your life do the different titles of Jesus apply?

d. Jesus' Messianic authority was a fulfillment of Old Testament prophecies.

None of the other synoptic Gospels quote the Old Testament like Matthew. He gives his citations an interpretive rather than textual coloration. Jesus' exorcisms and healings fulfilled Isaiah's prophecy: "Himself took our infirmities, and bare our sicknesses" (Matt. 8:17; cf. Isa. 53:4). Jesus' word of comfort to the paralytic and the woman with the issue of blood echoes the eschatological formula of the prophets: "Fear not" (Haggai. 2:5; Zech. 8:13, 15), because God's redemption is at hand.

Even the blind's wish is reminiscent of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies (Isa. 35:5; 42:7). Moreover, Jesus Himself is the answer to Moses' prayer. When Moses knew that his mission was coming to an end, he implored the Lord to raise a new leader "that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd" (Num. 27:16, 17; Matt. 9:36). Jesus was that Messianic leader.

How relevant are the promises of the Bible for you?

2. Faith as the Sine Qua Non of Discipleship

Jesus' words and wonders were indicative of His Messianic authority. But their effectiveness depended on the response of faith. Faith was a prerequisite to benefit from the wonder-working authority of Jesus' words and touch. Faith was the requirement for one to get into and stay in the condition of discipleship.

Most of the miracles illustrate the believer's response to Jesus' authority. Jesus "marvelled" before the centurion's faith and said unto him: "As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee." Jesus' attention was called by the faith of those who brought the "man sick of the palsy" (9:2). He attributed the healing of the "woman, which was diseased with an issue of blood" to her faith (9:22). He asked the blind men: "Believe ye that I am able to do this?" (9:28) and granted them their wish according to their faith (9:29).

When the disciples awoke Him, saying: "Lord, save us, we perish," He asked them: "Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (8:25, 26). The disciples were facing a faith crisis. They needed to understand that by following Jesus they would be involved in the great controversy between God and Satan. Consequently, they had to follow Jesus' example of a trusting and unshakable faith because they had to be a projection of His authority over fear, diseases, infirmities, and evil spirits.

Matthew shows that faith is a sine qua non to enter the kingdom of heaven (see Matt. 8:11, 12) and a sine qua non if we are to confront the challenges of the kingdom with courage and calm (8:26).

How can I develop Jesus' attitude of serene confidence when I am faced with the challenges of life?

What should I do to inspire faith in my friends and parents?

3. The Church as Extension of Jesus' Redemptive Activities

The intent of the collection of miracles was essentially didactic. It served as a preparation for the missionary chart of Matthew 10. Jesus spoke with authority and exerted authority in His wonders. He conferred the same authority to the twelve before He sent them to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (Matt. 10:6).

As the Messiah, He had traveled "about all the cities and villages" to perform the three aspects of His redemptive mission: teaching, preaching, and healing (9:35). He had seen the condition of "the multitudes," a

condition of despondency and disbandment (9:36). They needed leaders to continue Jesus' apostolic activities. That is why He "called . . . his twelve disciples" and gave them authority over evil spirits and sickness.

The disciples had to face the same challenges Jesus faced. They had to demonstrate the same authority. As embryo of the church, their mission was to create a new order of life by redeeming "the lost sheep of the house of Israel" (10:6).

How can I respond to Jesus' call to go to "the lost sheep of the house of Israel"?

What should I do to receive and exert Jesus' authority over the modern versions of "unclean spirits" and sickness?

Tuesday, January 30

Service: Our Purpose in Life

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 9:9

The ultimate reason for a Christian's existence is to be of service to God and others. As Ellen White points out, no matter what our status may be, God extends to us the opportunity for service: "Whether you are rich or poor, great or humble, God calls you into active service for Him."¹

For example, she makes the following comments about the call of Matthew and his unselfish response to the call: "Sitting at his toll booth one day, the publican saw Jesus approaching. Great was his astonishment to hear the words addressed to himself, 'Follow me.'

"Matthew 'left all, rose up, and followed Him.' There was no hesitation, no questioning, no thought of the lucrative business to be exchanged for poverty and hardship. It was enough for him that he was to be with Jesus, that he might listen to His words, and unite with Him in His work.

"So it was with the disciples previously called. When Jesus bade Peter and his companions follow Him, immediately they left their boats and nets. . . .

"To Matthew in his wealth, and to Andrew and Peter in their poverty, the same test was brought; the same consecration was made by each."²

The phrase "saved to serve" is applicable to each of us. Each of us has a place in the work for the salvation of others. Ellen White states that "service to God includes personal ministry. By personal effort we are to co-operate with Him for the saving of the world."³

As soon as Jesus healed Peter's mother-in-law, she immediately gave herself to the service of her Master and others (Matt. 8:14, 15). Likewise, the leper that Jesus healed. Concerning the leper, Ellen White comments:

"Notwithstanding the caution of Jesus, the man made no further effort to conceal the fact of his cure. It would indeed have been impossible to conceal it, but the leper published the matter abroad. . . . He went about proclaiming the power of this Great Healer."⁴

REACT

1. God has given us the gift of life and other special abilities. Do you consider it a privilege to use these gifts in service to God and your fellowmen? Why?

2. In this age of materialism, what will enable you to renounce the advantages of wealth, honor, and social status in return for service?

3. Does service to God automatically mean that we must forgo wealth, honor, and social status? Why or why not?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 129.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 273.

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 300.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 265.

by Morris A. Iheanacho

Morris Iheanacho is the catalog librarian at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Authority and Purpose in Life: A Continuity

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 9:13, 35-38

The end of Matthew 7 appropriately focuses the authority of Jesus and the fact that people are aware of its distinctive quality. Unlike any authority they have known, His authority inspires wonder and amazement. His teaching is radically different from the teaching of the scribes. He is an authority figure to whom imperiousness is unknown. At the level of the common man, He is truly egalitarian. His authority was accepted by the people as His passport to the experience of all the people, including the rich and the poor, the wise and the simple, religious and nonreligious, to the dispirited, to the disaffected, to the disenfranchised, to the disheartened, to those who had nothing in this world, and to those who thought they had everything. In Matthew 8:1 we are told about the great crowds of the people who followed Jesus when He came down from the mountain.

His authority is a constantly recurring theme. In Matthew 9:2-8, it is called into question with regard to His right to forgive sins. This raises the question of the role of authority as an investment of leadership. Matthew 8 and 9, among other things, answers that question. Authority is in place as an aid to the accomplishment of mission and purpose. Purpose in

life was a known quantity for Jesus. The fourth Gospel records that Jesus said to His disciples: "My food [My purpose in life] . . . is to do the will of him who sent me" (John 4:34, NIV). The consciousness of His authority served to heighten His sense of mission and purpose. Authority and purpose in the life of Jesus meld into service. Men under authority have great responsibility (Matt. 8:5-9). Responsibility portends purpose, and purpose evokes service.

There was no dichotomy between who Jesus was and His purpose in life. The latter was the interpretation of the former. His understanding of His purpose in life was not left to chance. Impressions from God and influences from home and church (John the Baptist) converged on His consciousness to form a fully integrated image of purpose and mission. The last and best-known actor in the drama at the dawn of His public ministry was John the Baptist, whose testimony sealed up His certainty of who He was. This was crucial, since His understanding of who He was, was at the same time the understanding of His purpose in life. For this reason, the importance of John's twice-given testimony (John 1:29 and 1:36): "Look! [Here comes] the Lamb of God, who takes away the sin of the world" (NIV), cannot be overstated. These words of John are a part of the conscious-

by James H. Melancon

James H. Melancon is associate professor of New Testament studies at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

ness that led to the affirmation "I am not come to call the righteous, but sinners" (Matt. 9:13), and the urgent entreaty "The crop is heavy but the labourers are scarce; you must therefore beg the owner to send labourers to harvest his crop" (Matt. 9:37, 38, NEB). The harvest is the end of the world.

In this last verse in Matthew 9, Jesus is outlining a purpose in life for Christians. Further, He is identifying that purpose with His own stated purpose in life (Matt. 9:13; cf. John 4:34). "I came to call sinners" could be placed upon the lips of every Christian. According to Paul in 2 Corinthians 5:19, God is entrusting to us "the word [ministry] of reconciliation." This is an assignment of purpose for (dare it be said?) your life. The mission of responsible discipleship in Matthew 8 and 9 comprises "a pattern shown in the Mount" through which Christians are to see a model for their own purpose in life.

REACT

1. The testimony of John the Baptist, according to the Gospel reports, sealed up for Jesus the certainty of who He was. In what way was it to God's advantage to have this final word of confirmation come to His Son from a human messenger and not, say, from Himself or the Holy Spirit or the angel Gabriel?

2. In your judgment, what were some of the effects upon the people, especially upon those who were not too familiar with the promises concerning the Messiah, of John the Baptist's two announcements that Jesus was the lamb of God taking away the sins of the world (His purpose in life)?

3. How would you compare your understanding of your purpose in life with Jesus' understanding of His purpose in life? Do the activities of Jesus in Matthew 8 and 9 help you clarify your own purpose in life?

The Abundant Life

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 10:10

"I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly" (John 10:10).

These golden words proceeded from the lips of the Master Shepherd Himself. Here Jesus speaks not only of the immortal life reserved for the faithful but also of high-quality living this side of eternity—the more abundant life.

It is important to note that the abundant life is not a life of selfish ease and freedom from responsibility. On the contrary, it is a life full of meaning and purpose, a well-ordered lifestyle that is planned and directed by God with man's cooperation, to ensure genuine joy and happiness.

Since it is true that real joy and happiness are found in ministering to the needs of others, it follows then that it is of the utmost importance for young adults to realize that true purpose and meaning in life is to be found in service to others.

How can we best prepare for service?

1. We must discover the gifts, talents, and skills that God has bestowed upon us from birth. For He lighteth every person

that cometh into the world, not only with life but also with gifts and talents to be developed to His glory. As young adults we must take time to engage in wholesome introspection under the illuminating influence of the Holy Spirit—to dig deep within ourselves—and discover the treasures God has placed within each life. Then dedicate those treasures to His service.

2. We must make every sacrifice to obtain an education that will develop our gifts and talents to their fullest capacity so that we can competently fulfill God's will for our life.

3. We must use every opportunity to utilize our gifts so that through persistent effort we can develop into all that God would have us to be.

4. We must understand that the Christian life is a directed life of careful planning and hard work. Proverbs 16:9 says, "A man's heart deviseth his way; but the Lord directeth his steps." We must plan for success in life, and then through hard toil the fruits of our planning and effort will materialize.

REACT

Why does God encourage us to do everything in our power to succeed in life? Why doesn't He just do everything for us, since He is all-powerful?

by Lionel Martell

Lionel Martell is a senior theology major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Friday, February 2

When Losing Is Winning!

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 10:39

Human nature is selfish and self-seeking. Christ came to demonstrate the unselfishness principle—that life is best lived by those who believe that “it is more blessed to give than to receive”—that true happiness lies in sharing. All nature illustrates this principle. Heavy clouds share their moisture with the earth. The streams feed the rivers. The rivers feed the ocean. Ultimately, the sun draws the moisture skyward. Thus Christ shared Himself where the need was greatest. He associated with the neglected and socialized with the outcasts.

Jesus placed human welfare above the sacredness of days, social convention, and economic advantage. Self-denial is a cardinal principle of life's essentialities. Much of our sense of unfulfillment lies in our failure here. The prayer of Saint Francis of Assisi best states the case:

“Lord, make me an instrument of thy peace;
Where there is hatred, let me sow love,
Where there is injury—pardon,
Where there is doubt—faith,
Where there is despair—hope,
Where there is darkness—light,
Where there is sadness—joy.
O divine Master, grant that I may
not so much seek

To be consoled as to console,
To be understood as to understand,

To be loved as to love.

For it is in giving that we receive;
It is in pardoning that we are pardoned;

It is in dying that we are born to eternal life!”

There are reasons for this sharing of ourselves. Lost men and women are redeemed through our ministry. Christ saw in those He touched infinite possibilities. His joy lay in the miracles of transformation He performed. Herein lies our joy. Talk with a successful literature evangelist; study him/her closely. Notice the vibrancy, the infectious enthusiasm, of these people. One of my annual joys is meeting with them in colloquium and sharing their experiences.

Talk to the people who are giving Bible studies, working on health vans, passing out literature, or conducting public evangelistic meetings. These people are a “breed apart.” They have long ago passed the experimental stage of contact for contact's sake. They are no longer self-congratulatory. They are caught up in the worthiness of a superior cause. They are forgetting themselves into history. They regard pain and frustration as necessary to character development. They are thus the human personification of the inevitable. They are, in Ellen White's words, “the invincible.”

“Our Lord came not to build mountains but to fill holes.”

by Edward Earl Cleveland

Even though Pastor E. E. Cleveland is officially retired after 46 years of ministry, he still teaches at least two courses per quarter at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 6, February 4 - 10

Choose Your Own Adventure



“Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it” (Matthew 10:39, NIV).

Skywriting

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 10 and 11

Skywriting. That's what I wished God were into. Skywriting. I tried to be quiet long enough to listen for that "still, small voice." I begged for Him to turn up the volume on account of my dense-ness. I set my fleece out there, greatly desiring some "word from the Lord." I wanted definite direction—something I could point to and say, "I was called to do thus 'n' such." But I sat there terribly frustrated, feeling too young to make such an important decision and running headlong into my own spiritual inadequacy.

I always envied those people who from birth knew exactly what they wanted to be and forged full steam ahead while I was feeling guilty for spending \$9,000 per year just to take general-education classes.

What was my calling? I knew for sure I didn't want to be a nurse, Bible teacher, or nuclear physicist, and if God knew me so well, why didn't He spell things out a little clearer and give me a hunch as to what I was going to be if I grew up?

It was several years after and many unexpected turns before my calling was made clear. And of all things, He called me to be a Bible teacher! I look upon it now with

much excitement and realize that I needed the time and the experiences that the next few years would afford before I could handle the answer to my most frustrating problem.

Maybe the question is not so much "What does God want me to be?" as it is "OK, since I've got these talents, how can I best use them rightly to represent my Father to the people I find myself working with?"

God doesn't want us all to be pastors. No! He wants us to infiltrate every area of the work force and show people by upright lives and positive dispositions what the Father is like. Think about it. You expect a pastor to do kind things and to speak favorably about God. That expectation, though, is not leveled against accountants, secretaries, or janitors. So when one of these exemplifies Jesus the impact is much greater!

As we ponder the topic of careers and avocations this week, try to keep these two things in mind:

1. Jesus said, "My yoke is easy, and my burden is light" (Matt. 11:30). "Whatever God sends us is made to fit our needs and our abilities exactly!"¹

2. "Talents that are not needed are not bestowed."²

Our God really does have our best interest at heart. Rest assured. We can trust Him.

1. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible: The Gospel of Matthew* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1975), vol. 2, p. 18.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 37.

by Janice Yakush

Janice Yakush is an associate chaplain at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Vocation and Calling

LOGOS

Theme: Vocation and Calling—*Catching the passion of God and participating in His mission and message to the world. How do we become involved with the mission of the church and how does it relate to God's plan for our life?*

There seems to be confusion among many in the church regarding the mission and work of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Like some Vietnam vets who did not know why they were fighting the war or who the enemy was, so the church suffers from a similar dilemma.

My concept of the church's mission and my part in it has slowly evolved. Harry Anderson's painting of Christ standing with a young couple, pointing off to a distant city, summarized much of my early concept of the work of the church. The canvas exuded Christ's concern for people. It also hit me that He was making the commission in Matthew 28:19, 20 a personal assignment. I still hold these as my position, but where I have drastically altered my concept is in the distant-city mentality. I used to envision mission as a paid professional entering cities filled with people he didn't know and preaching the gospel through literature or meetings.

I have since learned it isn't that way. Upon closer inspection something revolutionary leaped out of the Bible at me. It was

shocking, but a real relief. The command to "go" in Matthew 28:19, 20 actually says, "as you are journeying." This has no special idea of traveling to a distant land; its intent is, "as you are going about your daily tasks, witness." Ralph Neighbour puts it this way: "It's not something you go and do, but you do as you go." Look at what that says. The command includes all of us, wherever we are and whatever we are doing. It removes it from the exclusive domain of paid ministry and missionaries, to include all of us. Witnessing becomes enfolded into our everyday life. Christianity is woven throughout all we do. Christians, filled with Christ's character, are to infiltrate every level of society in every land.

Christ's commission to the twelve disciples in Matthew 10 is very similar to our commission. They were to go to their neighbors, friends, relatives, and fellow Jews. They too received the same power and authority promised to us. Their message was the same; i.e., to announce Jesus as the Messiah, and that salvation is available through Him. The only difference is that the disciples were sent out as itinerant preachers, whereas we are to go about our daily tasks witnessing as we go.

Do you want to know how to go about your task in your mission field? Matthew 10 and 11 give some very clear directives. First, Jesus deals with the attitude about the mission. Jesus cares for

by W. Rob Sheppard

Rob Sheppard is chairman of the department of religion at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

people. Go that they may know. Go that they may be set free on this earth and prepared for the one to come. Jesus loves people—He will give us this same compassion, and attitude of love.

That concern of His also applies to us, the ones sent. Matthew 10:14-42 warns us about the reception we will encounter. It's a tough, challenging work. Expect rejection and suffering. The devil and the sinful nature of humans resist any advancement of the kingdom of God. But go undaunted, the reward of seeing people released and happy is worth it.

Chapter 11 portrays God's plan of leaving no stone unturned in His mission of announcing salvation provided through Jesus. He spoke through prophets, through John the Baptist, through His Son, and through the apostles. They preached, taught, healed, comforted, and performed miracles—an all-out, no-holds-barred effort to enlighten the world.

The shocking thing is that many of those who witnessed this divine display of mercy refused it! Those who had been closest to Him and bore His name made the strongest resistance. Matthew is laying the foundation of the rejection of the Jewish nation and taking the gospel to the Gentiles. Listen to this passage and you can hear the words of a frustrated, brokenhearted God; "O, Jerusalem, Jerusalem, How I would have gathered you as a hen gathers her chicks, but you would not."

What is this message they rejected? Matthew 11:27 puts it in a

nutshell, "No one knows the Son except the Father, and no one knows the Father except the Son and those to whom the Son chooses to reveal Him" (NIV). This is it? Yes! John stated the same thing, "And this is life eternal, that they might know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom thou hast sent" (John 17:3). So our task is not spreading mere words, but introducing people to a Person. As illustrated with Israel, they had words but didn't know the Person.

Our task, then, is to witness as we go, giving the beautiful message contained in the last verses of Matthew 11. Tell the people Jesus says, "Come to me, all who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light" (verses 28-30, NIV).

How do you know when God has called you? How do you determine what your lifework should be?

If Jesus called you to participate in a project, what do you think He would say to you in light of your own personality and needs?

If you were asked by Jesus to go on a journey to a neighboring town or a foreign country to preach the gospel, which would be easier for you? Why?

If someone asked you this week what your ministry was, how would you explain it?

How could you tell your neighbor this week that the kingdom is near?

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 10:40-42

When Jesus sent His disciples out they were dependent on the hospitality of the people. There was a blessing to be received by those who willingly provided shelter and food for the traveling disciples, for Jesus said, "He who receives you receives Me, and he who receives Me receives Him who sent Me" (Matt. 10:40, NKJV). This week as we study the mission of the church, as well as our own ministry, let us consider the gift of hospitality.

"Even in our day, angels in human form enter the homes of men and are entertained by them."¹ When three strangers passed by Abraham's encampment he persuaded them to stay and rest awhile, not knowing he was entertaining Christ Himself and two angels. "Abraham stood respectfully beside them while they partook of his hospitality. This kindness he showed them simply as wayfarers, passing strangers, who might never come his way again."²

Jesus said, "He who receives a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward" (Matt. 10:41, NKJV). The widow of Zarephath surely received "a prophet's reward" for her act of

kindness to Elijah. "In this poverty-stricken home the famine pressed sore, and the pitifully meager fare seemed about to fail. The coming of Elijah on the very day when the widow feared that she must give up the struggle to sustain life tested to the utmost her faith in the power of the living God to provide for her necessities."³

"The widow of Zarephath shared her morsel with Elijah, and in return her life and that of her son were preserved. And to all who . . . give sympathy and assistance to others more needy, God has promised great blessing. . . . Our heavenly Father still continues to place in the pathway of His children opportunities that are blessings in disguise; and those who improve these opportunities find great joy. . . . No act of kindness shown in His name will fail to be recognized and rewarded."⁴

"Christ keeps an account of every expense incurred in entertaining for His sake. He supplies all that is necessary for this work. Those who for Christ's sake entertain their brethren, doing their best to make the visit profitable . . . are recorded in heaven as worthy of special blessings."⁵

"Social influence is a wonderful power. We can use it, if we will, as a means of helping those about us."⁶

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 342.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 341.

3. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 130.

4. *Ibid.*, pp. 131, 132.

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 344, 345.

6. *The Adventist Home*, p. 448.

by Glenda Joliiffe

Glenda Joliiffe is the administrative secretary to the vice president for enrollment at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Wednesday, February 7

Discovering One's Talents or Battle Strategy

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 7:7

It was scarcely dawn as a German boat slogged in the direction of a dark floating object. The bow broke a rolling wave as a German soldier leaned over the deck and recognized the object was a dead Allied soldier. Within the dead soldier's uniform was misleading information about the upcoming invasion by the Allies. The information was specifically placed there to lure the Axis powers into moving their troops from the actual site of invasion to another site. The Axis powers took the bait and moved their troops from Normandy to Holland. Meanwhile, the Allied forces invaded Normandy and won a decisive victory. When it comes to war, it is not necessarily how well a battle is fought, but where the battle is fought. This principle also holds true when struggling through the battle of discovering God's will.

There are many different avenues available to God when He chooses to communicate His plans. Waiting on a miraculous sign or a precise answer from God may mean we are searching in the wrong place. Satan distracts us with misleading information, causing us to place our strength on the wrong battlefield.

God can reveal His will in ways that are often overlooked. One way

God guides is through the talents He has given. Talents are direct gifts from God, and with the gifts comes the responsibility to use them constructively. Gifts not used become useless. Jesus told a parable about a master who left on vacation and gave his three servants talents to look after till he returned. To one servant he gave five talents, to the second he gave two, and to the third he gave one. The first two servants put their talents to work and doubled them. But the third servant buried his talent, and when his master returned, his talent was taken away (Matt. 25:14-30).

A good way to discover God's will for our lives is to begin developing the talents He has given. Ability in speaking, in listening, in singing, and even in making money can be used to serve God. The strength used in the battle of trying to determine God's plan for our lives will be more profitably spent in developing the talents He's already given. God has a purpose and a plan for everyone, and at the right time He will open windows, doors, and even tear down walls if He needs to. Our task is to be prepared for such opportunities.

REACT

If you know what your talents are, do you know how to use them for God? Why do you think some people have more talents than others?

by Shirley Hervig

Shirley Hervig is a senior biology and education major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, February 8

Falling in Love

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 6:33

You've fallen in love with Jesus. Congratulations! You'll find Christianity to be exciting, even radical at times. But you find yourself asking, "Now what do I do?"

Let's look at human relationships for a moment. Suppose I fall in love with a young lady. She's everything I've ever dreamed about in a girl. That's great, so far. But now I have to let her know that I'm in love with her. I could do the obvious and just tell her, but as the old saying goes, actions speak louder than words. Besides, as time goes on, she'll want some proof beyond mere words. I can say, "I love you," a million times, but if my actions don't support that, I'm lying. So I give of myself to her. I share my time, my thoughts, my talents, and everything that I have with her. This, combined with my words, lets her know of my love.

A relationship with Jesus is similar. When I tell Jesus I love Him, my actions should support that. After falling in love with Him, I will serve Him, not because I have to, but because I want to.

In the tenth chapter of Matthew, Jesus gives the disciples a commission to minister to people.

First, He tells them to go, then He says to preach. He doesn't leave it at that, however. Jesus goes on to tell them to heal and to give. Not all are called to preach, but everyone has a calling. How can you know what your calling is? Here are a few steps you can follow:

1. Make sure your life is in tune with the will of Jesus Christ.

"Seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you" (Matt. 6:33, NKJV). The rest of the process is wasted time if you don't take care of this first step.

2. Evaluate your gifts and talents.

What things do you do well? What talents has God given you? Look past the obvious, such as artistic talent or speaking ability. Remember, things like friendliness, mercy, and listening are talents also.

3. Look for activities where a person with your gifts could be effective. Ask yourself, How can I best use my talents to serve the Lord?

4. Go do it.

We don't have to wait on the Lord; He's waiting for us.

by Jerry Mahn

Jerry Mahn is a senior religion major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Friday, February 9

In the Midst of Wolves

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 10:16

“Behold, I send you out as sheep in the midst of wolves. Therefore be wise as serpents and harmless as doves” (Matt. 10:16, NKJV). Who are the wolves? What does it mean to be as wise as serpents and as harmless as doves? Later, in verse 22, Jesus says that people will hate us for His name’s sake. Why?

Today in the Adventist Church there appear to be two groups of people. One group believes that the church is growing more and more liberal and leaving behind the tried and true standards. This group abhors the changes in lifestyle and culture. The second group is quite the opposite. It thinks the church is just changing to better meet the needs of changing times. Changes in lifestyle and culture are viewed as normal.

Naturally both groups think they are right, and each thinks the other wrong. The first group calls the second the “L” word—liberal. The second group calls the first the “L” word too—legalistic! It’s interesting how the two groups deal with Matthew 10:16. The first group is more apt to talk about being “hated for my name’s sake.” The theme of being persecuted is more commonly heard. They also think the other group members are the wolves.

In the second group the “wise as serpents and harmless as doves” phrase receives more attention.

While they admit persecution is coming, they work to keep it away as long as possible. This group thinks the bunker mentality of the first group is counterproductive. They speak more of love and mercy and less of standards.

Today church administration at all levels has representatives from both groups. I have observed these groups at local meetings, as well as national. Sometimes I fear that it will be impossible for the groups to coexist. I believe that it’s not a matter of either/or but rather the church needs both. There is a fine line that needs to be drawn between the two.

Being wise as serpents does involve keeping up with the times, but we should not become like the wolves that pursue us.

The context of Matthew 10 is Jesus giving instructions on going out to evangelize the world. The wolves are those who stand against Jesus. Those who hate His followers do so because His followers love Jesus. Rigidly defining what loving Jesus means is pointless. One thing is sure. Jesus admonishes us to give freely as we have freely received (verse 8). This might be common ground upon which the two groups can meet.

REACT

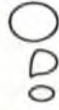
Have you observed the development of two groups within the Adventist Church? Do you have some observations on each group? What are they? Are there other points that might bring these two groups together?

by Victor F. Brown

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

Life at the Crossroads

A DAY OF
REST...



CHRISTIANITY

AT ITS

BEST?

“ ‘He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters’ ” (Matthew 12:30, NIV).

Sunday, February 11

The Mailman

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 12:31, 32

The mailman is on his way to deliver an important package. He is traveling on a narrow mountain road that is becoming narrower as he goes. He has a fellow worker with him who is watching the edge of the road so the truck won't tumble down the side of the mountain. The mailman asks, "How is it on the edge?" and his coworker answers, "You're OK." The driver feels the right front tire sink a little and asks, "Are we OK over there?" The coworker says, "Yes. As long as you're worried about going over the edge, we can't go over the e-e-e-e-e . . ."

"How do I know whether I've committed the unpardonable sin?"

"If you're worried about it, that must mean you haven't committed it."

I can't count the number of times I've heard this question and answer in my years as a Bible teacher. Matthew 12:31, 32 contains the scriptural substance for the doctrine of the unpardonable sin. Jesus states that anything can be forgiven except blaspheming or rejecting the Holy Spirit. This doctrine has been the source of much anxiety and insecurity among Adventist youth. Many are worried they might have committed the unpardonable sin and be eternally lost. And then many take false security in the counsel that worrying about it means you're OK.

The study caused me to ask why this scripture about the unpardonable sin was in the context of Matthew 12 and 13. In chapter 12 Jesus is confronted by the Pharisees over the Sabbath. Nearly every time the Gospel refers to Jesus and the Pharisees, the Sabbath is involved. It always surrounds Jesus' conduct on the Sabbath. To the Pharisees, Jesus is desecrating the Sabbath. Their traditions concerning the Sabbath formed the cornerstone of the legalistic system developed by the Pharisees. They believed that the sum of their works equaled their security with God. Many today in their anxiety over the unpardonable sin find themselves in the same position. They want to be sure to have all the externals perfect, hoping that this will insure their salvation.

In Matthew 12:31, 32 Jesus goes to the heart of the matter. He tries to focus on the real problem, rejecting the Spirit. Later, in chapter 13 He tells of the different ground the seed falls on. The message is, Accept the leading of the Spirit, be good soil for the seed to grow in. By taking these steps you will come to know the Sabbath as a joy. You will know what it means to do good on the Sabbath day.

In this week's lesson there are many avenues for discussion. Sabbath observance, the unpardonable sin, witnessing, and Christian growth. I hope you will strive to understand these issues in the context of these chapters.

by Victor F. Brown

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

The Nature and Basis of Christian Service

LOGOS

Theme: Self or Others—*Service is based on a divine call that, if accepted, will enable us to recognize the value and dignity of every human being.*

1. Human Value and Service (read Matthew 12:1-21)

“How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!” (Matt. 12:12, NIV).

According to Matthew 12, Jesus perceived Himself as a servant. This self-identity was based on His understanding of the Old Testament Messianic prophecies, particularly those found in Isaiah (cf. Matt. 12:17-21; Isa. 42:1-4). His life of service was not motivated exclusively by His divine call. There was a second aspect to it: the value of a human being.

True service begins with the recognition of the value of each person. Very often we limit that value, and as a result our sense of service is also restricted. We assign a higher value to certain aspects of a human being than to the whole person (skin color, citizenship, education, economic status, etc.). We may even give a higher value to an animal than to a human being. Jesus said, “How much more valuable is a man than a sheep!”

Surprisingly, the Pharisees based their devaluation of human beings on their interpretation of

the law. For the Pharisees, human existence had one basic goal, namely, obedience to the law. Jesus' goal was service to mankind. Consequently, any misguided religious fervor that would undermine the value of a person was condemned by Jesus. None of the laws God gave were intended to devalue a person's worth. The Pharisees found such argument difficult to accept. Jesus reminded them of David. When he and his companions were hungry they went into the Temple and ate the consecrated bread. The well-being of a person is of much more value than just any interpretation of the law.

Somehow the Pharisees had not grasped the true nature of service. For them it was more important to “keep” the Sabbath than to alleviate human suffering during the Sabbath. They considered the Sabbath and service to others as incompatible!

But Jesus had a deeper understanding of the law. For Him the law did not overrule the value of the person. On the contrary it helped to establish it. The Sabbath and the physical restoration of man can coexist. Sabbath and redemption are inseparable. Only a legalistic concept of the law will rend them asunder. In that case, contrary to the law's intention, the value of the person is not recognized and the spirit of service is replaced by one of judgment.

How far should we go in our

by Angel Manuel Rodriguez

Dr. Rodriguez is professor of religion at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

desire to serve? Are there traditions today that we could break in favor of serving someone on the Sabbath? Could you give some examples?

2. Conflict and Service **(read Matthew 12:22-45)**

“He who is not with me is against me, and he who does not gather with me scatters” (Matt. 12:30, NIV).

Throughout His ministry Jesus was restoring a sense of self-worth to every individual. The Pharisees, through their understanding of the law, have contributed in a distinct way to the disfigurement of a person's value.

Breaking through those barriers of social and religious prejudices required a revelation of divine power. There always seems to be opposition to any attempt to restore dignity to human beings. Jesus' loving power was manifested specially through healing. The eruption of that power into human history astonished the observers. They wondered whether Jesus was or was not the expected Saviour.

The Pharisees thought they knew the answer: the source of Jesus' power was demonic. They assigned unselfish love and the alleviation of suffering to the very source of selfishness and hatred, to Satan.

Jesus perceived the lack of logic in their argument. He said, “If Satan drives out Satan, he is divided against himself. How then can his kingdom stand?” (Matt. 12:26, NIV). By ascribing the work of the Spirit to Satan the Pharisees were siding with evil. The restoration of human beings was not their mission. Jesus' concern for them led Him to advise with respect to the dangers inherent in their attitude (see Matt. 12:30-37).

Jesus argued that true concern for others is not merely an external act. Goodness or evil is located at the very center of human

existence, in the human heart. That center could be controlled by the Spirit of God (12:28) or by demonic forces (12:43-45).

Jesus was totally possessed by the Spirit, and as a result love controlled His actions. His most sublime miracle was about to happen. In order to restore human dignity and ultimate value He was going to offer His life on behalf of mankind in an unselfish act of love (12:38-42). The human race would again be what it once was, a part of the heavenly family (12:46-50).

Jesus accused the Pharisees of being a “brood of vipers.” Is that a loving thing to say to those who disagree with you? Can you love those who are trying to kill you? Why or why not?

3. Transformation and Service **(read Matthew 13:1-23, 31-33)**

“What was sown on good soil is the man who hears the word and understands it. He produces a crop” (Matt. 13:23, NIV).

Matthew 13 is a collection of parables. In three of these parables humanity is represented by lifeless objects (the parables of the sower, 13:1-23; the mustard seed, 13:31, 32; and the yeast, 13:33). The intention is not to diminish the dignity of humans. The objects mentioned are valuable ones.

In the parable of the sower we are likened to *the ground*. Ground is a positive symbol. It contains nutrients and minerals indispensable for the growth of a plant or a tree. In the parable of the mustard seed we are compared to a *field*, and in the next parable to *flour* (13:33). These are important and priceless goods. They all have one thing in common: they do not possess life.

Deep inside the seed lies the mystery of life. The ground provides a womb for the seed. Inside it there is a glorious explosion of

life. Seed and ground seem to merge themselves into each other, and the result is a new plant of wheat or mustard.

In Jesus' parable the new plant comes to represent us. We are no longer ground, but a living plant. It is a fruit-bearing plant. It comes into existence to share its life with others. Its usefulness and genuineness are determined by the fact that it produces a fruit that would benefit others. The power of life transformed the individual from ground to fruitful plant, from flour to dough.

What is motivating you to seek an academic or professional degree? Education transforms a person. Are you being transformed in order to serve others?

4. Self-Service? (read Matthew 13:45, 46)

"When a man found it, he hid it again, and then in his joy went and sold all he had and bought that field" (Matt. 13:44, NIV).

Two other parables describe human beings as investors (the hidden treasure, and the pearl, 13:44-46). Once more Jesus describes people as capable beings. He is able to recognize that which is priceless. A man found a treasure in a field that was not his. He wanted to possess the treasure. There was only one legal way to do it. He must buy the field. So he went and sold everything he had in order to buy it.

The next parable is about a merchant. He was always looking for fine pearls. Sometimes we overemphasize the total corruption of humanity. According to Jesus, humans look for the best. Unfortunately, misguided by our fallen natures, we accept what is evil. But the possibility of finding a pearl of great value is still there. The man in the parable found it. To possess it, he sold

everything he had.

Do these parables suggest that religion is a matter of personal gain? Do they imply that we pursue Jesus for selfish reasons?

5. Preserving a Spirit of Service (read Matthew 13:24-30, 36-43, 47-50)

"The servants asked him, 'Do you want us to go and pull them up?' 'No,' He answered, 'because while you are pulling the weeds, you may root up the wheat with them'" (Matt. 13:28, 29, NIV).

Human beings tend to catalog people. Some are wheat; others, weeds. Then the tendency is to uproot the weeds. But Jesus knew how dangerous it was to do this. The parables of the weeds (13:24-30; 36-43) and the net (13:47-50) forbid God's people to destroy those who look like weeds or bad fish. That is God's responsibility. At the harvest, angels will gather wheat and destroy the weeds.

Under the water the net captures all kinds of fish. The net is, of course, unable to distinguish the good ones from the bad. But the fisherman knows. He will preserve the good fish and destroy the bad.

These two parables challenge us not to pass judgment on other human beings. Our call to serve humanity is limited when we do so. It creates in us a feeling of superiority. As a result, we conclude that those whom we reject do not deserve our love and concern. We are not willing to be their servants.

Jesus informs us that until the end of human history we are to look at every person as a precious child of God. Service requires a recognition, not of a person's limitations, but of his value.

Doesn't the church have the right to determine who can be a church member? How can the church perform that function in a caring way?

Tuesday, February 13

Service by and for the Individual

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 28:19, 20

Each year that passes, our church becomes more institutionalized. We have the ABC, ADRA, VOP, etc. With all of these groups it becomes easier and easier just to write a check and think we have done our part to serve people. While all these groups need our financial support, the following counsel sheds light on an important aspect of service.

"Everywhere there is a tendency to substitute the work of organizations for individual effort. Human wisdom tends to consolidation, to centralization, to the building up of great churches and institutions. Multitudes leave to institutions and organizations the work of benevolence; they excuse themselves from contact with the world, and their hearts grow cold. . . . Christ commits to His followers an individual work—a work that cannot be done by proxy. Ministry to the sick and the poor, the giving of the gospel to the lost, is not to be left to committees or organized charities. Individual responsibility, individual effort, personal sacrifice, is the requirement of the gospel."¹

"God expects personal service

from everyone to whom He has entrusted a knowledge of the truth for this time. Not all can go as missionaries to foreign lands, but all can be home missionaries in their families and neighborhoods."²

"The real character of the church is measured, not by the high profession she makes, not by the names enrolled upon the church book, but by what she is actually doing for the Master, by the number of her persevering, faithful workers. Personal interest, and vigilant, individual effort will accomplish more for the cause of Christ than can be wrought by sermons or creeds."³

"The Lord desires us to use every gift we have; and if we do this we shall have greater gifts to use. He does not supernaturally endow us with the qualifications we lack; but while we use that which we have, He will work with us to increase and strengthen every faculty. By every wholehearted, earnest sacrifice for the Master's service, our powers will increase."⁴

REACT

1. How do you make sure that zeal to serve isn't legalism?

2. Can a desire to serve personally conflict with institutional service? Why?

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 147.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 30.

3. *Christian Service*, p. 12.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 103.

by Victor F. Brown

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

Telephone for Love?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Proverbs 3:3, 4, NIV

Love and faithfulness are two key elements that have almost always been part of the personalities of people who have made resounding contributions to our society. And today, on Valentine's Day, we think of love and its many virtues. When love and faithfulness become the backbone of our lives, then we can truly serve.

By nature humans are self-centered but can be transformed. Acts of loving service for others can lead to success. This can be shown historically by the lives of people who have helped shape our society. Often their accomplishments can be correlated to an act of love done faithfully in service.

It is well known that Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone. But what was his motivation for inventing this modern-day necessity? Before Bell invented the telephone he taught speech to deaf children. In an attempt to create an apparatus to help them, he began to experiment. Although he seemed to fail, his apparatus in the process of time became the telephone of today.*

Imagine that! A man concerned with making life better for deaf children creates an apparatus that has mutated into an in-

strument with unnumbered technological uses. Government, business, and other modern-day services would move slowly, and communication would be tedious if it were not for the telephone.

Bell is only one individual who acted out of love and had an impact on society. There are many others, but the best example will always be what Christ did for us on the cross!

Ralph Waldo Emerson said it well when he wrote:

"To laugh often and love much; to win the respect of intelligent persons and the affection of children; to earn the approbation of honest critics and to endure the betrayal of false friends; to appreciate beauty; to find the best in others; to give of one's self; to leave the world a bit better, whether by a healthy child, a garden patch, or a redeemed social condition; to have played and laughed with enthusiasm and sung with exaltation; to know that even one life has breathed easier because you have lived—this is to have succeeded."

Somehow we must all strive to emulate the characters of those who served others unselfishly. They are the real heroes and champions, because they succeeded in helping someone else. It is still possible to join the ranks of these great people. Shouldn't we enlist now?

*Catherine MacKenzie, *Alexander Graham Bell: The Man Who Contracted Space* (New York: Grosset and Dunlop, 1928), pp. 56, 57.

by Ivan Bartolome

Ivan Bartolome is a senior corporate communications major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, February 15

Learning to Serve God

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 12:30

People attend church and claim to be Christians for many different reasons. Unfortunately, some only put on airs to impress other people or to ease their conscience. What is more unfortunate is that it's usually these same people who busy themselves with other people's business. In doing this they become caught up in self instead of in serving others. How can we as Christians live a life of service instead of self-gratification?

1. Serve only one master.

If we are to serve God we must have a firm foundation from which to build a relationship with Him. By getting to know Him we can see how He lived a life of service. How amazing, considering He is the Lord of all!

2. Recognize the Sabbath as an important part of service.

The Lord performed many acts of service on the Sabbath. The Pharisees were not rooted firmly in a relationship with Christ, and they criticized His actions. Christ touched the lives of so many people by serving them in whatever capacity He was needed. God made the Sabbath for humans to express His love

for them. He wants us to let His love shine through us every day. The Sabbath is an extra special day to show someone what God can do for them.

3. Avoid getting bogged down in ceremony.

The way we worship God is important, but the rituals and symbols should be observed because of our love for God, and not for the sake of themselves. If we seek always to do for others, then we will be less likely to worship the Lord simply because it's routine.

4. Serve with modesty.

Serving others should be done out of love, and not as an act to impress someone else. Christ strove only to give glory to His Father. Our acts of kindness should be a means of witnessing for our Father—not of seeking glory for ourselves.

5. Learn to love others.

If we have an attitude of service to others God can create in our hearts a love for all people.

REACT

How could we effectively serve and witness to those who do not wish to be witnessed to or served? Christ served those who rejected Him. Why is it so difficult to serve those who reject us?

by Michelle Presley

Michelle Presley is a junior journalism major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

“Sheep in the Pit”—Sabbaths

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 12:11

While a graduate teaching assistant at Brigham Young University I made many acquaintances with undergraduate students who took classes from me. It didn't take long for many of them to realize that, although I was a religious person, I was not a member of their church. Many questions soon came up concerning Seventh-day Adventist beliefs, including Sabbath observance.

One Sabbath afternoon while on a walk, I ran into one of my students at his apartment, and immediately got into a discussion on Sabbath observance. Matthew 12:11 came up. “What man shall there be among you, that shall have one sheep, and if it fall into a pit on the sabbath day, will he not lay hold on it, and lift it out?” He then mentioned that his “sheep in the pit” was snow skiing on Sundays—his Sabbath. You can well imagine the discussion that followed. I explained to him my interpretation of Matthew 12:11, and after some rationalization he decided that he was probably stretching his interpretation of Scripture.

Fourteen years later, his rationalization of acceptable Sabbath observance and of what doing good on the Sabbath really meant still frustrates me. Although many people rationalize their Sabbath activities based on

their own views, background, and philosophy, Ellen White gives us these principles of Sabbath observance:

1. “Refrain from physical labor.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 703.

2. “Let not the precious hours of the Sabbath be wasted in bed.”—*Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 357.

3. “The parents may take their children outdoors to view God in nature.”—*Manuscript 3*, 1879.

What is your opinion concerning acceptable Sabbath activities? Consider the following questions:

1. What types of recreational activity would you feel comfortable doing on the Sabbath? Are there differences among the following activities: walking, jogging, cycling, canoeing, floating down a river on a tube, boating, water-skiing, swimming, snow-shoeing, snow-skiing or fishing?

2. Since “the sabbath was made for man, and not man for the sabbath” (Mark 2:27), what should one's governing guidelines be for proper Sabbath activities?

3. The “sheep in the pit” rationalization is heard many times. What do you feel are legitimate “sheep in the pit” experiences?

4. Are there limits for Sabbath work in the “healing arts”? For example, is it acceptable for a nurse to work the majority of her time during the Sabbath hours? Why?

5. How can we keep the spirit of service on the Sabbath alive and avoid legalistic approaches to Sabbath observance without drifting into laxity?

by Thomas G. Bunch

Thomas G. Bunch is chairman of the department of health and fitness at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

A Mind-Jarring Look at the New Age

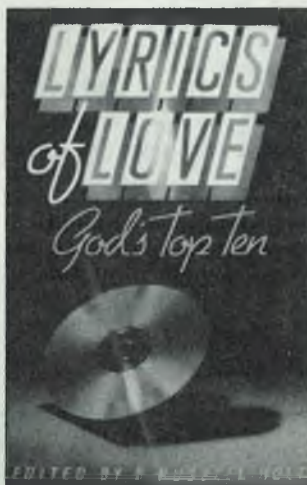


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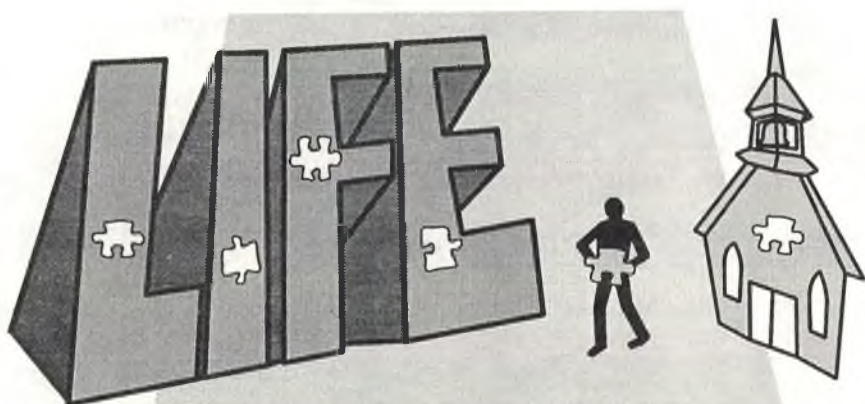
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Lesson 8, February 18 - 24

The Problem of the New Idea



Where Does My Religion

Fit In?

“ ‘The things that come out of the mouth come from the heart, and these make a man “unclean” ’ ”(Matthew 15:18, NIV).

Sunday, February 18

Stumbling Stones

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 14 and 15

Let's imagine we are hiking in a rocky, mountainous area. As we wind along the path, it becomes even more difficult because of the conditions we encounter. Part of the path is covered with gravel, making it difficult to keep our footing on the grades. In another place there has been a rock slide.

Giant boulders block the pass, and it is necessary to go carefully around them. There are also places where the rocks are jagged and have sharp edges, making it easy for us to be cut if not careful.

Life is a lot like hiking on a rough pathway. In Matthew 14 and 15 we find examples of "rocks" that can make the path that leads to eternal life difficult to walk unless Jesus is our guide.

The first one is DOUBT. A relative of Christ, who stood against rulers to defend the cause of his Lord, dies in prison, and Jesus seems to do nothing to help. John sends his disciples to ask Jesus whether He is the one who is to

come or whether they should look for another.

A second stumbling stone is a LACK OF FAITH. The disciples appear not to believe that Jesus, the bread of life, will be able to provide for the 5,000. Later, when Peter faces the huge waves on either side of him, he sinks when looking away from the Almighty.

Another stumbling stone is TRADITION. There were some religious leaders who were so concerned about their particular BRANCH of religion that they lost sight of the TRUNK—Jesus—the essence of religion.

This week as you study, take time to consider the stumbling stones in your life. Are they similar to those the disciples faced? When the stumbling stones are before you, you need to remember the words of the Lord, "Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the Lord thy God, he it is who doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee" (Deut. 31:6). When you look back you'll be able to see the rays of light.

by Werner Eliud Gil

Werner Eliud Gil is a senior theology major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Real Blessings for Real People

LOGOS

Theme: Relevance—*The message of God through Jesus is one that is both theologically significant and practical. It is this relevance that draws our attention to this week's study. Just how can the lesson of the feeding of the 5,000 and the discussion about uncleanness be significant and relevant for our life today?*

1. Dealing With the Death of a Friend (read Matthew 14:1-12)

"And his disciples came and took the body and buried it; and they went and told Jesus" (Matt. 14:12, RSV).

Herod Antipas was tetrarch, or prince, under the Romans, of Galilee and Peraea from 4 B.C. until he was deposed in A.D. 39. He was the son of Herod the Great (the Herod of Luke 2). His current wife, Herodias, was his niece, and the previous wife of his half brother, Herod Philip. Herod Antipas had divorced his first wife to marry Herodias, and Josephus says the Jews took exception to the marriage.

John publicly disapproved of the marriage, telling Herod, "It is not lawful for thee to have her." When he imprisoned John at the time of the Passover in A.D. 29, Herod said it was because he feared a public uprising by John's followers. John was sent to Macherus, a fortress near the Dead Sea. (Later, when Herod's army—garrisoned at Macherus—was de-

stroyed by King Aretas of Arabia, his first father-in-law, the people considered it a just punishment from God for what Herod had done to John.)

Herod followed the Greek practice of birthday celebrations with feasts, dancing girls, and lots of wine. He threw a drunken party a few weeks before Passover in A.D. 30, and Herodias persuaded her daughter Salome to dance for Herod's guests, a very unusual act for a royal princess.

After the dance, Herod, in sweeping hyperbole, offered her anything in the kingdom. In consultation with her vengeful mother, Salome asked for the head of John the Baptist. Even the drunks at the party were aghast at this request, but in the superstitious belief that even a wicked oath must be kept, Herod gave her what she wanted.

Herod had only a temporary victory. The story raced through the bazaars in Palestine. John's words continued to speak, even to Herod. When he heard about Jesus, he trembled: "This is John . . . risen from the grave."

John's disciples did the only thing they knew to do. "They went and told Jesus." He alone could give them the power to get through such a time.

How did Jesus handle His friend/cousin's death? Verse 13 says he withdrew to a "lonely place apart." He acknowledged that He needed time alone to think, to pray. Jesus also handled the tragedy by serving others

by Sharon H. Leach

Sharon Leach is vice president for advancement at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

(verse 14). He looked for ways to help and, in helping, He was comforted.

2. Being Fed by Jesus (read Matthew 14:13-21)

"And when he had given thanks, he broke it, and said, 'This is my body which is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'" (1 Corinthians 11:24, RSV).

Mark says Jesus and the disciples left Capernaum for Bethsaida Julius at the northern end of the Lake of Galilee "privately." Still the people watched them and ran the four miles around the lake to the plain of El Batiha. Jesus' group had a little time together in a secluded spot before the crowd discovered their exact location.

Jesus at once began healing and encouraging the people. Since the gathering was a spontaneous event, the people had brought no food, and by evening Jesus knew they were hungry. He asked the disciples to get them food. They, of course, protested that all they had were five barley loaves and two smoked or pickled fishes, the food of poor people. That food, incidentally, was not manna from heaven, but the result of the work and kindness of a little boy's mother.

There was something special about the way Jesus broke the bread and gave thanks. The usual prayer at the beginning of a Jewish meal is "Blessed art thou, O Lord our God, king of the world, who hast brought forth bread from the earth."¹ The disciples saw Him do this daily, and at Emmaus, He was known to them in breaking the bread.

The miracle occurred while the bread was in the hands of Jesus. And the people were satisfied; this was not just a small portion of food, but enough to fill each person. Ephesians 3:20 says that God is "able to do exceeding abun-

dantly above all that we ask or think."

3. The Importance of Knowing Who Jesus Is (read Matthew 14:22-33)

John 6:14 says that just after the miracle, the people concluded that Jesus was "the Prophet who is to come into the world" (NIV). Anyone who could feed multitudes, raise the dead, and heal the sick could deliver Israel from the bondage of Rome.

The disciples, led by Judas,² were ready to crown Jesus king. Since it would have brought His ministry to a premature close, Jesus asserted His authority and forced the disciples to leave "straightaway."

The Sea of Galilee—really a lake—is 13 miles long and seven miles wide. It's 650 feet below sea level, and at the north end is Mount Hermon. Air currents often roll down the surrounding hills and sweep the lake with sudden, fierce storms. That's exactly what happened that night. The disciples rowed hard for eight hours and got only three or four miles across the lake. They were exhausted and discouraged. But even while Jesus was praying in the hills above the lake, He never lost sight of His disciples on the lake. They were, after all, obeying His instructions when the storm came, just as storms come to good people now.

Sometime between 3 and 6 a.m., Jesus walked out to meet them. And the disciples thought He was a ghost! But His voice reassured them. His reply, "It is I," can also be translated, "I am," which were words God often used to identify Himself.

Now Jesus likely didn't intend to have Peter walk on the water. "But if his imperfect faith inspired such a course of action, Jesus was ready to accept it in that spirit."³ "He does not rebuke

us for attempting too much, but for trusting Him too little.”¹

Peter had been a fisherman all his life, and he knew how to swim. But in this sea, even the boat was sinking. He began to concentrate on the problem (the wind) instead of the solution (Jesus). And he sank. Jesus “immediately” saved him. There was no delay on Jesus’ part to a cry for salvation. First He saved Peter, then He rebuked him.

4. What Is Real Unclean-ness? (read Matthew 15:1-20)

“But that Israel who pursued the righteousness which is based on law did not succeed in fulfilling that law. Why? Because they did not pursue it through faith, but as if it were based on works” (Rom. 9:31, 32, RSV).

The Pharisees who came to visit Jesus after the feeding of the 5,000 were probably part of an official Sanhedrin delegation seeking an excuse to bring Jesus’ ministry to a close. They didn’t attack Jesus directly, because they didn’t want to offend those who worshiped Him—the simple people of Galilee. Instead, they attacked Jesus’ disciples for distributing bread to the multitude without washing their hands first.

This hand-washing was strictly ritual, not for sanitary purposes. Pious Jews poured a small amount of water on the fingers of first one hand and then the other. The hand was tilted so that the water ran from the palm to the wrist—no farther. It must not run back onto the palm. Then they alternately rubbed one hand with the palm of the other. The minimum amount of water was one and a half eggshells full. If no water were available, they could just go through the motions.

The tradition Jesus criticizes in verse 3 was the mass of oral, rabbinical regulations that had grown up around the Torah. They

were always passed from rabbi to pupil in oral form, and they came to be considered more sacred than the Ten Commandments. As an example, He cites, “Corban,” the dedication of something a person owned as an offering to the Lord. It sounds like a noble idea, but the greedy rabbis and their parishioners didn’t dedicate gifts in that spirit. If a man pronounced something “Corban,” no one, including his parents, was permitted to touch it, yet the man could use it all his life. In this way he avoided his duty to his parents, and Jesus said that broke the commandment of God.

Verses 10 to 20, as the context makes plain, are about the ritual of hand-washing, not the unclean foods as set out in Leviticus 11. If Jesus had meant to eliminate the distinction between clean and unclean food, Peter would not later have reacted as he did when asked in his dream to eat unclean meat (Acts 10:9-18).

What Jesus did say was that defilement of the soul is far worse than ritual defilement of the body. And nothing from outside can defile a man unless it finds a welcome inside.

Jesus was a devout Jew. The fringe, or tassel, on His garment (Matthew 14:36) marked Him as such, for Numbers 15:38 required Jewish men to wear this. His public criticism of rabbinical tradition was a watershed in His ministry, an irrevocable act. He had made the momentous break with tradition. In Matthew 15:12 we see that even the disciples had doubts about this course.

5. What Is Christian Faith? (read Matthew 15:21-28)

One of the characters in the story *Miracle on Thirty-fourth Street* defined faith thus: “Faith is believing in things when your common sense tells you not to.”

Immediately after the clean/un-

clean controversy, Jesus left the land of His birth for the first time to go into Gentile territory—the Roman region of Syria. He had less than a year until His death, and He wanted to teach the disciples about working for the non-Jews, who were also candidates for the kingdom.

Kneeling before Him, the Canaanite woman asks Jesus to heal her daughter grievously vexed with a demon. She calls Him “Son of David,” a Messianic title.

In Matthew 15:12, the disciples are portrayed as very worried about the Pharisees’ opinion of Jesus, so now He acts like a Pharisee to get their reaction. Unfortunately, they’re not quick to pick up on His act. They feel she’s attracting too much attention to them and ask Him to send her away.

The witty dialogue that follows between Jesus and the woman is for the benefit of the disciples. He had confidence that her faith would not fail (don’t forget 1 Corinthians 10:13) as together they taught the disciples that God’s grace was for all people.

The woman won Jesus, not by her wit, but by her quick faith. She knew what God would do, even when her senses told her something different. She knew He would deal compassionately with her. He had promised. (Isaiah

49:25, RSV, says, “I will save your children.”) And He did—instantly!

6. Another Feeding of Spiritual Food (read Matthew 15:32-39)

“And I have other sheep, that are not of this fold; I must bring them also, and they will heed my voice. So there shall be one flock, one shepherd” (John 10:16, RSV).

This second feeding of a multitude—this time about 4,000 people—took place in the early summer of A.D. 30. Most of the people in this crowd were Gentiles, and this gathering seems to have been a planned event, perhaps like a camp meeting.

It’s hard to believe that the disciples were so slow-witted about where to find food, since they’d seen Jesus feed 5,000 people only a few months before. But “Some of us are too conscious of similar unbelief in ourselves, in spite of repeated miracles of grace, to wonder long at the blindness of the apostles.”⁵

But that first crowd was made up of Jews, who deserved the bread of heaven, while these were Gentiles! “To the disciples the amazing and unexpected thing was not that Jesus *could* supply the bread, but rather that He *would* do so for Gentiles.”⁶ This second miracle indicates that Jesus would give His life for all the world, to be the living Bread for all people.

1. *The Interpreter’s Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1951), vol. 7, p. 431.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 718.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 416, 417.

4. Charles R. Erdman, *The Gospel of Matthew: An Exposition* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 134.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 144.

6. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 424.

Look Ma, No Boat!

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 14:29-31

In Matthew 14 there is found the story of Jesus walking on the water, and how He calmed the fierce storm. But a deeper message can be found in Peter's experience.

"Looking unto Jesus, Peter walks securely; but as in self-satisfaction he glances back toward his companions in the boat, his eyes are turned from the Saviour. . . . He is afraid. For a moment Christ is hidden from his view, and his faith gives way. He begins to sink. . . . Peter lifts his eyes from the angry waters, and fixing them upon Jesus, cries, 'Lord, save me.' Immediately Jesus grasps his outstretched hand, saying, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?'"¹

Jesus and a silent Peter returned to the boat. Peter "had no reason to boast over his fellows, for through unbelief and self-exaltation he had very nearly lost his life. . . . It was on the point where he thought himself strong that Peter was weak; and not until he discerned his weakness could he realize his need of dependence upon Christ."²

"When trouble comes upon us, how often we are like Peter! We

look upon the waves, instead of keeping our eyes fixed upon the Saviour. Our footsteps slide, and the proud waters go over our souls. Jesus did not bid Peter come to Him that he should perish; He does not call us to follow Him, and then forsake us. . . .

"Those who fail to realize their constant dependence upon God will be overcome by temptation. . . . Only through realizing our own weakness and looking steadfastly unto Jesus can we walk securely."³

"Doubts and fears grow by indulgence, and the more they are indulged, the harder are they to overcome. It is safe to let go every earthly support and take the hand of Him who lifted up and saved the sinking disciple on the stormy sea."⁴

The important message we can learn from Peter's experience on the water is that we need to hold on to our faith and give our doubts and fears to Jesus. He is the one in control, not us. He is the one who can grab our hands when we are sinking and lift us up.

REACT

What are some doubts or fears in your life that interfere with your relationship with Jesus? How can you start to let go of them?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 381.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 381, 382.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 382.

4. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 558.

by Becky Parrish

Becky Parrish is a senior corporate communications major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Wednesday, February 21

Are We Too Deaf to Hear?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 13:10, 11

The billboard advertisement startled me! "Jesus Is Healing the Sick: The Blind See, the Lame Walk, the Deaf Hear! Next Exit." Why should that sign startle me? Why don't we see miracles? Jesus healed everyone in His day, didn't He?

I can identify with the stories in Matthew 14 and 15. I know what it is like to have a friend die, to want to be alone, to be hungry, to be afraid of ghosts, to find myself drowning (perhaps not in water). I have seen handicapped people. We have problems and we think, If Jesus just lived on earth today there would be no adversity.

But as I reread these two chapters I discovered I had been reading selectively. I had noticed the miracles, but not the difficulties.

Notice these examples. 1. When Jesus learns of John's death, He doesn't go to raise him as He did Lazarus. He doesn't even go to see John's headless corpse. He just goes away to be alone, perhaps to grieve (Matt. 14:12, 13). 2. Jesus commands the disciples to leave without Him (14:22) for the other shore. The waves are high, the wind contrary. The disciples are exhausted after rowing many hours. When Jesus comes He nearly frightens them to death (14:26). 3. Jesus does not always speak words of comfort and cheer (15:3-9). The Pharisees resented being called hypocritical lawbreakers.

4. Jesus ignores a woman who is earnestly pleading for Him to help her demon-possessed daughter (15:21-23). When she persists He tells her He didn't come to help people from her race, He just came to help God's people—the Jews. She kneels, begging for help. He calls her a dog (15:23-26), saying He can't give the children's bread to the dogs. She begs for a crumb. Finally Jesus grants her request (15:28).

Perhaps our problems are not all that different from problems in Jesus' own day. Perplexities would still exist for us even if Jesus were walking the earth today. The trials of those people developed their patience and faith. It was not pleasant for them during the ordeal. I'm sure they were often full of doubts and discouragement. The relevance of Matthew 14 and 15 may be found in their teaching us to expect adversity even as we walk with Jesus; to trust when there are no miracles; to see trouble as an opportunity. Are we too deaf to hear the whole story?

REACT

1. How do you feel about Jesus' implying that the woman was a dog? In what ways does Jesus treat her as she might have expected from a Jewish male, yet at the same time let her know that He is different and she can press her case on Him?

2. Can you think of other instances when Jesus related in startling ways to people?

by Ron Jolliffe

Ron Jolliffe is an assistant professor of religion at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

What God Can Do With So Little

HOW-TO

Key Text: Proverbs 3:5, 6

The writer starts with a word. The sculptor a piece of wood. The painter his palette.

Just as these creators start small, so did God. He took a piece of clay and gently, with meticulous care, made His children.

Isn't it amazing what God can do with so little? I can look at my life in the past four years and see how far I've come, and know that it's only because of divine guidance.

So, now I'm a senior about to make major decisions about my life, and I catch myself making decisions without Him. Making decisions without Him is like trying to put together a jigsaw puzzle. Let's see, I like this piece; it's such a nice color of orange. Uh-oh, it doesn't fit. But I like orange. Here, I'll take the scissors and round off the corner and maybe straighten this curve a bit, there. Now it should fit. Uh-oh.

If we try to make the pieces fit, they will never mesh as beautifully as God's choices, no matter how much trimming we do.

Matthew 14:13-21 helps us to understand what Jesus is capable of. In the texts, Jesus is preaching to the multitude, and the day is about to end. Jesus realizes the people must be hungry, so He takes five loaves of bread and two fish and feeds them—all of them.

If Jesus can feed the five thou-

sand plus with five loaves of bread and two fish, imagine what He can do with your decisions concerning what to major in or where to work. Trust Him.

There are several things to consider once you have decided to let God make of your life what He will.

First, in our daily lives, we need to know God before we can know His will. I pray for God to be my friend who will give loving guidance, not general "Dear Abby" spiritual advice. We must spend time with God daily by reading His Word.

Second, don't play games with God. I've asked for signs as answers. I've even considered asking God to make my toothbrush wet in the morning and I'll accept that as a sign (I don't have a fleece). Know God so well that you will hear His still voice, and you won't need a wet toothbrush to tell you what to do.

Third, have faith in Him. Know that His will is best for you, and even if you do make the wrong decision He will continue to walk beside you.

Finally, and most important, look back. Remember where the Lord has led you in the past. That He has brought you through hard times. That He loves you. Always remember.

REACT

How can we today hear the "still voice" of God? What does it mean to hear it?

by Nora Peppers

Nora Peppers is a senior communications/broadcasting student at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Friday, February 23

A Day in the Life of Jesus

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 6:34

Matthew 14 illustrates a time in our life that we all eventually encounter. We receive news we have lost a loved one. In verse 12 Jesus receives the news about one of His family members, John the Baptist. John didn't just die; He was murdered. As Jesus did, we try to seek solitude or safety in order to grieve, to find peace and gain strength. It is difficult to find this time, because life must go on as friends, loved ones, and others press against us to receive the nourishment of our friendship and kindnesses.

Jesus is being pressed not only by one or two people, but by 5,000! Yet, He miraculously meets their needs. But before He feeds the 5,000 He desires that His disciples see that they have a part in meeting human needs. In the same way He speaks to us today as He gives us the talents, energies, and funds to reach out to those for whom He lived and died.

So He says to all of us, "Give ye them to eat." As we do so, however, we should try and bear in mind that Jesus is the true power behind the merciful acts of kindnesses and miracles performed. As we consider the bread that was given that day, "It is the

word of God, the impartation of His life, that gives life to the seed; and of that life, we, in eating the grain, become partakers. This, God desires us to discern; He desires that even in receiving our daily bread we may recognize His agency and may be brought into closer fellowship with Him."¹

Our needs are backed by God's resources. We must choose as Jesus did to "go to the Source of all strength, with our hands of faith outstretched to receive, [and] we shall be sustained in our work, even under the most forbidding circumstances, and shall be enabled to give to others the bread of life."²

As the day closes in the life of Christ in Matthew 14, He comes to the rescue of His friends in the middle of a storm. They are fearful, faithless, and faltering. Jesus had had a long day, and yet He provides by extending the hand of faith to His Father and extending His loving hands to His earthly friends, being the Mediator and Provider for their lives.

During this day Jesus experiences highs and lows. He had the grief of John's death, the joy of providing for the 5,000, and the adventure in the storm. This one day is like a microcosm of our lives. We need to be sure that we live our lives as He lived His day, in total dependence on the Father.

1. *Education*, p. 108.

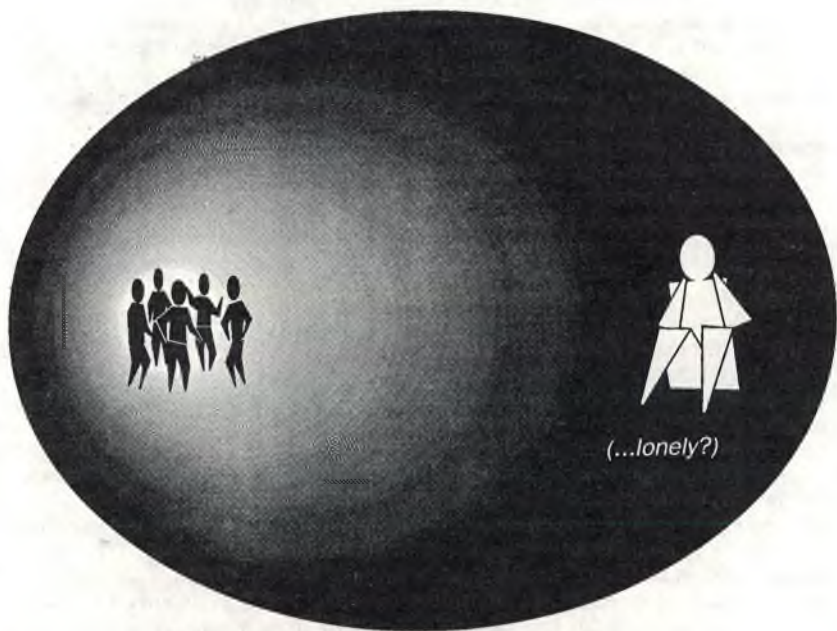
2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 371.

by Laurretta Hainey

Laurretta Hainey is manager of the college bookstore at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Lesson 9, February 25—March 3

Does Anyone Know I'm Here?



“ ‘What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul?’ ” (Matthew 16:26, NIV).

Sunday, February 25

Loneliness Is a Privilege

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 16 and 17

The loneliest moment in my life was:

a. When father drove away, leaving me alone at college three weeks before classes began.

b. The first Christmas morning I spent by myself away from family—crying over scrambled eggs.

c. My last day as a student missionary, feeling tired and anxious for home.

d. When I was baptized and became part of the Seventh-day Adventist Church family.

e. All of the above except “d.”
Trick question?

The right answer, at least in some ways, is “d.” Not only is life lonely, but Christianity itself is lonely too.

Why is the family of God sometimes a lonely place to be?

We find out this week that even Christ was lonely. Luke 5:16 suggests that Jesus often went to “lonely places” (NIV). At the most dramatic moment in His life—when He was in the Garden of Gethsemane—His closest friends, His disciples, blissfully slept.

The scary thing about loneliness, I think, is that sometimes it’s necessary. And, in the case of Christianity, it is sometimes even demanded.

But for a good reason.

Starting with the Old Testament, the Bible is filled with lonely encounters with God. Whether it was Jacob wrestling with an angel, a stormy mountain-top for Moses, or a smelly lion’s den for Daniel, this contact with God was one on one, personal, apart from support, companionship, encouragement.

The good news about that loneliness was the end result. These situations represented a loneliness that prepared these people better to work with those around them.

In turn, my lonely college experiences, even the loneliness that I have at times experienced as a Christian, if viewed properly, can be exciting.

In college, I ultimately made friends. I spent the afternoon of that initially tear-soaked Christmas day with friends. I came home to family.

And in my loneliness as a Christian, I have had the opportunity to stop, listen, pray, and learn.

The example of Christ and others throughout the Bible unfortunately tells us that there’s no guaranteed escape from loneliness.

But each of those stories also tells us that loneliness is not a life sentence. As David tells us in Psalm 68:6, “God sets the lonely in families” (NIV).

Beyond *our* loneliness, there’s a family waiting for us too.

by Stephen Payne

Stephen Payne is director of marketing and communication at Paradise Valley Hospital, National City, California.

Thoughts on Loneliness

LOGOS

Theme: Loneliness—“People are lonely because they are vulnerable and they are vulnerable because they are alone; they are vulnerable when they are without love and they are vulnerable when they have it. Personal vulnerability and loneliness are inseparable; they are often merely different ways of looking at the same thing. . . . Love it-self can also make a person vulnerable. Having accepted love, he may live in terror that he may lose it, and may be led to give up his self in bizarre and extreme ways to the one who gives love. ‘Anything for my beloved’ then becomes ‘nothing for myself because of my beloved,’ and the self is cast away.”¹

This week we explore a paradox—how loneliness can be either resolved or multiplied within families.

1. The False Teachings of the Pharisees Are the Result of Mask Wearing

“When they went across the lake, the disciples forgot to take bread. ‘Be careful,’ Jesus said to them. ‘Be on your guard against the yeast of the Pharisees and Sadducees.’” “Then they understood that he was not telling them to guard against the yeast used in bread, but against the teaching of the Pharisees and Sadducees” (Matt. 16:5, 6, 12, NIV).

Alcoholics Anonymous has a saying, “Stinking thinking gets you drinking.” The Pharisees

taught not only false concepts about God but also false concepts about themselves and about others. They wore masks that covered up their own sins as they accused others. They were not worshiping the God to whom they gave lip service, but in reality they worshiped themselves. Thus, Phariseism guarantees separating oneself from others by ‘holier than thou’ contrasts and worshiping a false god, namely, “self.”

2. Loneliness Born of Identity Crisis

“When Jesus came to the region of Caesarea Philippi, he asked his disciples, ‘Who do people say the Son of Man is?’ They replied, ‘Some say John the Baptist; others say Elijah; and still others, Jeremiah or one of the prophets.’ ‘But what about you?’ he asked. ‘Who do you say I am?’ Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:13-16, NIV).

The first challenge of Jesus’ identity happened in the Temple when He was 12. While personally lonely, He was able to respond, “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). Knowing His identity and His mission precluded any later confusion about what God’s purpose was for His life. Jesus made a distinction between the Pharisees and “the people,” meaning the common people. He was appealing to the masses who would know Him and recognize Him when others did not.

The experience of loneliness is

by G. Edward Bryan

G. Edward Bryan is the chaplain at Simi Valley Adventist Hospital, Simi Valley, California.

multiplied when we do not know who we are in relationship to Christ.

Can there be loneliness when identity is intact? Who do you say that Christ is? Who are you in relationship to Christ? How did Jesus resolve His identity crisis in the Temple? Did Jesus' resolve concerning His identity crisis prepare Him for solitude rather than loneliness? Explain.

3. Loneliness and Death

"From that time on Jesus began to explain to his disciples that he must go to Jerusalem and suffer many things at the hands of the elders, chief priests and teachers of the law, and that he must be killed and on the third day be raised to life" (Matt. 16:21, NIV).

As a teaching chaplain I have often made the statement "The only fear of dying is not having really lived." Ways of nonliving are ways of escape. Sometimes to escape loneliness, people will try suicide, as if by prearranging their death they can avoid pain, rejection, or abandonment. Paradoxically these conditions are sometimes found within one's own family. We may find support for our loneliness within our family or conversely the very opposite could be true, and so relationships within the family become destructive.

Was Jesus ever alone with His family? What is God's plan for you in regards to relationships? How does one transcend his or her loneliness? Have you been lonely "in the crowd?" Pinnacles are lonely places. Do we create our own mini-deaths in self-inflicted rebellions?

4. Self-Denial

"Then Jesus said to his disciples, 'If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself

and take up his cross and follow me. For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will find it. What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?" (Matt. 16:24-26, NIV).

In contrast to the spirit of independence, the spirit of possessiveness of people and things also contributes to loneliness.

Paul Tournier tells the story of a rabbi visited by a wealthy hypochondriac who told him his troubles. "The rabbi had him stand before a mirror and asked what he saw. 'I see myself,' replied the man. Then the rabbi led him to a window and asked what he saw. 'I see some men,' was the reply. 'Well,' said the rabbi, 'do you know what makes the difference between the two sheets of glass? One of them is covered with silver!' (Translator's note: In French, 'silver' and 'money' are the same word.)"³

Lonely people perhaps have not resolved the question of the difference between themselves and their possessions.

How does loneliness relate to self-centeredness? Are you possessive of people in your life, and do you then resent them for rejecting you?

5. Fellowship Is Christ's Answer to the Lonely Person (read Psalm 68:6, NIV)

If you are alienated from God, self, and/or others, fellowship in His family is the cure. This fellowship is manifest in symbolic form with the transfiguration, "Lord, it is good for us to be here" (Matt. 17:4, NIV). Peter was no longer speaking for himself alone, but for his *brethren*. Although they understood only part of what Christ was revealing with Moses and Elijah, they did hear the voice of God say, "This is my Son,

whom I love, with him I am well pleased. Listen ["obey"—The Living Bible] to him!" (verse 5, NIV). Fellowship comes from listening to God and obeying. In our *rebelliousness*, is it possible that we create new avenues of loneliness wherein is fear? Gerald G. Jampolsky, M.D., in his book *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* affirms that "*To Give Is to Receive* is the Law of Love. . . . By giving our Love away, we increase the Love within us and everyone gains."⁴

Jesus, seeing His disciples prostrated and terrified, said, "Get up, don't be afraid." When they looked up, they saw no one *except* Jesus" (Matt. 17:6-8, NIV).

Fear has to do with punishment. In 1 John 4:18, NIV, Jesus said, "Perfect love drives out fear."

Do you have fears that someone might discover what is behind your mask? How does Christ's example empower me to transcend my experiences of loneliness and

solitude? Does your loneliness relate to fears concerning conflicts of a personal, professional, or spiritual nature? Why or why not?

One patient at St. Elizabeth's Hospital shared the depth of her loneliness in the following words:

Panic

And is there anyone at all?
And is
There anyone at all?
I am knocking at the oaken
door . . .
And will it open
Never now no more?
I am calling, calling to you—
Don't you hear?
And is there anyone
Near?
And does this empty silence have
to be?
And is there no one there at all
To answer me?

I do not know the road—
I fear to fall.
And is there anyone
At all?⁵

1. Joseph Hartog, J. Ralph Audy, and Yehudi A. Cohen, eds., *The Anatomy of Loneliness* (New York: International Universities Press, 1980), pp. 95, 96.

2. Paul Tournier, *Escape From Loneliness* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974), pp. 99, 100.

3. Gerald G. Jampolsky, *Love Is Letting Go of Fear* (New York: Bantam Books, 1970).

4. Hartog, Audy, and Cohen, p. 352.

Tuesday, February 27

What Do People Say About You?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 16:13

Is it important what other people think about you? Whether we are being examined or our work is being evaluated, we are indeed interested in what others think about us.

It's important for us to know that we are worth something and that we are contributing to somebody else's life. Our effectiveness is largely determined by how well we are viewed by those about us.

In the November 3, 1988, *Adventist Review*, the question was asked, "Church—Not There When You Need It?" The article referred to a Gallup survey of nearly 1,000 people nationwide. What it concluded was that religious institutions often fail their members at the most critical times.¹

While it is important for us to ask what others think about us, perhaps the question that Christ asked in Matthew 16:15 is even more relevant: "Who do you say I am?" (NIV). We can testify of the worth of a soul to others, or to ourselves, only when we recognize what we think of Christ. Ellen White said, "Sadly the disciples were forced to acknowledge that Israel had failed to recognize their Messiah. . . . Many were

ready to accept Him as a prophet; but they did not believe Him to be the Messiah."²

She further stated, "Ever before Him He saw the result of His mission. His earthly life, so full of toil and self-sacrifice, was cheered by the prospect that He would not have all this travail for nought. By giving His life for the life of men, He would win back the world to its loyalty to God."³

What do others say about you? Who do you say I am? *Messages to Young People* gives us the answer: "Ask, then; ask, and ye shall receive. Ask for humility, wisdom, courage, increase of faith. To every sincere prayer an answer will come. It may not come just as you desire, or at the time you look for it; but it will come in the way and at the time that will best meet your need. The prayers you offer in loneliness, in weariness, in trial, God answers, not always according to your expectations, but always for your good."⁴

REACT

What can I do for those around me to make them feel that they are accepted?

Do we have individuals in our church who feel lonely and worthless? Suggest ways we could help such individuals.

1. *Adventist Review*, Nov. 3, 1988.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 411.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 410.

4. *Messages to Young People*, p. 250.

by W. D. Blehm

W. D. Blehm is director of constituent relations for Adventist Health System/West, and a former president of the Pacific Union Conference.

Loneliness Therapy

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 17:3

It is the year A.D. 67. Picture yourself a 25-year-old Christian Jew and a member of the Antioch church. You have never seen Christ, but you have grown up with stories that others have told you about Him.

There is trouble in the land as the Jews mount another aggressive revolt against the Romans. The non-Christian Jews hate, and even persecute, Christian Jews. The church of your community is divided on the values of the past, the direction of the future, and the relative importance of different doctrines.¹

The church is made up of ignorant peasants, learned but rigid Pharisees, wealthy and liberal Sadducees, monkish Essenes, survivalist zealots, and a few Gentiles with backgrounds in pagan philosophy.²

You begin to wonder whether you are really in the right church. Was Christ really the Messiah? Why should you put up with all this hatred from without and bickering within? It has become a very "lonely" experience, and no one seems to understand! There is no communication!

Then along comes Matthew with his story of Jesus written

for the church in chaos. There he describes how no one understood Him. How lonely Jesus must have felt!

During His retreat at Caesarea Philippi, surrounded by the pagan influences of the worship of Pan, the Greek god of nature, and the secular impact of the temple dedicated to Caesar Augustus,³ Jesus attempted to communicate to His disciples the contrast between truth and error. He attempted to distinguish between the real Messiah and the messiah of the dream world by describing His humiliation and eventual death (Matt. 16:21). Peter, speaking for the others, demonstrated his complete lack of understanding when he disputed Jesus saying, "Never, Lord: . . . This shall never happen to you" (verse 22, NIV). To which Jesus responded, "You think as man thinks, not as God thinks" (verse 23, NEB).

Six days later, Jesus led Peter, James, and John to a mountain where they observed the therapy for Christ's loneliness—communication with God and with fellow "church members" Elijah and Moses. *People who understand!* And as they listened to Jesus . . . a voice from a cloud proclaimed, "This is my Son, whom I love; with him I am well pleased" (Matt. 17:5, NIV).

What therapy!

1. Leland Doohan, *Matthew: Spirituality for the 80's and 90's* (Santa Fe, N. Mex.: Bear and Co., 1985), pp. 29-33.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, pp. 51-55.

3. Hirschel H. Hobbs, *An Exposition of the Gospel of Matthew* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1965), pp. 213, 214.

by Richard A. Gingrich, M.D.

Richard Gingrich is a general and vascular surgeon at Portland Adventist Medical Center, Portland, Oregon, and a member of the Adventist Health System/West board.

Thursday, March 1

What's in a Recipe?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 16:24, 25

Is there a recipe that we can follow to overcome loneliness?

For a diversion, I sometimes like to prepare the Sabbath dinner entree, using one of my favorite recipes. But sometimes I like to add new ingredients or change a few of the minor ones. That's the way it is with loneliness. Sure, God has a basic recipe for overcoming loneliness, but He also created each of us with our own unique personalities. And since we are different, we have different needs. So the ingredients to the "loneliness recipe" are tailored to match our individual makeup.

The same is true in the business world. No matter what the business challenge is, the plan of action to solve it will have the same basic, proven principles to solve the challenge. However, it will be tailored to the company's culture, environment, and people—otherwise the plan of action will fail.

Today's key text has the basic recipe (plan of action) to overcome loneliness. Why do I believe this? Because the Bible has many examples where this recipe (plan of action) worked. (See Rom. 15:4; 1 Cor. 10:11; 2 Tim. 3:16, 17).

Probably the best example of real, heart-wrenching loneliness is the story of Joseph (Genesis chapters 39-41). If there was anyone who could have given in to

loneliness, it was Joseph. How did he overcome loneliness?

1. He created a positive climate and atmosphere wherever he was (Gen. 39:3; see also, Ps. 51:10, RSV). You can be blessed by God if you just ask Him to give you a positive attitude and exercise faith.

2. Be honest and faithful (Gen. 39:7-20). By yielding to sin or dishonesty, we can bring on loneliness.

3. Do your best in whatever situation you find yourself (Gen. 39:21-23). It is evident that for Joseph to be noticed by the keeper of the prison he had to have a work ethic that would be noticed by someone in authority, even though he was a lowly prisoner.

4. Get involved in good things (Gen. 40:6, 7; see Phil. 2:2, 3). A way to overcome loneliness is to be of service to others. There are a lot of opportunities to serve. For instance, you could volunteer your time to:

a. Hospitals, serving the many needs of patients, their families, and visitors;

b. Your church. It's exciting to get involved in youth programs. If there is anything that will take away loneliness, it's getting involved with young children and youth;

c. Community. There are many community activities in which you can get involved. Get acquainted with your community and widen your circle of friends through organizations like the Red Cross or

by Frank Dupper

Frank Dupper is the president of Adventist Health System/West, Roseville, California.

United Way. Or feed the homeless, etc.

5. Love others—friendship (Prov. 18:24; 2 Tim. 2:22-26). It is more important to do something *with* someone than just doing something for them.

6. Just being alone is sometimes good for us (Ps. 46:10; 2 Cor. 12:9).

7. Remember, you are a part of God's great family. This should give you significant self-worth and purpose that is not based on human blood lines or genes. After all, we are sons and daughters of the heavenly King. The King of

the universe! This gives us the courage and power to overcome any type of adversity—even loneliness.

REACT

Study and read how the following individuals overcame loneliness and handled being alone: Daniel and his three Hebrew friends in a foreign land (Daniel 1 and 2); Elijah (1 Kings 19); Ruth (the whole book); Christ—Satan's temptations (Matt. 4:1-11) and in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 26:31-45); Paul, a prisoner (2 Tim. 1:8; Eph. 3:1; Philemon 8-10).

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March 31 , 1990**

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Friday, March 2

Angst Attack

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 26:38

When I was 19, I set out to see the world. I'd saved my money, bought a backpack, and was making my way around the globe—country by country.

I'd made it to India, which is many, many miles from my hometown of Sutherlin, Oregon. And culturally, I was light-years from anything familiar.

To stretch my limited money, I traveled as frugally as possible. Third-class hotels. Meals from roadside vendors. And, above all, the cheapest train ticket available, please.

I was bouncing along on a train through southern India when a tidal wave of loneliness hit. A feeling that my German grandmother called angst: fear, anxiety, isolation, and near-panic all wrapped into one depressing package.

It wasn't because of a lack of potential companions. The third-class train car was packed. Every seat was taken. Children sat on their parents' laps. Even the aisles were full of luggage—which served as makeshift seating for even more people.

With every stop we made, more passengers boarded. But no one seemed to get off.

There was irony in the fact that never before had I been among more people. And yet, never had I felt more alone.

What was missing wasn't people, but a sense of being con-

nected—sharing a common culture, similar goals, and a common heritage.

In a very small sense, it may have been akin to the loneliness that Christ felt in the Garden of Gethsemane. Yes, His disciples, albeit sleeping, were a stone's throw away.

The problem wasn't human contact. The problem was the lack of common purpose—a sense of facing the future alone.

So overwhelming was Christ's dread in Gethsemane that He said, "My soul is very sorrowful, even to death" (Matt. 26:38, RSV).

In the southern Indian town of Madras—during a layover on my way to Sri Lanka—I thumbed through the phone book to see whether there was a church. Sure enough. There was one—within easy walking distance from where I was staying.

That Sabbath, as I neared the church, I heard singing—"Sitting at the Feet of Jesus."

It couldn't have sounded more beautiful if the Mormon Tabernacle Choir had been singing. It sounded wonderful and melodious—not because of the harmony—but because it came from a place where I knew I belonged.

Sometimes you have to go a long way to learn a simple lesson. On that sunny day in Madras, I discovered that shared values are more important than geography. And beliefs held in common cast out loneliness.

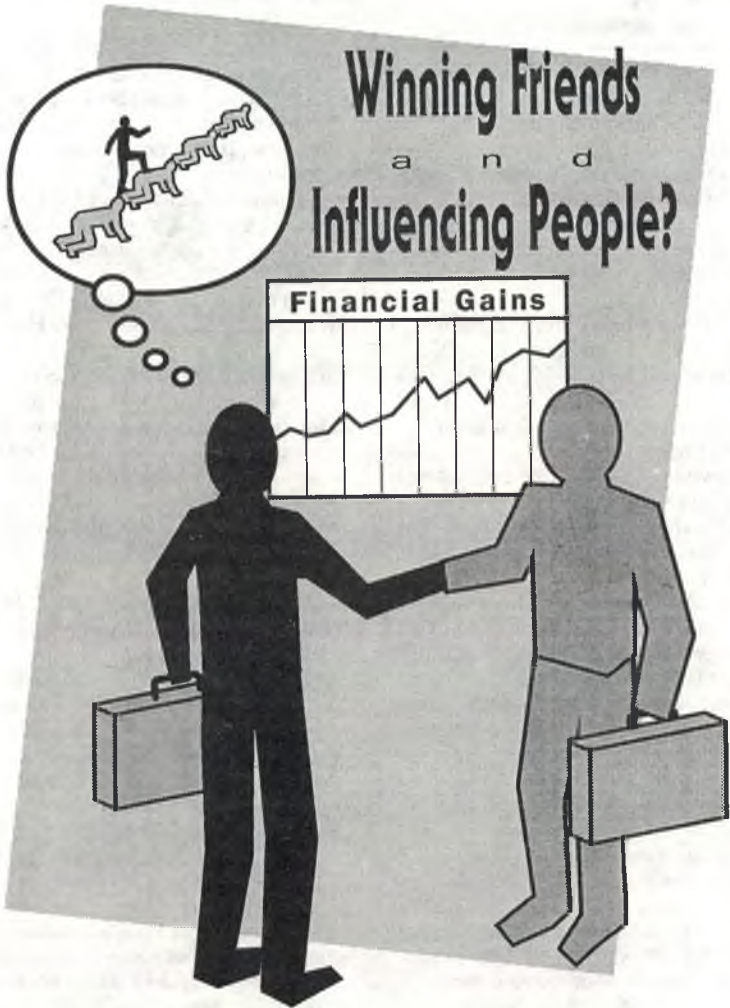
In short, where there's sharing, there's no angst.

by George Alan Hein

George Alan Hein, formerly communication manager at Adventist Health System/West, now runs a public relations agency in Seattle, Washington.

Lesson 10, March 4 - 10

The Carpenter Is Still Building Houses



“At that time the disciples came to Jesus and asked, ‘Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?’ ” (Matthew 18:1, NIV).

Sunday, March 4

Who's the Greatest?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 18:1—19:15

I was sitting in Maria's living room asking her about some of the people she had recently helped through a unique volunteer program at White Memorial Medical Center in East Los Angeles.

I had to ask a lot of questions and draw out the details of her work, because she didn't see anything unusual about it. To her, it was just helping people who were in need.

There was an elderly black man Maria had helped for a few months. He had undergone surgery that left him unable to do ordinary household chores. He had no family or friends to care for him. So Maria would hop on a bus and ride 100 blocks to his home, where she cooked, cleaned, and did his laundry.

Looking around Maria's home, I knew she didn't do volunteer work because there wasn't enough to do at home. In fact, her very modest house was a very busy place, with her family coming and going. Then, in the corner, I noticed three large buckets of flowers, which I knew represented a substantial portion of her in-

come. This explained where the floral arrangements come from that she takes to the homes of people she helps.

As she talked about her elderly friend, her voice became serious. She said the day came when she had to tell him that this would be her last visit. He was well enough to care for himself, and others needed her help.

He didn't want Maria to stop visiting him. They had become friends, and her visits were the highlight of his week. Tears rolled down his cheeks as he promised to pay her if she would only keep coming to see him.

Maria told me that just before I arrived she was talking with him on the phone. They call each other nearly every day.

The disciples argued over who was going to be the greatest in heaven. My friend Maria—and many others like her—are going to fill that spot because they have not concerned themselves with that question. They would be too embarrassed even to entertain the thought. Instead, they have humbly gone about their lives with their main worry being how to use their friendship and personal influence in a way that serves Jesus and His ministry.

by Mark Newmyer

Mark Newmyer is the manager of corporate communication at Adventist Health System/West, Roseville, California.

The Two-sided Coin

LOGOS

Theme: Friendship and Influence—*The ability to be great in the kingdom of God is proportional to our ability to forgive. Greatness and forgiveness are two sides of the same coin—they can't be separated.*

1. Greatness

"Who is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven?" (Matt. 18:1, RSV).

Nearing the end of His earthly ministry, Jesus desired to teach His disciples some valuable lessons. He knew there would be bitter disputes and rivalry among them because their expectations of the coming kingdom were totally different from His. They expected high positions with great honor and homage; they hadn't quite learned the true lesson of what greatness in the kingdom of God really means.

So, Jesus began to question His disciples about the dispute they had about "who is the greatest?" From that discourse on humility come some of the most powerful teachings on greatness and forgiveness in the Bible.

The disciples asked two questions, "Who" and "What constitutes greatness?" Then Jesus called a little child into their midst and said, "Look." Picture it in your own mind—a little child called from his play with a look of bewilderment on his face as he glances around in fear and antici-

pation of punishment. "What did I do wrong?" says his expression. As the child looks into the faces of the disciples, what does he see? Disgust, disbelief, uncertainty, puzzlement, perplexity as their expressions question the sanity of their Teacher. "This child is great in the kingdom of heaven?"

What in the world constitutes greatness?

In our world, greatness is manifested by a high office, wealth, beauty, intellect, strength, culture, cunning, popularity, power. But what constitutes greatness in Jesus' kingdom? Humility, dependence, helplessness, trustfulness, and eagerness. These are the attributes of a young child.

Adults are self-reliant, suspicious, wary, calculating, ambitious, and complex. But little children are simple. They express themselves freely, readily, naturally; there is no guile. They are also flexible, moldable, and yield to the touch of a hand. They are imperfect—waiting for correction and instruction in order to develop—like clay in a potter's hand waiting to be molded and shaped into a useful form.

Because little children are so impressionable, Jesus warns us to be careful how we treat them.

Have you ever seen a millstone? As you travel in New England, they are quite common sights. A millstone is about the size of a truck tire—six inches thick with a hole in the middle.

by Richard Caraboolad

Richard Caraboolad is director of pastoral care at Anacapa Adventist Hospital in Port Hueneme, California.

Have you heard any good-news—bad-news jokes?

Well, with a millstone, the *good* news is that it is placed around your neck and you are cast into the sea if you cause a little one to stumble. So what's the bad news? Jesus warns us not to despise any of these little ones, because it would be better if a millstone were placed around your neck and you were cast into the sea. That's pretty serious. Also, you would be out of harmony with the angels, Son, Father. Despise not, offend not, reject not the little ones—but receive, entertain, and be like a child and you will be great in God's kingdom.

What attributes hinder my walk with God, and what attributes draw me closer to Him?

2. Forgiveness (read Matthew 18:15-35)

“*“I forgave you all that debt because you besought me”*” (Matt. 18:32, RSV). This Teacher so severe, so terrible, who makes one tremble lest he should offend, summons us by the compassion of God's heart to go after an offending person and bring him back.

a. Personal effort—key word: *gain or restore*

In order to gain the brother for oneself, personal effort must be put forth. No one is to know except the injured party. If the brother hears, all is well. Case closed. He has been restored and brought back to fellowship. But if he refuses . . .

b. Friendship effort—key word: *witness*

If we are not heard we are to take another friend along. Maybe he will be able to persuade the offending brother and gain him back. If the brother hears, then

all is well; he has been restored. But if he refuses . . .

c. Corporate effort—key word: *bind*

If we are not heard, tell it to the church. The whole order is designed for one purpose only, and that is to restore harmony in the family of God and to gain the brother back. Our responsibility against our sinning brother is not created by the fact that he has wronged us, but by the fact that he has sinned and harmed himself. Our efforts are *always* redemptive, not punitive! If he is won back receive him and smother him with the brotherly kiss of love and rejoice over him. But if not, then the church's decision is binding, authoritative, and final. Remove him from fellowship.

What are the virtues in following such a plan?

d. Principles of forgiveness—key word: *mercy*

Why was it always Peter? Have you noticed in reading the Scriptures that every time the moment became tense, quiet, or reflective, it was Peter who spoke? He craved recognition and attention so much that he was always prepared to give an answer.

Look at (RSV):

Matthew 14:28: “Lord, bid me come to you on the water.”

Matthew 16:16: “You are the Christ.”

Matthew 16:22: “God forbid, Lord!”

Matthew 17:4: “Lord, it is well.”

Matthew 26:33: “I will never fall away.”

Matthew 26:35: “Even if I must die . . .”

Peter was ever ready and opinionated. Observe his magnanimity and meanness! He sought to contrast his approach to forgiveness with that of the

scribes, who were willing to forgive once, possibly twice, but not three times. Peter thought in his greatness he would be better than the scribes. He said, "Master, I am beyond that, until seven times!" But compared to what Jesus said, "Until seventy times seven," Peter looked small. So Christ painted a word picture to illustrate the goodness and greatness of our heavenly Father:

Two debtors—king's servant versus fellow servant.

Two debts—10,000 talents versus 100 denarii.

One pledge—"Lord have patience with me and I will pay."

Two decisions—mercy, freely given, versus unforgiving spirit.

Judgment: " "I forgave you all that debt because you besought me; and should not you have had mercy on your fellow servant, as I had mercy on you?" " (Matt. 18:32, RSV). "Nothing can justify an unforgiving spirit. He who is unmerciful toward others shows that he himself is not a partaker of God's pardoning grace. . . . We are not forgiven *because* we forgive, but *as* we forgive. The ground of all forgiveness is found in the unmerited love of God; but by our attitude toward others we show whether we have made that love our own."*

Was God fair in His judgment?

What would you have done if you were king?

3. Marital Faithfulness (read Matthew 19:3-12)

" *For your hardness of heart Moses allowed you to divorce your wives, but from the beginning it was not so* " (Matt. 19:8, RSV).

It is no secret that marriage can be sustained only by our continual knowledge of Christ's teaching on greatness and forgiveness. Love is not static! It is like a delicate plant that needs attention daily. The more effort we put into our marriage to nurture, water, and cultivate it, the more in love we will be. A loving relationship takes effort from both parties. But the joy produced far outweighs the effort.

Why was this lesson given to the disciples? Maybe to soften their hearts a little and bring them to a better knowledge of their Lord and Saviour. Did they learn the lesson? Evidently not too well, because the children that were brought to Jesus were rebuked. That is why Jesus became indignant with them. But let's not be too fast to criticize—aren't we the same? " 'Let the children come to me, and do not hinder them; for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven' " (Matt. 19:14, RSV).

* *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 251.

Tuesday, March 6

Influence of Associations

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Proverbs 13:20

Webster describes influence as "the act or power of producing an effect without apparent force or direct authority." The power of influence and relationships is so strong that it not only affects our lives here but will have an impact for eternity.

The good news is this influence, which so directly affects eternal life, is ours to choose. We determine our destiny by the associations we keep.

Ellen White speaks strongly of the importance of influence on our character and how it determines our eternal future. "Show me your company, and I will show you your character." The youth fail to realize how sensibly both their character and their reputation are affected by their choice of associates. One seeks the company of those whose tastes and habits and practices are congenial. He who prefers the society of the ignorant and vicious to that of the wise and good, shows that his own character is defective. His tastes and habits may at first be altogether dissimilar to the tastes and habits of those whose company he seeks; but as he mingles with this class, his thoughts and feelings change; he sacrifices right principles, and insensibly yet unavoidably sinks to the level of his companions."¹

She further points out that "just in proportion to the strength of the friendship will be the amount of influence which friends will exert over one another for good or for evil. . . . The influence may be unconscious, yet it is no less powerful. If the youth could be persuaded to associate with the pure, the thoughtful, and the amiable, the effect would be most salutary. If choice is made of companions who fear the Lord, the influence will lead to truth, to duty, and to holiness."²

"Let all who would form a right character choose associates who are of a serious, thoughtful turn of mind and who are religiously inclined. Those who have counted the cost and wish to build for eternity must put good material into their building. If they accept of rotten timbers, if they are content with deficiencies of character, the building is doomed to ruin. Let all take heed how they build. The storm of temptation will sweep over the building, and unless it is firmly and faithfully constructed it will not stand the test."³

As important as the influence of friends on us is ours on others. "Their influence will be saving, and their works will not perish in the great day of God, but will follow them into the future world; and influence of their life here will tell throughout the ceaseless ages of eternity."⁴

1. *Messages to Young People*, pp. 411, 412.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 587.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 588.

4. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 98.

by Diana M. Anderson

Diana Anderson is a registered nurse at Walla Walla General Hospital in Walla Walla, Washington.

Starting Over

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 18:3

As these words are being written, Americans have just elected George Bush as president, and he is forming a cabinet. The secretary of state has been selected. The White House chief of staff has been chosen. The secretary of defense has yet to be identified. And the questions being asked by media people and politicians are "Who will have the ear of the president?" "Who will command the respect of Congress?" "Who will be the greatest?"

It is in this context that Jesus' astonishing response to His disciples' clamoring queries regarding their status in the coming kingdom captures our attention. "Believe me," he said, "unless you change your whole outlook and become like little children you will never enter the kingdom of Heaven" (Matt. 18:3, Phillips).

Does such a jarring declaration have relevance for those of us who are on the verge of career advancement? Is Jesus really telling us that we ought to start over? If so, how do we do it?

One of the wisest of modern psychologists, Erik Erikson, describes a human life in terms of eight stages.* Erikson sees each of these stages as a conflict between forces arising out of individual and social needs. As the individual matures from infant to

adult, he or she reaches some kind of resolution in each stage and builds on that to resolve the conflict in the next stage. For example, a baby must first resolve the issue of trust versus mistrust. Born helpless and vulnerable, the baby learns to trust his or her caregivers and develops lifelong patterns of drive and hope as a result. As the baby grows he or she faces a conflict between autonomy and shame. Building on his heritage of trust, the baby resolves this conflict in favor of autonomy and thus develops self-control and willpower. The next stages lead from direction and purpose, through competence, to devotion and fidelity. The young adult is then ready for affiliation and love, which, in turn, prepares him or her for mature productivity and, finally, the wisdom and contentment of later years.

Even as optimistic a psychologist as Erikson believes that we can never truly go back and make up all that we have lost in earlier stages. The words of Jesus suggest, however, a more radically optimistic view. Your insecure strivings, He seems to say, need not imprison you. You *can* become a new person. You can be born again.

Who, then, will be the greatest? Perhaps it is the person who, with God's help, is ready to step to the sidelines in the race for money, prestige, and power; take a deep breath; and truly start over.

*E. H. Erikson, *Childhood and Society* (New York: Norton, 1963).

by Adrian Zytkoskee, Ph.D.

Adrian Zytkoskee is vice president for strategic planning at Adventist Health System/West, Roseville, California.

Thursday, March 8

Chosen to Influence

HOW-TO

Key Text: John 17:18

Have you ever wondered why God chose to influence people through you? Why He deliberately chose to place His reputation in your hands? Perhaps, like me, you have thought, "Surely there must have been a better way!"

It may seem like a risky strategy to employ, but it's all part of God's master plan. Jesus told us that as the Father sent Him into the world, so He is sending you and me (John 17:18). We are, therefore, Christ's ambassadors, as though God is making His appeal through us (2 Cor. 5:20). He could have selected other media to express His love; but the fact is, He chose us.

Fortunately, we have the life of Jesus as our example of how to build friendships that can change the world. What were Jesus' methods?

1. He Was One With the Father. Jesus' relationship with others was based on His relationship with His Father. He opened His will to the will of God daily through communion with the Father. You can choose either to make it on your own grit and determination or to ask for His Spirit to demonstrate His power through you to others.

2. He Became One of Us. How did the Father send Jesus into the world? Essentially, He be-

came one of us. Jesus interacted and identified with the needs of others in an open and accepting way that promoted self-esteem.

You can choose either to use other people for personal advancement or recognize that we are all spiritual travelers in need of God and one another.

3. He Was Aware. In healing the woman who had been subject to bleeding for twelve years, Jesus demonstrated keen awareness. When He asked, "Who touched my clothes?" the disciples answered, "You see the people crowding against you, . . . and yet you can ask, 'Who touched me?'" (Mark 5:24-31, NIV).

You can choose either passively to wait for opportunity or actively to practice consciousness of need.

4. He Established Common Interests. Jesus used common interests as a bridge to build friends and express eternal truths. When He met the woman at the well, their conversation started quite naturally about water. He patiently waited for her physical thirst to be quenched before He shared the good news of salvation (John 4).

You can choose either to focus inwardly to self or to look outwardly to the interests of others.

5. He Invested Himself. The Gospels depict Jesus acting as a servant to others. His commitment to and loyalty for His friends was unquestioned. Ulti-

by Michael Jackson

Michael Jackson is president of Glendale Adventist Medical Center in Glendale, California.

mately, they would understand the meaning of His words, "Greater love has no one than this, that one lay down his life for his friends" (John 15:13, NIV).

You can choose either to consider friendship too demanding or willingly to invest your talents for the happiness of others.

6. He Was Understanding.

Even though Jesus offered eternal life, not all accepted. He honored their freedom of choice.

You can choose either to attempt to control and manipulate others or to let the Holy Spirit work to do His good will.

What will you choose?

Friday, March 9

Friendship and Influence

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 22:61

In Matthew 18 and 19 we have several stories and lessons. When Jesus speaks about the little ones He teaches us the meaning of acceptance. The lost sheep shows us the concern of the shepherd. The brother who sins demonstrates the power of forgiveness. The story of the debtors underlines our great need of compassion. When talking about marriage Jesus stresses unity. Acceptance, concern, forgiveness, compassion, and unity are the great attributes of friendship.

Love and friendship are basic needs of babies, children, and teenagers as well as mature adults and the elderly. There is, however, a difference between love and friendship. Friendship is love with reciprocity; it is a positive relationship with an echo. Friendship has its limits, but when it goes beyond those limits it is called *true friendship*.

Influence is a summary of all forces that bridge personalities; it is the climate or atmosphere that creates feelings, that allows a person to grow. On the other hand, it can paralyze or even destroy one's self-worth. We influence family members, friends, and strangers we pass on the street. Just throw them a smile and see what happens.

Some people accomplish almost anything they set their minds to. We call them influential. Jesus

had influence. When He looked at Peter after the cock crowed during the trial, Peter walked out and cried bitterly. Probably the room was noisy, and Jesus was too far away to talk to Peter. Only a look convicted Peter, but that look also told Peter not to despair because of his terrible failure. Christ's loving glance was a powerful sermon, which guided the distraught apostle to dedicate himself to the Master's service for the rest of his life.

Even if we are only ordinary people, we exert an influence whether we do so intentionally or unconsciously. We can influence people by the way we dress, what and how we eat, how we look at them—yes, every movement sends a message to others.

Dale Carnegie wrote a famous book, *How to Win Friends and Influence People*. It is worthwhile reading for pastors, businessmen, politicians, suitors, parents, and students. It elaborates the idea that there is no more successful way to make an impression on people than by unselfish caring and true friendship. To win friends and to influence people is also the theme of the Bible and all missionary endeavor. Above all, whether we recognize it or not, Jesus is our best friend.

REACT

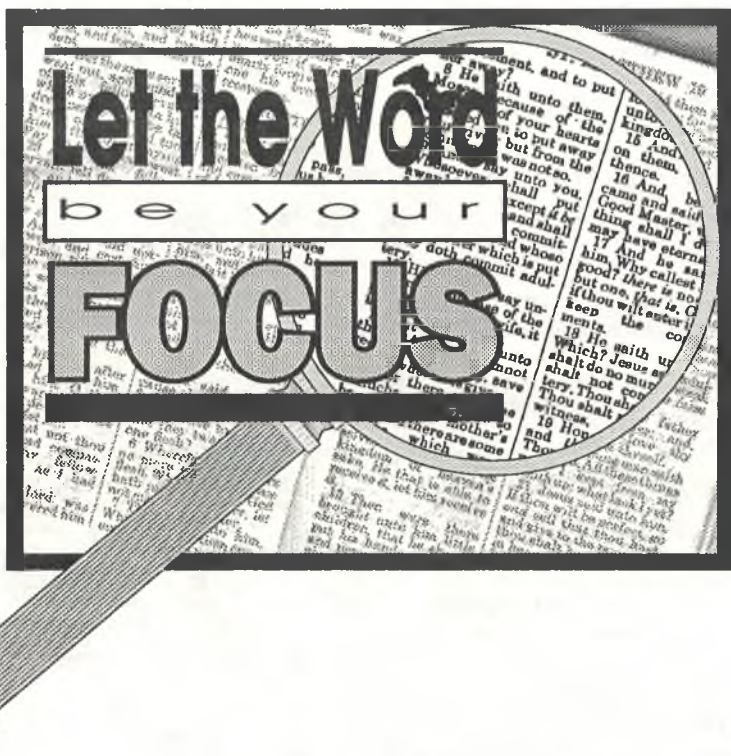
1. Why is it sometimes difficult to be a friend to everybody?
2. How can I improve my influence within my family or at my workplace?

by Harald Giebel

Harald Giebel is a surgeon practicing in Ukiah, California.

Lesson 11, March 11 - 17

Trivia Pursuit



“ ‘To sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared by my Father’ ” (Matthew 20:23, NIV).

Sunday, March 11

A Tight Squeeze

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 19:16—21:46

The camel approached the needle and sniffed it warily. Just about that time, I prepared to write eloquently on the topic of earthly distraction from things divine. I found a comfortable chair, my favorite quill, and a sheath of medium-stock papyrus. The television flickered to my left. It was 7:00 p.m.

Vanna flicked her supple wrists and without apparent effort recognized and turned five consecutive consonants. Marjorie Lumox, of Muncie, Indiana, solved the puzzle, rejoiced, kissed Pat on the muzzle, and filled her station wagon with a lifetime supply of Lee Press-on Nails.

A group of 1,000 unfortunate medical professionals found themselves trapped on a desert island, suffering from hunger, pestilence, jungle fever, and severe headaches.

"What is a dingo?" I shouted. Alex cautioned the studio audience.

Theo purchased a \$95 shirt and felt no remorse. Cliff's stern and loving rebuke caused the family to discover profound truth, then to laugh ruefully together. Those Huxtables.

The girl, scantily clad, slunk through the night on a solitary mission of social mercy. The rugged, wild-looking gentleman motioned her upstairs. They embraced until voices below brought them fearfully to the window. "Po-

lice," he said. "They're after me."

"But why?" she cried.

He kissed her passionately in response. "Whatever happens," he said, "you know I love you."

She clung to him, and then he was gone. To the elevator. No, it would be watched. To the stairwell, down a flight, then the dreaded sound of booted footsteps rising quickly to meet him. He turned, crouching like a hunted animal. Darting back upstairs, down a hallway, out onto the fire escape. Crouching, descending. Pausing. Listening. Hearing nothing. Standing up. Dying in a hail of bullets, lurching forward over the rail, plummeting. Lifeless eyes gazing up at the disbelieving face pressed against the tear-streaked window.

As the credits rolled, the clock struck 11:00 p.m., and I saw myself as a chubby, middle-aged gentleman striding resolutely toward the pearly gates, wheezing slightly, my 19-inch combination TV/VCR surgically embedded in my back, grabbing the emerald knocker, rapping several times, and calling, "May I come in?"

"Definitely not," said the shiny face. "You'll never be able to squeeze through. Next."

Candidates for heavenly promotion are held as responsible for their time as for their money. I turned away, somewhat disappointed, and realized that the theological challenges of the rich man, or even of the camel, are minuscule next to those of the hopeless TV addict.

by Gary Tetz

Gary Tetz is assistant director of marketing at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Getting to the Head of the Line

LOGOS

Theme: Distractions and

Focus—*Living the Christian life can be difficult since distractions often tend to shift our focus from the things of the Spirit to those of the flesh. Keeping our eyes clearly on our goal and then moving to that clear finish are challenges that the young adult faces regularly in life. This week we explore the various things that deter our vision and purpose.*

1. The Money Test (read Matthew 19:16-30)

“At this Peter exclaimed, ‘Look, we have left everything and followed you. What will that be worth to us?’” (19:30, Phillips).

In the first scene a young man asks Jesus for advice. He seems to be a serious fellow with his priorities in order. But when Jesus invites him to liquidate his extensive financial portfolio and join the disciples he leaves in disappointment. So Jesus expands on the topic of wealth by telling the disciples that you can thread a camel through a needle’s eye with more ease than a rich man can squeeze into the kingdom of God.

This story and Jesus’ words have spawned a long discussion among Christians. Some have concluded that Jesus thought a rich Christian is a contradiction of terms. From this point of view Christians have the obligation to divest themselves of all but the necessities as long as there are

the poor. Others believe only a prophet has the right to apply the money test to anyone else. Still others believe that Jesus’ words about giving away property and money were addressed only to the spiritual athletes of the church. For Catholics these would be the priests and nuns who take the triple vows of poverty, celibacy, and obedience. Other Christians think of missionaries or even ministers.

We resist the temptation to stop here to expand on the dangers of money to young Adventist “yuppies” and others neither yuppie nor still young. Jesus’ words on wealth, as important as they are, are not the destination of this conversation. Instead, notice how this matter of money serves to introduce a disturbing exchange between Peter and Jesus. The major concern here is not with money, but with the “perks” of position.

Peter reminds Jesus that His disciples have passed the money test that the reluctant rich man flunked. They already have given up everything and followed Jesus. Peter presses Jesus to tell what they will get for their generous sacrifice (Matt. 19:27).

Jesus seems to reassure Peter by promising an incredible return on his investment for the kingdom (verses 28, 29). They will even serve on the Supreme Court, etc. But He goes on to drop an ominous hint: Many who are first in the line will be last, and the last will be first (19:30; cf. 20:16).

by Ernest Bursey

Ernest Bursey is an associate professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

What could Jesus' words mean to those of us who are first in line for the kingdom and its honors?

2. Coping With God's Grace (read Matthew 20:1-16)

"So, many who are the last now will be first then and the first last" (20:16, Phillips).

Jesus tries to explain this puzzling saying by telling a disturbing story in which everyone got paid the same regardless of how long or how little they worked. In fact, in this story those who worked the longest were sent to the end of the payline! Naturally these tired farm workers were mad.

The same words about first and last are repeated at the end of the story. This means the story is supposed to be an explanation or at least an illustration of the saying. But what does the story explain? That people at the head of the line shouldn't expect more than people at the end of the line? That people who start out at the head of the line will find themselves at the end of the line? Is this what Jesus means?

For starters, let's note that Jesus is talking to His disciples. For them the biggest challenge isn't money. It isn't even deciding to follow Jesus. They have already made that decision. After all, from what Jesus said, putting your treasure in heaven should turn out to be an excellent investment.

Instead, a harder test will be whether they (and I, and maybe you too) are willing to let God be generous. Do they (and I, and you) have a secret belief that heaven will be ours because of what we have done for it? If that is the case, then I will not be satisfied when others get box seats for less than the price of the bleachers. I will be particularly in-

censed if somehow God lets them go to the front of the line ahead of me. But that is what He is likely to do. I must come to see His amazing generosity toward me. Even for those who invest their whole life in following Jesus, eternal life will not be some sort of payment. We are all called to labor in the vineyard. But the kingdom is God's. We get it as His gift in the way He chooses.

Extend Jesus' parable to the next morning. If everyone gets the same "reward," then what motivation is there to get up early to work in the vineyard all day long?

3. How to Get to the Head of the Line (read Matthew 20:17-28)

"If he wants to be first among you he must be your slave—just as the Son of Man has not come to be served but to serve, and to give his life to set many others free" (Matthew 20:28, Phillips).

As readers we are jarred by the inappropriate pressure applied on Jesus by the mother of James and John. Jesus has just reminded the Twelve of His appointment in Jerusalem with the religious leaders, Pilate and his soldiers, and the cross (cf. 16:21; 17:12). What will He say to this woman who wants to reserve the head of the line for her boys?

Again Jesus carefully untangles the duties of discipleship from the privileges of position. The resentment of the other disciples, plus Jesus' strong words, reveal the intensity of this struggle between Jesus and the thrust for power in the world (Matt. 16:24-28).

Which is more jarring—the mother's inappropriate request or the answer of Jesus? Would you want to go to the head of the line on Jesus' terms? Why or why not?

May I Have Your Attention, Please?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Corinthians 3:17, 18 (NIV)

So many things struggle to get our attention. As a college student, one finds it easy to be distracted from living the Christian life. Often, we shift our focus from spiritual things to everyday concerns. As we work toward finishing college, finding a life partner, and beginning a satisfying career, we face challenges that can turn us away from God.

In her writings, Ellen White mentions friends as possible distractions for young people in living the Christian life. "By the choice of evil companions many have been led step by step from the path of virtue."¹ Ellen White uses Samson as an example, saying it was because of "the influence of wicked associates [that] he let go that hold upon God."²

Amusements, or entertainment, can also influence the Christian life. Ellen White suggests students ask themselves, "What bearing has the question of amusements on my religious life, on my character as a Christian?"³

Probably the most prominent distraction for students is studying. "Students should not be so

pressed with studies . . . they should let nothing interfere with their seasons of prayer, which bring them in connection with Christ."⁴ In order to live the Christian life, young people definitely need to be in contact with their Creator. However, Satan would like to turn people's focus away from Christ and will use any device to do so. Ellen White writes, "Cares, riches, pleasures, all are used by Satan in playing the game of life for the human soul."⁵ Satan leaves out nothing in trying to turn us away from Jesus.

In order to maintain an active spiritual life "we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to *choose* another master. . . . But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe."⁶ Our relationship with God is the most important thing in turning away from worldly distractions. For "without a vital connection with God . . . we shall be overcome."⁷

REACT

1. What challenges face the young adult? How do these affect one's religious commitments and goals?

2. What should the young person do to counter these negative influences?

4. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 318.

5. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 55.

6. *Steps to Christ*, p. 72.

7. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 324.

by Tamma-iynn McDonald

Tamma-iynn McDonald is a junior elementary education major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Wednesday, March 14

Can a Christian Own a BMW?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 19:21, 22

The story of the rich young ruler as recorded in Matthew 19 has never applied more to the human experience than today. Acquiring possessions has become America's national pastime.

How should the Christian relate to all of this? Many Adventists have worked hard, invested carefully, and saved diligently to put themselves in a comfortable financial position. So how does Jesus' command to "sell your possessions and give to the poor" (Matt. 19:21, NIV) apply in this situation? Are we to take this text literally?

The Christian evangelist and author Tony Campolo sheds some light on this question. He stresses that Jesus' 2,000-year-old example is still valid today. "To live out the will of God in today's contemporary world . . . changes your whole monetary lifestyle. People say to me, 'What do you mean? Are you suggesting that if I follow Jesus I won't be able to go out and buy a new BMW?' You got it!

"You might say, 'But I know a lot of godly people who own BMWs.' Well, when they get really godly they will repent of their BMWs, because BMWs are luxury cars that symbolize conspicuous consumption instead of compassionate concern for the sufferings of the world. Let me

put it quite simply: If Jesus had \$40,000 and knew about the kids who are suffering and dying in Haiti, what kind of car would He buy? You're saying this is stupid, this is irrelevant. No. This is where Christianity needs to be applied. There is no room for conspicuous consumption. Our culture has in fact conditioned us to want more and more stuff we don't need, so that we have become consumers of God's wealth while the hungry of the world suffer and the hungry of the world die."*

Let me stress, I'm not picking on BMW owners here. Few of us can claim we have never been seduced by a beautiful car, house, or any other possession you care to name. But Campolo is right. The more we crave the things of this world, the harder it becomes to follow Jesus and do His will. The human mind has a hard enough time visualizing the glories of heaven without further clouding it up with the comparatively worthless baubles of earth. Even Jesus admits this. "Again I tell you, it is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle than for a rich man to enter the kingdom of God" (Matt. 19:24, NIV).

It is not wrong to seek financial independence and success. But what we do with God's financial blessings will be examined in the final judgment. And all of us, rich or poor, will be held accountable for our decisions.

*Tony Campolo, "Which Jesus Do You Believe In?" *U Magazine*, April/May 1988.

by Daniel Kaempff

Daniel Kaempff is assistant director of college relations, office of admissions and marketing, at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Keeping Focus on Your Christianity

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 19:22

In the parable of the rich young ruler in Matthew 19:16-30, the young man went away sad because he did not want to give away his riches (v. 22). The young man, being satisfied with his goodness, sought some new merit. He saw getting to heaven as based on certain prescribed works. God pointed out to the young man that works are not the basis of getting to heaven. But I also think God was telling the young man his riches were a distraction to his Christianity. He could not obtain salvation, because he was being distracted. The same holds true for us. Many things in today's world distract us from God. There are three things which I believe we can do to keep from being distracted from our Saviour.

1. Spend Time With Him During the Good Times.

When things are going bad, many of us turn to Christianity. When grades come in the mail and the A you thought you had turned miraculously into a C somewhere between the final examination and your mailbox. Or the young man/woman you've fallen in love with suddenly doesn't see you in his/her future. God always seems to be the answer—and He is. But once things begin

going good, most of us forget the times of despair and our need for God. Good times can deter your focus from God. Spending time with Him when things are good is just as important, if not more, as asking Him for help when times are bad.

2. Rely on Habit.

Sometimes when you are deterred from Christianity, habit keeps you hanging in there. Waking up and going to church every Sabbath. Ten minutes every morning with Him. Friday-night vespers. Things like this can keep us from straying too far. Concentrate on forming good habits that you can rely on when distractions deter your focus from God.

3. Meditate.

Spending a few minutes with yourself in total solitude provides an opportunity to focus your mind on the day's tasks and on the goals you want to achieve. I find it much easier to keep my mind focused during the day on what I want to accomplish. Jesus often spent long hours by Himself with His Father, using the time to regroup and gather His strength.

Finally, we cannot ignore the fact that we are not perfect. We are all going to be distracted from God. But being able to realize that you will be distracted may be the most helpful knowledge you can have as a guard against being distracted.

by James Williamson

James Williamson is a senior communications major at Walla Walla College, and a staff writer for the office of admissions and marketing.

Friday, March 16

The Price Tag on Eternal Life

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 20:26-28 and Matthew 19:29

When I was young, the only thing I knew about the stock market was the big arrow on the evening news. Up was good and down was bad. I grew older, got a job, made money, and gained some sophistication about the financial world. Merrill Lynch and my parents said, "Invest wisely. Do not squander money. Think long-term. Set priorities." Their advice has paid off. I can afford to go to college, buy books, and not worry excessively about the poor-house.

The story of the rich young ruler (Matt. 19:16-30) has often disturbed and confused me. How do I follow Christ when He's not on this earth as He was in the disciples' time? As for giving up my riches, do I take this passage literally? And if I give my riches to the poor, wouldn't the poor be wealthy and therefore in the same position as the rich young ruler and I were? In the end, who nets all of the wealth?

Throughout my youth, my parents and some of my teachers taught me the importance of goal-setting and dream-making. One of

my goals was to own a silver Porsche 944 before I turned 30. I thought of the rich young ruler and heard an ominous voice proclaiming, "Thou shalt own no car costing more than \$5,000." Did God want me to drive a Yugo or a used 1975 Civic? Should I forget about cars and buy a bike? Matthew 19 reminds me that living in a material world is not exclusive to the twentieth century. The parallels are obvious. Values—the rich young ruler viewed his earthly goods as being superior to eternal life. Instant gratification—if he couldn't have something instantly, it wasn't worth waiting for. The rich young ruler thought short-term. Christ did not ask him to give everything up forever. "Everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times more and will be given eternal life" (Matt. 19:29, TEV).

God gives good advice. The rich-young-ruler passage makes sense to me if I use it as a principle and attitude toward life. Use common sense. Think long-term. Set priorities. Don't possess anything that can't be given up in order to serve God. "If one of you wants to be great, he must be the servant of the rest" (Matt. 20:26, TEV).

by Michele Molstead

Michele Molstead is a junior English major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Lesson 12, March 18 - 24

Rising Above the Crowd

Walking The Fine Line Between...



“ ‘Give to Caesar what is Caesar's, and to God what is God's’ ” (Matthew 22:21, NIV).

Sunday, March 18

Why Study Commitment?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 22 - 25

I'm wondering whether anyone interested enough in the Christian life to be reading this quarterly really questions whether commitment is important or not. It seems elementary that commitment to God is mandatory in order to be a Christian. So why discuss commitment with those who already know that it is so important?

Do any of us really wonder whether or not we can put off the decision to commit our lives to God? I think we've all been through enough Weeks of Prayer, sermon appeals, and funerals to know that we can't let commitment slide, because time is short.

I think we all realize that those committed to a Christian lifestyle make entertainment and social choices different from those made by people who are not committed to a Christian lifestyle. That's basic, right?

And I'll refrain from making the old comparison between the love commitment on earth and the commitment to God. I think we all have that one down pat, don't we? We're old enough to make the connections in the analogy work.

So what's left to say about commitment?

A lot.

The question is, not whether to commit, but how to commit, and how to know when you are committed, and how you can say, in good conscience and with a humble smile on your face, that you are committed. And are we committed to the God we serve or the dogma we memorize? How do we make our commitment relevant as we live in a world that is not tailor-made with ideal "Christian situations" around every corner?

Let's face it: we do not live in the black-and-white world we think we do. The landscape before us is a gray one, and, like fog in front of our headlights, the grayness obscures our vision sometimes. What seemed so clear in the sanctuary on Sabbath morning is not so clear on Saturday night. Or the rest of the week, for that matter.

That's why we need to study commitment. We need to study it in ourselves and in the context of Scripture. Self-evaluation is a hot topic at the bookstores, but for the Christian it has always been vital. As you read this week's lessons, think about your commitments and how they can direct your life. Find out what it is that guides you through the fog.

by Ben Cawthra

Ben Cawthra is a senior English and history major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Is There Life After Commitment?

LOGOS

Theme: Commitment—*Young adults often select their vocations, their friends, and their entertainment because of the degree that these choices interact with their commitments and life-purposes. This lesson analyzes the nature of personal commitment and the life of faith. Such things as the definition of commitment, the feelings of commitment, and the impact of the commitment on one's actions are explored.*

"Therefore, I urge you, brothers [and sisters], in view of God's mercy, to *offer your bodies as living sacrifices*, holy and pleasing to God—which is your spiritual worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will" (Rom. 12:1, 2, NIV).

So what is this *commitment* thing all about? Tell me, can I survive today's stresses and anticipate tomorrow's eternal life without *commitment* in my experience with God? Is there life after *commitment*?

To find out what the word means, select the nearest option from these dictionary definitions of *commitment*:

1. The act or process of entrusting or consigning;
2. The state of being committed;
3. An engagement or pledge to do something;
4. A consignment to a prison, mental institution, etc.

Who chose being consigned to a mental institution? Seriously, folks, number 3 seems closest to religious commitment! Let's find out *what it is* and *what it is not* in our walk-through of Matthew 22-25.

For a young adult facing today's tensions, issues, and influences—the book of Matthew pulls back the curtain on God's desire to touch and heal where it really hurts. And commitment puts us where God can make a difference.

Commitment—What Is It and What Is It Not?

1. Hypocrisy and Legalism (read Matthew 22:1-14; 23:1-39)

Look at your environment, both religious and secular. So many live by the unfulfilling values of self-achievement (legalism) or double-standards (hypocrisy), that you become nauseated. They seem fanatical and committed to their lifestyle. But is this religious commitment? And will these people enjoy inner peace in their experience with God?

"Everything they do is done for men to see" (Matt. 23:5,

by Don Wessels

Don Wessels is a postgraduate student at Walla Walla College, majoring in mass communications. He is on study leave from the Orange-Natal Conference, South Africa.

NIV). And the result or effect of this type of commitment? “For whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and whoever humbles himself will be exalted” (23:12, NIV). No wonder Jesus continues with the “seven woes”—warning of the grave dangers of this type of commitment!

We’re different, right? Nothing that hollow will influence our decisions for or against God. “So then, just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him, rooted and built up in him, strengthened in the faith as you were taught, and overflowing with thankfulness. See to it that no one takes you captive through hollow and deceptive philosophy, which depends on human tradition and the basic principles of this world rather than on Christ” (Col. 2:6-8, NIV).

“In the parable, all the ten virgins went out to meet the bridegroom. All had lamps and vessels for oil. For a time there was seen no difference between them. So with the church that lies just before Christ’s second coming.”¹

It seems to me, then, it’s not how much money you make, or to whom you give (Matt. 22:21), but how committed are you to making a difference to other people’s lives.

2. Influences and Conflict (read Matthew 22:15-22)

Remember the kung-fu movies? And afterwards the kids going down the street shouting and high-kicking everything in sight?

Should such influences and conflict situations determine how you react? Is your commitment to God, or the lack of it, being programmed by those around you right now?

Philippians 4:4-8 clearly suggests we should consider only “the good”—since we are what we behold, right? “The teachers of the law and the Pharisees sit in

Moses’ seat. So you must obey them and do everything they tell you” (Matt. 23:2, 3, NIV).

Mentors come in different sizes and packages. But something or someone out there is being allowed to shape my actions, values, and lifestyle!

Social patterns, lecturers, colleges—so many voices. What role are you allowing God to play?

3. Do I Have To? (read Matthew 22:1-14)

Live a life worthy of your calling, God says (Eph. 4:1). There is only one wedding garment that will get me into heaven (Matt. 22:12-14). Those who are not committed to God’s will get rather warm (Matt. 7:19-21). Do I have to be committed to God?

Kidney-failure patients rely on their regular treatment for bodily purification. Living on borrowed time. But so are we, in a spiritual sense (2 Cor. 5:14-21).

So some young adults today choose living together, rather than the commitment of marriage, enjoying the “yo-yo” experience of love. Why do you think Jesus uses marriage to illustrate what He longs for in a relationship with each person? Simple, it’s a determination to make it!

When did Jesus first call you to the wedding banquet? How did you initially respond? How many other times has He invited you since that first occasion? What does this say about His commitment? What does it say about your commitment?

4. Procrastination, Commitment, and 10 Virgins (read Matthew 24, 25)

Caution: Danger ahead. That’s what Matthew 24 and 25 are all about. Warnings challenging us to be committed to Christ as our only hope. Check out the following references that urge you and

me to be more committed to God, living where He can make a difference:

(a) Daniel 5:4-6, 23-30: Belshazzar woke up too late to change; (b) Matthew 24:37-39: Too late to enter the ark; (c) Matthew 24:40-42: Someone not ready for Second Coming; (d) Matthew 24:43, 44: Burglary last night, too late to intervene; (e) Matthew 25:1-14: Ten virgins, all caught asleep, but some have taken time to prepare, while others have awoken much too late; (f) Matthew 25:14-30: Talents and rewards—too late to correct the lack of action.

“In the parable, all ten virgins went out to meet the bridegroom. All had lamps, and vessels for oil. . . . A time of waiting intervenes, faith is tried; and when the cry is heard, ‘Behold, the Bride-

groom cometh; go ye out to meet Him,’ many are unready. They have no oil in their vessels with their lamps. They are destitute of the Holy Spirit.”²

LORD, PLEASE DON'T EVER STOP WORKING WITH ME UNTIL YOU SEE I CAN BE ALL THAT YOU WANT ME TO BE.

I AM WILLING, LORD, TO BE JUST EXACTLY WHAT YOU WANT ME TO BE!

What unexpected event has happened in your life in the past six months? Were you ready to handle it? If you knew the world was going to end in six months what would you do? How would your lifestyle change? What bothers you most about the end of the world?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 408.

2. *Ibid.*

Tuesday, March 20

Challenges to Commitment

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 24:9,10,13

In the key text Christ addresses the righteous, not the wicked. Why should persecution turn the righteous away from God? Commitment to God is shaken when one begins to question God's commitment to Himself. Many feel that when a crisis occurs, God is nowhere to be found. Tribulation of the wicked seems understandable. But suffering of the righteous seems inexplicable. The entire book of Job is devoted to this issue. The trials that Job faced were characterized by several features that constitute challenges to commitment.

Job had not sinned, and he felt he did not deserve punishment (Job 10:3). Job also felt that God's actions were not consistent with His character. God is a just being, yet He seems to punish the righteous while the wicked prosper (Job knew nothing of the meeting in heaven in which Satan challenged God to prove Job's commitment). God is a loving being, yet He seems uninterested and unwilling to answer Job's cries. Job did not know that divine beings were observing the whole drama (Job 23:3-9; 30:20). Last, Job felt that God's attitude was inconsistent with His position as ruler of the universe: If God was just, then Job's tribulation must mean

that God was not in control.

Today, righteous people face at least one of these challenges each time they endure hardship. At such times, it is important to remember that elaborate philosophical theorizing will bring no solace; Job's mental and physical suffering was not relieved by his friends' philosophical arguments. God spoke to Job only when Job made two statements: First, that to fear God is the only wise course for humans; and second, that Job was committed to this principle in the past and remained committed in spite of his suffering (Job 28-31). This fact is hardly surprising, since Job's tribulations came because Satan questioned his commitment, and they could not end until Job's commitment was either nullified or confirmed.

Job's experience mirrors that of every righteous person. As Jesus predicted in Matthew 24, trials will challenge our commitment. However, as Ellen White advises, "The Christian is ever to realize that he has consecrated himself to God, and that in character he is to reveal Christ to the world."* The victors are those who maintain their commitment to God. They will ultimately be reassured that God is indeed committed to them.

REACT

What role does faith play in commitment?

* *The Desire of Ages*, p. 417.

by Linda Abdel-Malek

Linda Abdel-Malek is a senior business major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Wednesday, March 21

Party Clothes

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 22:36-40

A wedding guest thrown out for wearing the wrong clothes. Render unto Caesar. Marriage in heaven. Love thy neighbor. Pious pastors rebuked for hypocrisy. Signs of the end. The time of trouble. Ten virgins. Talents. Sheep and goats . . .

Commitment. Does the word define this menagerie of stories, or do these stories define the word? According to Webster *commitment* means "a pledge or promise to do something." These stories speak of action, but reveal many different interpretations of the word *commitment*.

The wedding guest wasn't thrown out of the party because he was too poor to buy proper clothes. He was dismissed because he pretended to be a legitimate guest but didn't bother even to wear the required garments. The parable is puzzling, but in the context of the following speeches against hypocrisy, Christ is warning those who come for the party but fail to meet even the basic prerequisites. As the generous host, He invites everyone to the feast, but feeds only those who show genuine interest by wearing the proper garment.

So what is that garment?

When answering the questions of the religious leaders about taxes and marriage in heaven, Christ makes it clear that their concerns are trivial. By stating

that the greatest commandment of all is love, He shows that their real concern should be love for God and humanity. In the scathing rebuke of hypocrisy that follows, He shows that their greatest sin is pretending to be committed to God, but failing to wear the simple garment of love.

The tasks that the characters in the parables of the 10 virgins and the talents are asked to fulfill are very simple. Those who fail to do what they have promised are punished. It is ironic that when Christ separates the sheep from the goats in His description of the final judgment, His test of commitment is so simple the sheep don't even remember fulfilling it. The goats, on the other hand, spent their time working so hard to be saved that they forgot what their actual commitment was. The sheep have internalized the principle of love so thoroughly that they aren't even aware of their "works."

The "signs of the end" in Matthew 24 have brought terror to the hearts of many. Earthquakes and wars bring a renewed belief in Christ's return. Is it possible, however, that our interpretation of this passage has become trivial? In our concern with time lines and charts of last-day events have we missed the fact that this passage is prefaced by the commandment of love and concluded by the story of the sheep and the goats?

Our primary concern should be with keeping a promise.

by Cynthia Westerbeck

Cynthia Westerbeck is a junior English and music major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Thursday, March 22

An All-consuming Commitment

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 22:37

“Commitment: The state of being bound emotionally or intellectually to a course of action.”*

The Pharisees and Sadducees were strongly committed. They had a commitment to regain the influence Jesus had taken from them. At one time they had authority over the people; their word was “truth.” But when Jesus showed up, some of the things He said caused the people to distrust their leaders. And they wanted that trust back.

Their commitment to the task was a passion. It consumed their every waking moment. Satan took control of them, and every action was prompted by him. The passion with which they plotted revealed how committed they were.

Jesus was also strongly committed. He had a commitment to seek and save what was lost (Luke 19:10). He was not committed to building up Himself, nor to tearing down the religious leaders’ reputation. He was committed to building up His Father’s image.

His commitment to save was a passion. It consumed every waking moment. He gave control to His Father, who prompted every action. He healed, He forgave, He loved. He showed the way to God. The power with which He lived showed to whom He was committed.

Jesus asks us to be committed too. He has given us a commission to seek and save what is lost, just as He did (Matt. 28:19, 20). In fact, He says we cannot live without a commitment. We are committed either to Jesus or to Satan (Matt. 12:30). There is no middle ground. We cannot call ourselves Christians without giving God control of everything.

1. Look at your actions over the past 24 hours. Carefully examine what you do and why you do it. This can give a fairly good indication of your commitment. Everyone falls at times, but are there some things you do regularly that are not strengthening your commitment to God?

2. Renew your commitment several times a day. Satan is lazy. He won’t tempt you any more than he needs to. When you’ve given God more control, Satan will try harder. The more he works on you, the more committed to God you need to be. It’s a vicious cycle! The more time you spend with God, the more strength you’ll have to resist temptation.

3. Realize that commitment to God doesn’t just happen. We are sinful. We don’t naturally give control of ourselves to the Holy Spirit. And God doesn’t just take control. We need to decide to let Him have control.

*The American Heritage Dictionary, s.v. “Commitment.”

by Larry Witzel

Larry Witzel is a theology major and program director at KGTS, the college radio station, at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

The Great Surprise

OPINION

Key Text: Matthew 25:31-40

I love surprises, and the Bible is full of them. Abraham is home reading *Modern Maturity*, and Sarah has just downed her third dose of Geritol for the day when an angel shows up dressed like the stork. Long before the age of microchip speech, Baalam's 4X4 talks. Jonah takes a timeout twenty thousand leagues under the sea and winds up in the very place to which he swore he'd never go.

The message of Matthew 25 has Adventist written all over it. It is about the judgment. About the Second Coming. It follows on the heels of Christ's most comprehensive statement on His promised return. It is a message for those who long to see their Saviour.

Surprise! Those who are trying to earn their way to the kingdom through their unaided good works are frustrated. Hear their litigation:

"Lord, we stood up for You. We worked for You. We clung to the truth when others espoused heresy. We upheld the standards when others put them down. We preached. We published. We distributed cassette tapes by the box-car load. We prayed our hearts out, Lord. And, get this, we witnessed miracles! Lord, Lord!"

Surprise! The bottom line in judgment is not theological orthodoxy. It's not simply sandbag-

ging one's life against the erosion of a highly selective list of life-style distinctives. The bottom line question in the judgment is plainly and simply this: "How did you relate to people? How did you treat others?"

For those who go to punishment, the surprise is that there was a requirement they missed. They thought they'd nailed them all. For those who go to glory the surprise is that the very thing which only seemed right—to care for someone else's needs even as they would their own needs—should become such a big deal in the judgment. Talk about surprises!

"We didn't do it for a reward, Lord. We didn't know it was You with the split lip and the empty wallet. We had a hunch that if You'd been around You'd have done something about it, but we had no idea it was actually You. This wasn't some good deed for our goal device. We asked You to live inside us and motivate us, and You did. We loved You, and it was natural that we would try to reach out to those who needed help. Listen, Lord. We were busy people too. I'm sure we missed more than our share of opportunities to help. I'm positive we didn't do enough."

Surprise! Listen to the Lord's final pronouncement.

"Enter the kingdom, friend. I'm not inviting you in because you did *enough*. I'm inviting you in because what you did do, you did out of *love* for Me. When you did

by John C. Cress

John C. Cress is the chaplain of Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

it unto one of the *least* of these My children—not when you did it to every last one.”

And the *least*, what did they say? “I was a discouraged college student, and your kindness kept me going. I was out of work, and you shared more than just food and necessities. My children were in church school because you cared. I was a single parent, and you took the time to notice how busy I was, being father and mother all in one. I ran away

from home and I was angry, and frustrated and scared, and you took me in. I was grieving, and you touched me with your compassion, and we both found healing. I was down and out, and you didn’t give me a lecture on industry versus irresponsibility. You simply helped me. I was a widow living on a very small income. I don’t even know where you came up with the means to share with me, but I know you did, and I’ll remember it for eternity!”



Lesson 13, March 25 - 31

Dare to Dream



The Continual Climb Towards

FULFILLMENT

“The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he has risen’ ” (Matthew 28:5, 6, NIV).

Sunday, March 25

Where Does Your Fulfillment Come From?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matthew 26 - 28

I had it all planned. For years I had studied, prayed, and trained. Now it was time. This was what I had waited for.

It was my senior year at Walla Walla College. Being a theology major meant that December was the month "calls" were given. Conference presidents from throughout our union came . . . and went . . . and with them went my chance for a call. I still remember those feelings of disappointment, having to catch my self-worth and bring it back when it started to slip away, and reminding myself to trust God's plan for my life.

Several years went by before I finally received a call to the ministry. During those years of waiting I reminded myself that even though my *plans* weren't fulfilled, I could still be fulfilled. What mattered most wasn't that I had an official title to serve God, but that I had *God*.

Mary Magdalene must have felt something like that, and maybe you do too. God's plans were different from hers too. She probably felt disappointed, empty, and unfulfilled. Her plans weren't for Jesus to die, and when He did she was so wrapped up in the disappointment that she forgot about His promise to rise in three days.

Have you ever been so caught up in feelings of disappointment

and unfulfillment that you, like Mary, have forgotten God's promises? Promises like, "So do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand" (Isa. 41:10, NIV). And the promise "And my God will meet all your needs according to His glorious riches in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:19, NIV).

You and I can learn an important lesson from Mary. In the midst of her feelings of disappointment and emptiness, she didn't lose her faith in God. As soon as it was morning she chose to go to the tomb and do something that would help her feel fulfilled—at least she could visit the tomb and anoint Jesus with spices. Her love for Jesus hadn't died with Him. And because of her devotion, she was rewarded with being the first person to see Jesus and preach the risen Christ.

So when things don't go according to your plans, instead of allowing it to get you down and make you feel unfulfilled, why not trust that God has a plan for your future? He's been with you this far, and He won't let you down now. He's promised.

The world fools us into believing that fulfillment comes from getting what we think we want: These things may help us "feel" good. But unless love, trust, and commitment to God are there, we'll feel empty, not *fulfilled*.

by Nancy Canwell

Nancy Canwell is an associate pastor at the Walla Walla College church, College Place, Washington.

Choosing Sides: Fulfillment or Failure

LOGOS

Theme: Fulfillment—*Feeling that you are worthy and fit is a crucial identity issue facing young adults. Equal to this is the necessity of transference of information into the real world. Christianity, if it is to be significant for youth, must be of a quality to be seen as applying to the important issues in life. This lesson directs our study to such issues as: How do you feel fulfilled and useful? What are the implications to your intellectual choices as they impact your practice of religion?*

1. Choices (read Matthew 26:1-5)

"Jesus . . . said to his disciples, 'As you know, the Passover is two days away—and the Son of Man will be handed over to be crucified'" (Matt. 26:1, 2, NIV).

The last three chapters of Matthew portray a grim and graphic story of people making life-altering decisions of cosmic significance. It is as though Matthew is desperately hurling his word picture at us. No gentle prose or charming stories now. No euphemisms or hidden meanings. The penetrating truth and stark horror of it all leap out in bold and intense imagery.

One after another, key players in the drama march on stage and become entangled in the plot. Each faces a similar predica-

ment and each intends to make it right.

Is there any way to know God's will for human dilemmas? Why isn't good intention enough? Will God make up for our mistakes only under certain conditions? If so, how can we tell what those conditions are?

2. Judas Fails (read Matthew 26:14-25; 27:1-10)

"When Judas, who had betrayed him, saw that Jesus was condemned, he was seized with remorse and returned the thirty silver coins to the chief priests and the elders. 'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood'" (Matt. 27:3, 4, NIV).

This painfully sad story about a motivated, idealistic, competent young businessman should sober many in our greedy culture. Judas has gotten a lot of bad press, not all of which he deserves. He started out merely wanting to be helpful.

Most of the other disciples came from the uncultured part of Palestine. They had no class, no political astuteness, no experience with educated, sophisticated people. Judas promised much-needed balance in that area, and the disciples urged Jesus to accept him into their inner circle.

It was not widely known that Judas misappropriated funds or gave bad advice. He was apparently a good man, dedicated to

by Darold Bigger

Darold Bigger is the senior pastor of the Walla Walla College church, College Place, Washington.

his job and wanting his “company” to succeed.

But he probably became desperate when Jesus said He would be crucified. Then, when Jesus allowed a prostitute to touch Him and later took a basin and towel to wash feet like a slave, Judas decided Jesus needed help. Perhaps, pressed to defend Himself physically, Jesus would respond with the kind of power He had used to benefit others. It would not be fair to the Jewish people for this moment of opportunity to pass. So Judas tried to rescue the Messiah!

Jesus’ mission had become Judas’ mission too. But in the transfer Judas had disastrously distorted God’s intent.

What do you do when things don't go as planned? What feelings do you have and do those feelings distort your perception? affect your choices?

3. Peter Fails (read Matthew 26:31-35, 69-75)

“After a little while, those standing there went up to Peter and said, ‘Surely you are one of them, for your accent gives you away.’ Then he began to call down curses on himself and he swore to them, ‘I don’t know the man!’” (Matt. 26:73, 74, NIV).

Peter wasn’t nearly as subtle as Judas. When faced with the prediction that he’d forsake Christ he loudly protested, “Even if all fall away on account of you, I never will. . . . Even if I have to die with you, I will never disown you” (Matt. 26:33, 35, NIV).

If nothing else, Peter was confident. Years of hard work and a life of success had given him self-confidence. Even during his time with Christ, bold assurance had stood him in good stead. He’s the one who walked on water and was the first disciple to acclaim Jesus as the Messiah, the Son of God.

But in this instance he blazed a bravado trail that has made him famous among the faithful ever since. He learned the bitter lesson of failure. He too was unworthy of the Master’s love, just like Judas, Pilate, the priests, and rulers. That which he was most determined to do he could not accomplish. Fear won over wit and will.

With bitter tears, this macho man faced the horrible truth of who he was—beyond the brave façade, the bold words, and the strong body. That discovery nearly led him to a suicidal death.

Only a subtle but dramatic intervention by Jesus rescued him from that fate. Peter’s salvation is symbolic of how forgiveness and wholeness come for us all. Matthew hints at the solution when he records Jesus’ postresurrection request to the women: “Go and tell my brothers to go to Galilee; there they will see me” (Matt. 28:10, NIV). John tells more of the Galilee encounter between Peter and Jesus, a beautiful story of forgiveness and restoration. Read it to complete this scene from Peter’s life (John 21:15-23).

Why wasn't Peter ready to face the accusations of Christ's critics when he was ready to use his dagger and fight for Him? Under what circumstances are you most likely to yield your highest values to please the crowd? Is it difficult for you to accept forgiveness when you've wronged someone? Does Peter's experience suggest things that might make that easier?

4. Jesus Shares Forgiveness and Finds Fulfillment (read Matthew 26:26-30, 36-46; 27:32-56; 28)

“The angel said to the women, ‘Do not be afraid, for I know that you are looking for Jesus, who was crucified. He is not here; he

has risen, just as He said' " (Matt. 28:5, 6, NIV).

Matthew honored several in these chapters whose behavior demonstrated their confidence in Christ. The woman who anointed Jesus at Simon's feast, Simon from Cyrene, who carried the cross, the centurion and soldiers whose fear brought them to faith, the women who stayed by till Jesus' death, Joseph of Arimathea, who saw to His burial, the women who went to see the tomb on Sunday morning.

But there is none who stands out in dignity and grace like our Lord. Only He, who was supremely powerful, completely submitted to God's will. Only He, who was most despicably treated, offered forgiveness to His tormentors. Only He, who understood best the limitations of humanity, commissioned His unfaithful followers to represent Him to the whole world.

Jesus plays several rolls in Matthew's telling of the story; doomed royalty at Simon's feast, servant and lamb at the Last Supper, prisoner at the arrest, victim at the trials, sufferer of physical

abuse and crucifixion, comforter to the mourners on resurrection morning, and commissioner of the disciples in Galilee. In each He demonstrates the key to success.

The others in whom we see glimpses of goodness reveal that goodness at times of concern for another. The villains and good people gone bad demonstrate their worst when most concerned for themselves. In contrast, all of Jesus' attention was devoted to others—either to His Father or His subjects. Even at times of intense stress and life-threatening danger He did not flinch. His perfect example of selfless love led to eternal life.

How do you react under stress? What might help you keep your mind on others when you're under fire? Is success something one strives for, in and of itself, or is success the by-product of working on behalf of others? Jesus found fulfillment by sacrificing Himself; can that approach be used in your personal life today? Your studies? Your job? Career? What are its limitations? Is it too idealistic? Why?

Tuesday, March 27

Expectations Fulfilled

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matthew 26:36-46

For a young person growing up in the Adventist Christian subculture, there is no doubt that others—especially parents, teachers, and pastors—have specific expectations of you. Expectations relating to your conduct, your dress, the media you consume, how you think, and even your religious experience. Add to these your own personal vision of the model Christian, and you have a pretty formidable role to fill.

When the individuality of your spiritual life doesn't meet the expectations set by your parents, peers, and even yourself, don't despair! "Every individual has a life distinct from all others, and an experience differing essentially from theirs. God desires that our praise shall ascend to Him, marked with our own individuality. These precious acknowledgments to the praise of the glory of His grace, when supported by a Christlike life, have an irresistible power, that works for the salvation of souls."¹

As Christ agonized in the Garden of Gethsemane He felt the pressure of His disciples' expectations. They were eager for Him to exercise His power and take His place on the throne as ruler. But Jesus, through constant prayer had kept in touch with His

Father, and He had a clear vision of His purpose on this earth. So in spite of Satan's relentless temptations and the accusations that pierced Jesus' heart, He still prayed, "If this cup may not pass away from Me, except I drink it, Thy will be done."² God heard Christ's prayer and suffered with Him. "In this awful crisis, when everything was at stake, . . . the mighty angel who stands in God's presence . . . came to the side of Christ. The angel came not to take the cup from Christ's hand. . . . He came to give power to the divine-human suppliant."³

Prayer is our lifeline to God. Prayer strengthens our faith and empowers us with the Holy Spirit as we commune with God.

"The faith that strengthened Habakkuk and all the holy and the just in those days of deep trial was the same faith that sustains God's people today. In the darkest hours, under circumstances the most forbidding, the Christian believer may keep his soul stayed upon the source of all light and power. Day by day, through faith in God, his hope and courage may be renewed. "The just shall live by faith.' In the service of God there need be no despondency, no wavering, no fear. The Lord will more than fulfill the highest expectations of those who put their trust in Him. He will give them the wisdom their varied necessities demand."⁴

1. *Ministry of Healing*, p. 100.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 693.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 693.

4. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 385, 387.

by Teresa Wiedemann

Teresa Wiedemann is secretary to the pastoral staff of the Walla Walla College church, College Place, Washington.

Fear or Fulfillment

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matthew 28:5, 6

“Do not be afraid. . . . He has risen” (Matt. 28:5, 6, NIV).

The resurrection of Christ is the key to the validity of the Christian faith in the sense that Christianity stands or falls depending on whether or not the resurrection truly happened. Paul is clear about that in 1 Corinthians 15. He will have none of twentieth-century notions about the resurrection as metaphor. “If Christ has not been raised, our preaching is useless and so is your faith” (1 Cor. 15:14, NIV). Without the resurrection all fulfillment of ancient prophecy about which Matthew speaks to us is irrelevant. Ultimate fulfillment of all the promises made to mankind is possible only with the resurrection of Christ.

He has risen! That fact is also the guarantee of new life and new possibilities for each of us individually. It is the resurrected Christ who appears to the eleven disciples on a mountain in Galilee at the end of Matthew’s Gospel to give the final promise, the closing words of the gospel: “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NIV). We don’t have to wait until the second coming for personal fulfillment. He promises to be with us now!

But how do we experience fulfillment on a personal level? Personal fulfillment is directly re-

lated to how we feel about ourselves. It is tied up with our self-concept, our sense of being somebody. An adequate self-concept is the key to fulfillment. It allows us to devote our energies wholeheartedly to living a useful and productive life, and so to find meaning in our lives. An inadequate self-concept is a handicap. It binds a person under the tyranny of always having to measure up in some way to feel accepted. Some people are so completely preoccupied with feelings of being a nobody, in a world of people who appear to be more or less stable somebodies, that they can scarcely apply themselves to any certain task. They are afraid of failure, rejection, and humiliation. This fear is a thief. It paralyzes them, robs them of a sense of fulfillment and so, according to clinical psychologist Maurice E. Wagner, three feelings integrate to form the essential elements of self-concept. These three “work together like legs of a tripod to support and stabilize self-concept. If any of the three feelings is weak, the self-concept totters like a camera on a tripod when one leg is slipping.”* Often, we seek self-verification from others based on their acceptance of our *appearance* or our *performance* or our *status*, and it leaves us insecure. Then we constantly and desperately need to be reaffirmed to keep from feeling or thinking we are a nobody. When self-concept is tied to relative values we can never really be sure we

by Henning Guldhammer

Henning Guldhammer is an associate pastor of the Walla Walla College church, College Place, Washington.

belong, are worthy, are competent. But what does this have to do with Jesus?

The message of Jesus to us is that *we belong*. God the Father loves us with an unconditional, voluntary love. He is pleased to call us His children. We may call Him *Abba*. We have been redeemed from being a nobody. We know we are somebody to God. In our relationship with God the Father we can be sure we belong.

The righteousness of Christ in His life, death, and resurrection assures us that by His grace we can be *worthy* in Him. When we come to Him for forgiveness of our sins, we lose our sense of guilt and the associated feelings of being a nobody, a bad person. This is the basis for a true sense

of worthiness. In our relationship with the Son we can be sure we are worthy.

Jesus, through the Spirit, gives us *competence*. Jesus is with us "to the very end of the age" through the Holy Spirit. He teaches us. He gives us gifts for competence. He imparts the love of God, hope, and joy to us. When we relate to the Holy Spirit as our comforter, guide, and source of strength we experience a secure sense of competence.

So, do not be afraid . . . He has risen! Be fulfilled in Him.

REACT

Does competence mean things always go as planned? When do *you* feel most fulfilled?

*Maurice E. Wagner, *The Sensation of Being Somebody: Building an Adequate Self-Concept* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975).

Thursday, March 29

Two Formulas for Fulfillment

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matthew 26:39

So you're shopping for fulfillment (satisfaction) in your life? Then you need to know about the two competitors, Satan and God—each wanting to sell you on his *formula for fulfillment*.

Satan's formula? Grab what you can get, scheme and maneuver, climb to the top (over anyone in the way)—basically, live for yourself; you only go around once. You'll find this formula very compatible with the "natural" (?) world around you.

God's formula for fulfillment? Live your life the way Jesus did, even though it goes against the natural flow of things in this life. Just how *did* Jesus approach life? Here are some key factors in His formula:

1. Submit Your Life Each Day to God's Will. Jesus in Gethsemane did (see Matt. 26:39). Did it pay off? If so, when and in what ways? How did Jesus have the strength to submit? What practical things can you do now to get that kind of strength? When will you find absolute fulfillment?

2. Commit Yourself to Servanthood. Jesus showed us that to really live is to *give*—that to be a "taker" is to die on the inside, even while you still breathe. (If

you want to see how *Satan's* formula for fulfillment worked out for one of Jesus' friends, look up Matthew 27:3-5.)

3. Make Everything You Do an Act of Loving Worship. Have you discovered yet that even doing daily chores can bring fulfillment if you do them out of love for God? Jesus was a carpenter for most of His life—a seemingly menial task compared to His ministry. Yet He did both tasks with deep love for God in His heart.

Brother Lawrence, a humble washer of pots and pans in seventeenth-century France, understood this. He claimed, "It is enough [fulfillment!] for me to pick up but a straw from the ground for the love of God." "We ought not to be weary of doing little things for the love of God, who regards not the greatness of the work, but the love with which it is performed." "We can do little things for God. I turn the cake that is frying on the pan for love of Him, and that done, if there is nothing else to call me, I prostrate myself in worship before Him, who has given me grace to work; afterwards I rise happier than a king."¹ Ellen White also understood this. When love springs up in the heart "every burden is light, for the yoke that Christ imposes is easy. Duty becomes a delight, and sacrifice a pleasure."²

1. Robert M. Johnston, "The Devotional Life of Brother Lawrence," *Ministry*, July 1981.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 59.

by Keith Canwell

Keith Canwell is an associate pastor of the Walla Walla College church, College Place, Washington.

Friday, March 30

“Wait a Minute, Lord”

OPINION

Key Text: Romans 3:28

“Holly? Holly?”

“Wait, wait, wait! I know what you’re gonna say. I’m so sorry about today. I promise, tomorrow I’ll try harder.”

“But, Holly . . .”

“Did you at least see that I was really sweet and kind to my roommate this morning? I tried to let her know that I appreciate her.”

“I know, but . . .”

“And did you see when I *voluntarily* offered to help that guy in my math class. I promise that it had nothing to do with his good looks and coincidental availability.”

“That’s not what I’m trying . . .”

“And I’ve been trying to pay closer attention to the little things that make a difference. I made it a point to smile and say ‘Hi!’ first to everyone on the sidewalk today. I offered to help with Bible studies. I agreed to hostess at church. I went out of my way to help our elderly neighbor. I even gave my room an extra cleaning on Friday. I . . .”

“Holly, all these things you’ve diligently listed for me are great. I’m sure they had a positive impact on the people, but they won’t get you to heaven.”

“What do you mean? What didn’t I do? Are you sure you got down the time I . . .”

“Holly, what I’m trying to tell you is that I already sent My Son down to die for you.”

“I know, but . . .”

“Don’t you see? He was a gift. If you will accept Him and let His love be the cause of your obedience, your note-taking and list-making will not be of primary importance.”

Oftentimes we seem to forget that Jesus has already done the part we cannot do for ourselves. All we have to do is invite the Lord to dwell in our hearts, and let Him make the necessary changes in our lives. We’re so funny. We seem to believe that if we in our strength pile up, arrange, and rearrange our “good deeds,” then we have somehow provided our own salvation. It is reassuring to know that Jesus has not only paid the price for our redemption, He also provides the means for making us safe to save. Through Jesus Christ we can experience true fulfillment.

REACT

Why is it so much easier to keep a record of our “good deeds” rather than just believe? Is it really that simple? How do we actually invite the Lord in?

by Holly Hurlbert

Holly Hurlbert is studying to be a nurse at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Next Quarter's Lessons

Galatians—The Magna Carta of Christianity

For readers who have not yet received a copy of *Collegiate Quarterly* for second quarter 1990, here is a summary of the first two lessons.

Lesson 1: Together We Stand—Divided We Fall

Scripture: Acts 1, 8-11, and 13-15

Theme: Relating to Differences of Understanding. Under divine guidance and the wise administration of its leaders the church can remain true to the gospel of Christ. Unity among its members must be maintained in spite of their differing cultural and religious backgrounds.

Lesson 2: Apostolic Credentials

Scripture: Galatians 1

Theme: A Message From God. Paul's message of salvation by grace did not come from any human source. God gave him special revelations that not only invested him with apostolic authority but also clarified, for the church in every age, the relationship between grace and works. To accept Paul's gospel is to accept the Lord Jesus Christ, who gave it to him.

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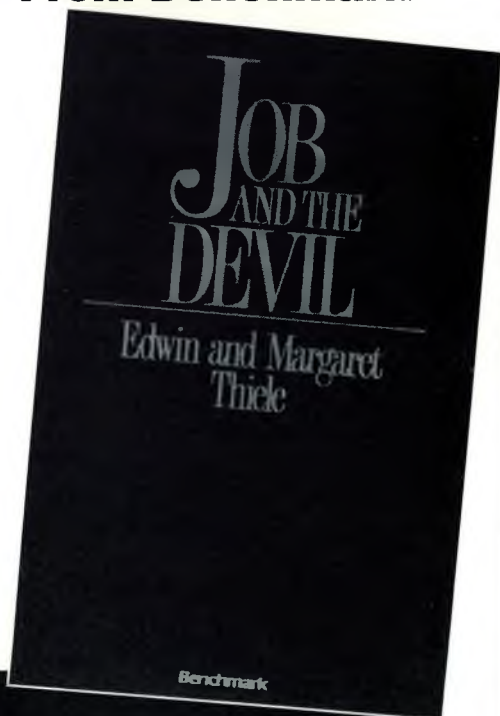
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*It's more than a health message.
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A family of four from England, had been vacationing in Florida for about three weeks when the father began feeling ill. When his condition worsened, he was admitted to Florida Hospital; tests showed he'd suffered a brain hemorrhage.

One of the nurses on the man's unit learned that her patient's son would have his fifth birthday in three days. Even though, their family was going through a tough time, the nurse knew that every child needs to celebrate his birthday. So the nurses on the unit planned a party complete with cake and gifts. The following Sunday, a Florida Hospital social worker treated both sons to a day at Disney World. "The loving care we received at Florida Hospital helped us through our crisis," the man's wife said. The staff worked on my husband's physical recovery and our whole family's emotional one."

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