

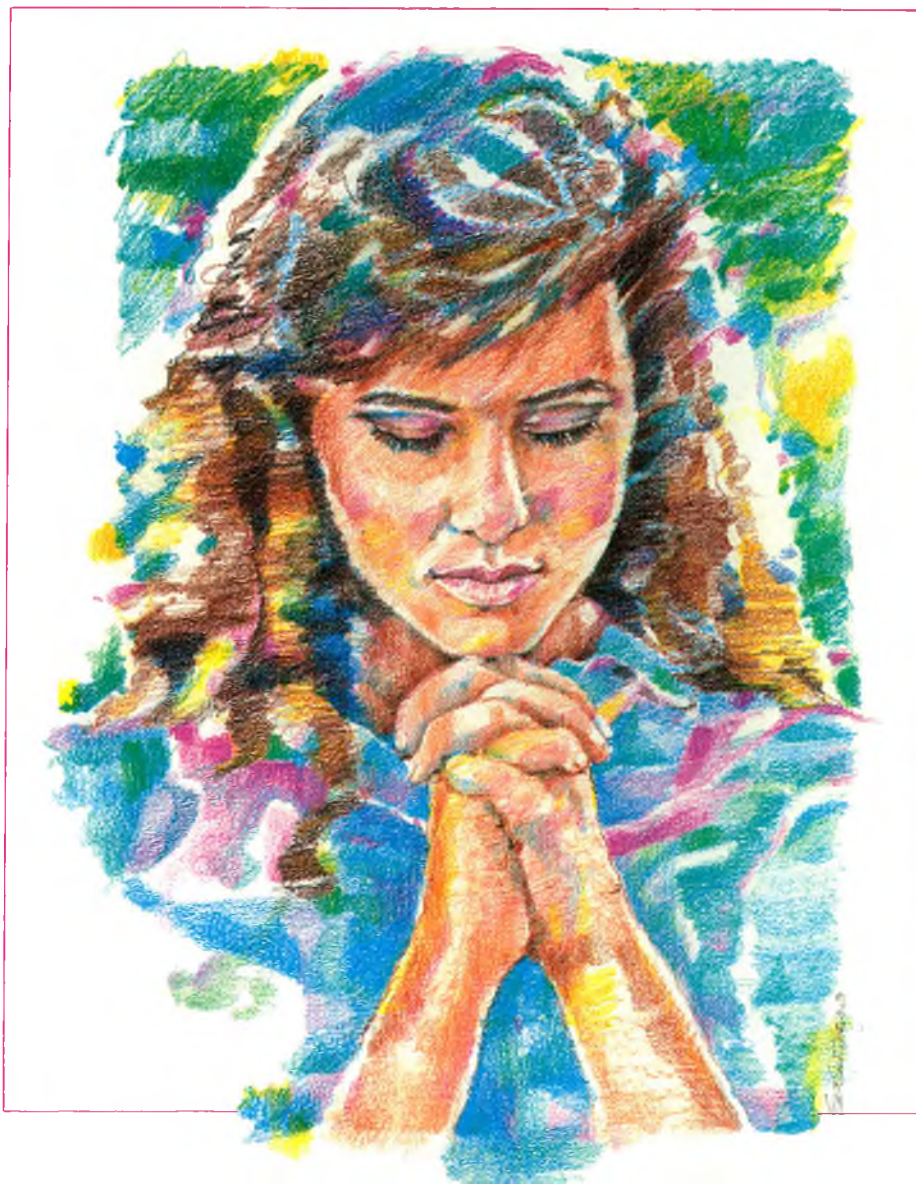
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

A General Conference Church Ministries Publication



April-June 1992

Psalms The Songs of Life



WHY SHOULD KIDS HAVE ALL THE FUN?

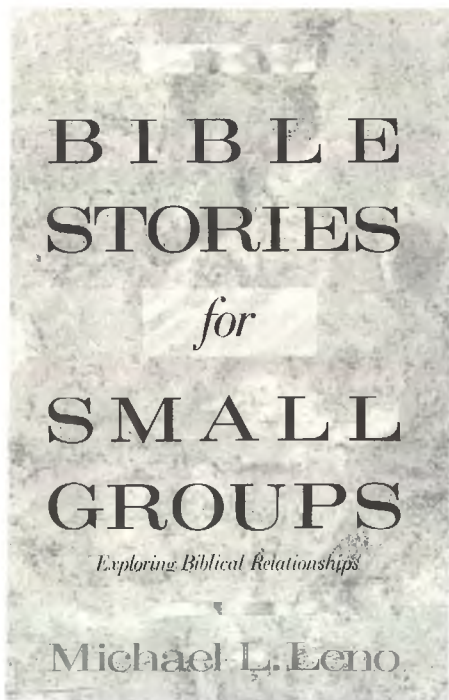
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Psalms

The Songs of Life

1. Why Do the Good Guys Lose?	6
2. When the Roof Falls In	14
3. When All Else Fails	22
4. God of the Gaps	30
5. When the Going Gets Tough	38
6. Your Pilgrim's Progress	46
7. On the Rock or on the Rocks?	54
8. The Wonderful World of Worship	62
9. The Lord God Made It All	70
10. The Blessing Book	78
11. A King for All Seasons	86
12. God in the Driver's Seat	94
13. Praise the Lord Anyway!	102

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Getting the Most Out of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY (CQ) is based on the conviction that the Word of God has transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. 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. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because CQ deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it 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. More than 200 individuals contribute to CQ each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 26,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type in the "Introduction" (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 from your own study of the biblical passage.

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

"Introduction" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest 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 abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

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

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

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 the "Evidence" and "Opinion" sections express views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions.

This Quarter's Artist



Our artist for this quarter is Ed Guthero, former designer of *Signs of the Times*, a winner of more than 40 national publishing awards over recent years, including recognition from *PRINT* magazine, *Communications Arts* magazine, *Graphis*, *The Society of Illustrators' Annual*, and the Associated Church Press.

A Canadian, Mr. Guthero graduated with honors in art from Andrews University in 1976. He spent five years working in advertising in Winnipeg, Manitoba, and Oshawa, Ontario. Presently living in Boise, Idaho, he has recently completed an extensive photographic book project on the contemporary American west. He also teaches a class in design at Northwest Nazarene College in Nampa, Idaho, and presents seminars in publication design.

He plays goalie for the Boise Knights ice hockey team each winter and enjoys guitar, writing, and composing in his spare time.

Lesson 1, March 29–April 4

Why Do the Good Guys Lose?



“Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you” (Ps. 73:25, NIV).

Sunday, March 29

Is It Fair?

INTRODUCTION

Key Text: Job 21:7

Antonio Salieri, the official composer of the Austrian court, once struggled for weeks to write what he considered to be a brilliant composition. When Salieri performed his masterpiece for the king and a group of friends and courtiers, another musician happened to be in the audience. After listening to the piece, this young musician casually dismissed it as "a good start." He then sat down at the piano and within a few minutes had improved an expanded and improved version of Salieri's work.

The crowd applauded heartily, not for Salieri, but for the young *Mozart!*

Within a short time Mozart had completely eclipsed Salieri. What was worse, Mozart seemed to spend most of his time partying and chasing women.

Salieri became a bitter man. *Why?* he asked himself. *Why has all my hard work and dedication amounted to nothing, while this lecherous punk earns praise and admiration with hardly any effort? It isn't fair!*

Salieri's story has a familiar ring to anyone living the Christian life. If God is in control, then why do the wicked prosper?

The limits of God's control (and ultimately, the very existence of God) are under debate by those who study the origins of the universe. At one end of the table sit

the evolutionists, who believe the universe came into being by chance. The universe for them is a chaotic, random place where things happen for no apparent reason.

At the other end of the table sit the creationists, who believe things happen because God allows them to happen. If the wicked succeed, it's because it's part of God's mysterious plan. In the long run, *life is fair* (and the wicked will get theirs, just you wait).

The early scientists subscribed to the creationist point of view. They saw the universe as a great, orderly system with everything meshing together like the workings of a precision-crafted clock.

The discovery of randomness in nature, combined with the increasing acceptance of the theory of evolution, changed the way some scientists looked at the universe. They began to view chance, rather than order, as the fundamental law of nature. A whole new branch of study called "chaos theory" came into being.

Recent developments in chaos theory suggest that nature is neither ordered nor chaotic, but some combination of the two. Although scientists used to think of order and chance as mutually incompatible, some now see an uncanny partnership between them.

Perhaps some things in life do happen by chance. Our struggle as Christians, then, might be in part to learn to maintain our faith in God even when life isn't fair.

by Curt Dewees

Curt Dewees is assistant director for communication for Philanthropic Service for Institutions in Silver Spring, Maryland.

Monday, March 30

Why Do the Good Guys Lose?

LOGOS

Ps. 94:18

The Challenge to Faith (read Ps. 73:2-12; 77:1-9; 94:1-7)

"But as for me, my feet had almost slipped; I had nearly lost my foothold. For I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked" (Ps. 73:2, 3, NIV).

In 1981 an obscure rabbi by the name of Harold Kushner published a small book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. The book became an overwhelming bestseller by striking a nerve as old as biblical religion.

The Bible, from Genesis to Revelation, weaves a portrait of a God who is loving, just, and powerfully active in human events. And that's the problem. If God is loving and just and powerfully active, why is the world also a place where the innocent too frequently suffer.

Each of this lesson's psalms begins with a variant of Rabbi Kushner's question. The psalmists ask, "Why do good things happen to bad people?" It's really the same question.

In Psalm 73 the question is no routine rhetorical device. It is an anguished cry. Why is it that wicked persons who are arrogant and callous (see verse 3), proud and violent (see verse 6), malicious and cynical (see verse 8), unbelieving and presumptuous (see verse 11) enjoy health, wealth, and lives of carefree ease?

It is reassuring to see the psalmist's struggle with the same questions that bother us. Indeed, our spiritual experience is shallow if the injustice that characterizes human experience has never challenged our faith. We should be troubled.

Why was the good fortune of the ungodly and the misfortune of godly persons more troubling to the faith of Old Testament writers than to the faith of New Testament writers?

What is the difference between spiritually productive questioning and destructive doubt?

God Is in Control (read Ps. 73:17; 77:10-20)

"I will meditate on all your works and consider all your mighty deeds" (Ps. 77:12, NIV).

As we have seen, each of our psalms begins with troubled questions. In each the troubled prologue comes to a triumphant end that echoes with inspiring affirmations of faith. How did this transition occur?

In Psalm 73 the transition occurs in verse 17 when the psalmist goes to the sanctuary. Significantly, the answer to his anguished questions does not come through study but through worship.

The psalmist's experience suggests that the problem of understanding the injustice of our world is first of all a problem of the heart, not of the mind. The

by Ed Lugenbeal

Ed Lugenbeal is vice-president for academic affairs at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

psalmist implies that a moment of genuine communion with God in worship can be more effective in solving the fundamental questions of life than years of graduate study! In the sanctuary the psalmist begins to see things very differently.

When the psalmist worshiped in the sanctuary, he experienced a change of heart. He saw that his near loss of faith over the unfair prosperity of the wicked resulted from an embittered spirit (see verse 22) and a sour heart (see verse 21). Even the most powerful mind is helpless to solve the simplest problems if bitterness colors everything you experience.

With this change of heart the psalmist gained a new perspective on the wicked. He saw that he not only exaggerated the good fortune of the wicked, but that their good fortune was temporary and highly precarious. Eventually, justice would prevail, even if that *eventually* could be seen only with the eyes of faith.

What a difference it makes, our psalmist suggests, when we choose to meditate upon different facts—not upon the unfair prosperity of the wicked, but upon God's mighty deeds (see Ps. 77:10-20). God's mighty deeds are first and foremost deeds of redemption and deliverance of His people, including the greatest Old Testament example, the exodus from Egypt.

Today we, as twentieth-century Christians, are in a far better position than the psalmists. We have so many more mighty deeds to focus upon, including the mightiest of all—God's redemption of us

through Christ.

Why do God's mighty deeds seem to appear less ambiguous and more common in biblical times than today?

The Trust of the Righteous (read Ps. 73:20-28; 94:8-19)

"Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you" (Ps. 73:25, NIV).

When the psalmist entered the sanctuary, he also gained a new perspective on God. The high point of the psalmist's new perspective is his recognition in verse 25 that "the earth has nothing I desire besides you."

The psalmist realized that the good guys are losing only if victory is defined by the values of the ungodly. The psalmist had envied the wicked for their prosperity. But what does prosperity have to do with victorious living? The real winners are those who live "near God" (verse 28) and who thus are able to absorb and discover meaning out of whatever life dishes out.

There will always be tragic injustices until Christ comes again, but there will also always be power to cope with these injustices and to live near to God. The injustices will seem overwhelming only if we forget, as the psalmist came to realize, that the earth has little for us to desire besides God.

How much of what happens to us represents the will of God as opposed to luck or chance? Why can personal tragedy be more difficult for a religious person to accept than for a secular person?

Tuesday, March 31

Do the Good Die Young?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Kings 19:10

“Good guys finish last.”

“The good die young.”

David describes in one of his psalms the pain and agony a righteous person encounters in contrast to the enjoyment of a wicked person. The righteous and godly man suffers pain, ruin, ridicule, and discouragement. The wicked person, on the other side of the spectrum, suffers nothing, enjoys life, and takes advantage of someone else's misfortune.

Elijah, one of God's most trusted servants, fell victim to fear, for Queen Jezebel had ordered that he be killed. “It would seem that after showing courage so undaunted, after triumphing so completely over king and priests and people, Elijah could never afterward have given way to despondency nor been awed into timidity. But he who had been blessed with so many evidences of God's loving care was not above the frailties of mankind, and in this dark hour his faith and courage forsook him.”¹

Elijah's spirit suffered fear, disappointment, and depression. His lack of faith in God gave way before the weakness of his flesh, thus causing Israel's great prophet to run for his life. Elijah fled from Jezebel. He tried to hide

from man, but forgot that he couldn't hide from God. God went to Elijah and questioned his actions. Elijah confessed of his fleshly weakness and fear for his life.

“The angel bade him stand before the Lord . . . and listen to His word. ‘And, behold, the Lord passed by, and a great and strong wind rent the mountains . . . but the Lord was not in the wind; and after the wind an earthquake; but the Lord was not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; but the Lord was not in the fire; and after the fire a still small voice.’”²

In the still, small voice God had manifested His love to Elijah. “It is the still, small voice of the Spirit of God that has power to change the heart.”³ Elijah, now filled with the power of the Holy Spirit and the reaffirmation of God's love, went back to Israel to try to bring a reformation to God's chosen people. We mustn't listen to our fears, for they will make us doubt. But listen with our hearts to the “still, small voice” of Jesus.

REACT

How does the “still, small voice of God” express itself to you?

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 159.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 168.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 169.

by Thomas Silva

Thomas Silva is director of the audio-visual department, and is working on his master's degree in education at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

What Price Prosperity?

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Ps. 73:7, 9, 12

Why do the wicked prosper? It is all too easy simply to say that it rains on the just and the unjust.

The psalmist of Psalm 73, in this case Asaph, David's song leader,¹ tells us why the wicked prosper. "From their callous hearts comes iniquity; the evil conceits of their minds know no limits" (verse 7, NIV). "Their mouths lay claim to heaven, and their tongues take possession of the earth" (verse 9). "This is what the wicked are like—always care-free, they increase in wealth" (verse 12).

These verses suggest that the wicked prosper because they concentrate on the wrong things. Look at the evidence of the verses. They have callous, hardened hearts, no compassion, no concern. Therefore, this opens their minds to all sorts of attitudes, desires, and sins.

They prosper because they don't care about anything else. They don't care about you or me. They don't even care about themselves (except in the sense of personal gratification), and they don't care about God. Given these sets of circumstances, anyone could prosper.

Drug dealers. The manufacturers, distributors, and sellers don't care. They care only about making a profit. Because they devote their time, energy, and talents into being prosperous, nothing

else matters. By putting themselves first and caring only about what they can acquire, they prosper. With hardened hearts, with malice, with conceit, with an evil mind, anyone can prosper.

Evil people are so different from us. Right? Wrong! We are all human beings. We are all born with a tendency to sin, with a human, sinful nature. What then keeps us from becoming one of them?

Moses writes in Psalm 90, written 400 years before David and probably the first psalm,² "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands" (verse 17).

The difference is very simple. We let God assign to us the works He wants us to do. God does no evil, therefore our work—His work—cannot be evil. We go to God with unhardened hearts, without malice. We seek Him for His sake that we may do His work. We are satisfied to work for God. "And I—in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness" (Ps. 17:15).

REACT

At what point does prosperity become *our* prosperity and not that of God?

1. Henry H. Halley, *Halley's Bible Handbook* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing Company, 1965), p. 261.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 263.

by Joe Kilburn

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

Thursday, April 2

What Will Your Transcript Say?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 90:12

As we live we encounter innumerable people who are living willfully evil lives, yet they prosper and have the material blessings promised by God to the righteous. On the other hand, we who seek to do God's will suffer the scorn of the wicked (see Ps. 73:1-14). As we cry out at the apparent injustice, we need to come into God's presence to worship, for no other means can restore our faith and perseverance when God seemingly forsakes His covenant promises.

Can we know whether God is in control? What foundation for this trust is there, if any? Is this blind faith?

There are answers that will sustain faith. We need to stop to remember God's creating, protecting, and sustaining deeds from the foundations of the earth to present history (see Ps. 77:11-20). More than this, even, is thankfulness for His intervention in our individual lives. Then we can see the shallowness of the success of the wicked in light of eternity. Then, realizing that we live in a wicked world, we can plead for the Lord to fulfill

the covenant and restore His people (see 1 Kings 8:46-53). The most important part of this process is for God to guide our lives so that we permanently follow Him.

As we analyze our lives and the lives of those not professing to follow Christ, we must recognize our need of instruction and cleansing. There are always lessons that can be learned from every situation, though not every situation is sent by God to teach us something.

Is it improper to expect material blessings from God?

It is harder to understand the lessons found in trials and accidents. We can be sure God is ultimately in control, however, even though Satan does all the evil he can. God does not override evil in every instance, but chooses rather to offer protection of our spiritual well-being if we ask for it. The response God desires is that we be in such a condition that, as in Ps. 90:12, He can teach us to "number our days" and present to Him our hearts.

Do you have any traits that you do not want on your "transcript" of life? In what areas is He attempting to instruct you? How is your response going to look in the light of eternity?

by Glenn Carter

Glenn Carter is a junior religion and business-administration major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Lest We Forget

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 77:11, 12

Since the fall of Adam and Eve, human nature has been endowed with selfishness, pride, hatred—and doubt. At times we lack faith in things that cannot be seen, which sometimes results in our strained relationship with our heavenly Father.

In spite of our doubts and fears, we can still believe through the avenue of faith based on the Word of God. This belief in the Eternal One allows us to reflect on what He has done for us in the past, and, if we allow Him, what He can do for us today and in the future.

Occasionally we look around and notice the ill effects of sin—sickness, death, war, famine—and are quickly tempted to believe that God has forgotten His earthly children. We complain and ask, “Has his unfailing love vanished forever? . . . Has God forgotten to be merciful?” (Ps. 77:8, 9, NIV).

We also see individuals prosper who are not living according to the will of God, and we say, “They have no struggles; their bodies are healthy and strong. They are free from the burdens common to man; they are not plagued by human ills” (Ps. 73:4, 5). By the careful examination of these people, we fall into the common belief that God has abandoned us, leaving us in despair and without hope.

Then there are others who

choose not to look at the prosperity of those not living righteously, but who carefully examine their own relationship with God. They stand firm in faith, believing that God will not leave or forsake them.

Doubt makes us forget what God has done for us. We quickly remember the negative experiences in our lives and blame God for them. If we could just pause and reflect upon our personal relationship with Him, we would remember His goodness, unending mercy, and love.

Instead of forgetting, we should remember who wakes us up in the morning, who provides food, clothing, and shelter, who sends the rain to water our thirsty crops and sunshine to keep us warm. He cares for us so much that He provides friends to encourage us in all circumstances. More important, God loved us so much that He did not hesitate to sacrifice His only Son for our redemption.

REACT

1. When did I last pause to reflect on the goodness of God toward me?

2. What category of people do I belong to when it comes to my relationship with God? Do I doubt His promises or stand firm on them?

3. Explain why you agree or disagree with the following statement: “Doubt is the vestibule which all must pass, before they can enter into the temple of truth” (Colton).

by Sandra A. Smith

Sandra A. Smith is a senior social-work major at Atlantic Union College, South Lancaster, Massachusetts.

Lesson 2, April 5-11

When the Roof Falls In



“You will arise and have compassion on Zion, for it is time to show favor to her; the appointed time has come” (Ps. 102:13, NIV).

Rescued!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 50:15

The day was warm and windy, and my excitement was high.

Today my rock-climbing class was going to rappel down the college water tower! With great anticipation I climbed the ladder.

Partway up, I glanced down. The nervous knot in my stomach tightened. I decided to keep looking up; I felt safer that way. Reaching the top, I clipped my climbing harness into a piece of webbing securely tied for my protection. It was almost time for me to find out just how much courage I really had.

Because I was so nervous, my teacher told me to go down first. Unclipping myself from the webbing, I hooked the rappelling rope to my harness. I was set. Cautiously I approached the edge, hands sweating and heart pounding. I must have been crazy to sign up for the class, but it was too late to worry now. With much encouragement from my teacher, I stepped over the edge. My feet found the side of the tower, and my confidence returned while I relaxed in the harness.

The delight of being free in the air was exhilarating, so I climbed up the ladder again, eager to have another chance. Finally it was time for my second descent.

This time stepping over the edge was not quite so terrifying, and swinging out from the water tower was thrilling, despite the persistent wind.

Then it happened. The wind whipped my hair too close to the rope, and it was caught. I was only one-third of the way down, suspended in midair, 60 feet from the ground.

What was I to do? If I had had scissors, I could have easily cut the hair. But who brings scissors to rock-climbing class? I couldn't go up or down. "Help," I shouted. "I'm stuck!"

For a long time I couldn't see what my teacher was doing, so I just dangled patiently, knowing that he would come and save me from my dilemma.

He could have let me try to free myself. After all, I was the one who had been foolish enough not to braid my hair. But he clipped his harness into another rope, descended to where I was, and rescued me.

God is very much the same. He could just leave us in the trouble we have created for ourselves. But He doesn't. He wants us to call on Him for help. In fact, Psalm 50:15 says that *all* we need do to gain His deliverance is to *call* on Him. As the thought for this week states, God "will deliver you" from trouble (NIV). He is indeed our Saviour!

by Laurelee Michaela Cotton

Laurelee Michaela Cotton is a senior elementary-education major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

Monday, April 6

Facing the Avalanche

LOGOS

Ps. 102:13

The Reality of Distress (read Ps. 80:4-6)

"Many secrets of religion are not perceived till they be felt, and are not felt but in the day of great calamity."¹

It is difficult to be certain which national calamity originally brought forth Psalm 80, but mention of the tribes of Ephraim, Benjamin, and Manasseh in verse 2 indicates that it most likely refers to the overwhelming of the northern tribes of Israel by the Assyrians about 732-722 B.C. But whatever the calamity, verses 8 through 19 show an earnest desire for restoration of the nation, even though the prayers of the people seem to be a combination of faith and uncertainty in a time of trouble. Their prayers for deliverance, mingled with confession of sin and with many tears, are answered (see 2 Chron. 32:20, 21).

How much is your own religious experience like the typically human response in verses 4 and 14? What is the psalmist saying about human nature in these two verses?

The Pit of Despair (read Ps. 74:10, 11)

"What we call despair is often only the painful eagerness of unfeigned hope."²

It is approximately 587 B.C.

The enemy sweeps down like a relentless avalanche, beating the Hebrew armies back, taking King Zedekiah prisoner, and slaying his sons before his eyes. The king is led away captive. His eyes are put out, and he perishes miserably in Babylon.

Many who escaped the horrors of the long siege by Nebuchadnezzar years before now perish by the sword in the final overthrow of Jerusalem. And those remaining, especially chief priests and officials of the kingdom, are taken to Babylon, where they are executed as traitors or forced to become slaves.

Even the beautiful temple on the mount is not spared. "They burnt the house of God, and brake down the wall of Jerusalem, and burnt all the palaces thereof with fire, and destroyed all the goodly vessels thereof" (2 Chron. 36:19). The Babylonians completely destroyed Jerusalem, *including the temple*.

God's people cry out in anguish, not just for help! However, their faith assures them that His love, not His anger, lasts forever (see Ps. 106:1). Although God did not use His power to deliver the Hebrew people from their oppressors, He has, in the realm of history, provided salvation for His people. Even when you feel lost and rejected, when your sins seem to be a wall separating you from God, God cannot lie! He has promised never to leave you. He never will reject you just because

* by John Wesley

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you are a sinner.

Hope in Personal Captivity (read Ps. 102:19, 20)

“Tribulation worketh patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope” (Rom. 5:3, 4).

The believer’s personal feelings of despair and hopelessness appear in Psalm 102:1-11. However, the focus shifts from the personal level to the corporate level in verses 12 through 22. The good news in this passage shows us not only our own suffering but also the suffering of Jesus Christ our Saviour. Jesus can fully identify with our predicament, and “in Christ” we can truly hope—even in captivity.

Hope in National Captivity (read Ps. 137:4)

“I do not desire vengeance. . . . I would rather pray with Esther than take the sword with Judith.”³

After returning from Babylonian captivity, the Hebrews recall how they refused to sing Yahweh’s song for the amusement of their captors (see verses 3, 4). The psalmist here prays for vengeance on Israel’s enemies who destroyed Jerusalem, but we must be careful not to attribute to God the shocking form of retaliation expressed by the psalmist in verse 8. Vengeance seems like justice to the psalmist, who is a child of the prevailing customs of his age; however, it is not God’s will that children or anyone else—including the heathen—should

perish (see Matt. 18:14; 1 Peter 3:9). Our only hope is in the love of God and in His promise for *all* who believe; our hope is in God’s mercy.

What is a Christlike attitude toward oppressors? How do you think God feels about you if your feelings toward oppressors are not Christlike?

Deliverance (read Ps. 126:3, 5)

“So freedom comes array’d with charms divine,
And in her train Commerce and Plenty shine.”⁴

In Psalm 126 we find an expression of happiness and relief in verses 1-3, but it implies more than deliverance. Verses 4 through 6 speak of mercy, freedom, and restored fortunes. Prayer and thanksgiving are offered for harvest and seasonal rains in the dry Negev Desert. When God visits His people, the miracles of the past suggest hope for the future. The dry places in our lives are potential rivers in Christ our Lord.

How have you received the relief and joy of salvation provided as a gift by God in Christ (see Rom. 5:10, 11)?

1. T. Edwards, *The New Dictionary of Thought* (New York: Standard Books, 1936), p. 11.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 127.

3. E. Partnow, *The Quotable Woman* (New York: Facts on File Publications, 1985), p. 37.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 621.

Tuesday, April 7

God Is Our Pillar

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Nahum 1:7

Things were not looking good for Judah. Years earlier (722 B.C.) the Assyrian armies had finished conquering both Israel and Samaria and had taken about 30,000 captives. Now, Sennacherib, the Assyrian general, was at the borders of Judah with his army, heading toward his ultimate goal—Jerusalem. He divided his force into two groups, one to attack Judah and the other to prevent Egypt from coming to Judah's aid. Hezekiah, Judah's king, had done all he could to shore up Jerusalem's defenses (such as digging a tunnel under the city walls to secure a safe water supply). Judah, a tiny nation, would have to face Assyria without help from its allies. The situation looked hopeless, but Hezekiah did not lose his faith and trust in God. God rewarded him for this by saving him and Judah from destruction by the Assyrians.

What lessons can we learn from this episode in the history of the children of Israel?

First, we can take hold of God's promise that "I will never leave thee, nor forsake thee" (Heb. 13:5). "We are to believe God and His promises, and in His power to help and save us. We must believe Him; for He is well able and more than willing to help us in time of trouble, to comfort us in times of affliction and distress, and to deliver us out of all our trials and difficulties."¹

God is always ready to assist us, for He is "our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1). No matter how terrible our situation, God will see us through if we let Him.

Second, "God would have us recall His dealings with His people in the past, to save them from their enemies, and trust in Him. He has always chosen extremities, when there seemed no possible hope for deliverance from Satan's workings, for the display of His power. Man's necessity is God's opportunity."² We can learn from the lessons that God has taught us in the past, both individually and as a church. We can have hope in the present, that God will forgive us our sins, taking us out of the hopelessness of the situations that arise in our lives.

Finally, we can look forward to "that blessed hope"—Jesus' soon return! God has promised to deliver us out of the darkness of sin and into the hope of life eternal. Will we take Him up on His offer?

REACT

1. How do we claim the promises of God? What does this mean in everyday terms?

2. What can we do when there seems to be no solution to a problem?

1. Ellen G. White, in *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, December 21, 1886.

2. Ellen G. White, in *Signs of the Times*, November 28, 1900.

by Richard A. Foulkes

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History: Lest We Forget

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 4:18, 19

Hezekiah had done all he could to defend his kingdom. Waiting outside the walls of Jerusalem, Assyrians taunted, "On whom are you depending?" (2 Kings 18:20, NIV). "Has the god of any nation ever delivered his land from the hand of the king of Assyria?" (2 Kings 18:33, NIV). Despite the seemingly inevitable collapse of Jerusalem, Hezekiah's faith remained dependent upon God.

Why, then, was Jerusalem wiped out 120 years later? Didn't God's covenant of a Davidic line in 2 Samuel 7:12-16 endure forever? Here lies a dilemma for all who study the Scriptures; what is God saying, and why do we misunderstand Him?

Although many of us feel as though everything is ready to collapse and we can't grasp God's plan, Psalm 102:18-22 gives us comfort. History shows how those before us overcame their trials.

The year 1991 started with the world anxiously awaiting the consequences of the January 15 confrontation between the U.S. and Iraq. Many hoped that the problems in the Persian Gulf could be remedied by negotiation, but this was not the case. Do you remember your thoughts during that time? Were you as prepared for the events to follow as you should have been? Did this clash of powers present enough insight

and intensity to move you to declare the three angels' messages to the world?

The book *Prophets and Kings* gives extraordinary insight into God's character: "With unerring accuracy the Infinite One still keeps account with the nations. While His mercy is tendered, with calls to repentance, this account remains open; but when the figures reach a certain amount which God has fixed, the ministry of His wrath begins. The account is closed. Divine patience ceases. Mercy no longer pleads in their behalf."^{*}

God has promised to deliver those who accept the atonement of His Son for their sins. To be like Hezekiah and submit our problems to God in prayer and petition assures that He will go before us and care for us in ways we have not even considered.

God's sovereignty appeals to man to dedicate himself daily to Him in thought and action. The eye of faith will see through any discouragement, and our focus will be on Christ and His heavenly ministry. Our roof will not fall in as earth's history draws to a close. Our reward will be to find ourselves as one of the five wise virgins, who were prepared for the bridegroom to come.

REACT

Why is it sometimes easier to detect God's leading in global affairs than in more localized affairs?

^{*}*Prophets and Kings*, p. 364.

by Leslie Erho

Leslie Erho is assistant dean of men and a behavioral-science major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

Thursday, April 9

A Tractor in Mudtime

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 102:13

Stuck again! The mud hadn't looked that deep. I had been driving my car on a country road to visit some friends, and this had to happen. I could spin my tires and get stuck deeper. I could go and get a rope and break my back trying to pull my car out. But why? I knew how to get this thing out in no time at all. I just needed to go get help from the farmer down the road. The farmer's tractor would pull it as easily as I could open a door.

It is amazing how often we get spiritually stuck on some terrible experience. We spin our emotional wheels and end up feeling even weaker than when we began. We become angry. We let the whole world know how terribly we've been treated. But God is just a prayer away, like a super-ultimate, turbo John Deere tractor ready for any trouble.

People never seem to remember that God's help is so readily available. The people of Judah were stuck when they had the Assyrians fighting against them. They were afraid and confused, so they went to Egypt for help, but Egypt was in no position to help them. However, Isaiah reports

that when Hezekiah prayed, God heard his prayers, and the Assyrian king failed to take Jerusalem. God kept His word, and Jerusalem was safe.

Humans haven't become stronger through the years, no matter how much we'd like to think we have. Today, too, we need to call on God for our strength. Here's how:

1. *Get on your knees and tell God, "Life is scary, and I need Your help. I can't deal with it alone."* God will reach out His hand and take all the troubles and fears we will give Him.

2. *Ask God for the strength you need, and He will give you a victory to celebrate.*

3. *Ask God for peace. We are such worriers. We wonder, Have I really overcome this problem? Yes, Jesus took it, and He will give us ultimate joy. Jesus is victorious, and we can claim His power.*

REACT

1. Is worrying a sin? What is the difference between legitimate concern and worry?

2. On what kinds of issues can I justify calling on Jesus for help?

3. Why is worry so spiritually destructive?

by Richard Gray

Richard Gray is a senior elementary-education major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

When God Is Silent

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 102

I can relate to the pain expressed by the afflicted man in Psalm 102. Involved in a traumatic experience, he encountered what he thought was the silence of God.

I was in my first church assignment on my own and was not enjoying it. People misunderstood my best efforts to help. Life was no longer fun, but a burden. As my wife observed, I no longer laughed. My capacity to minister effectively was rapidly disappearing. My sermons were a nightmare to prepare and present. I felt I was failing and knew that if something didn't change I'd have to quit.

The most difficult part was God's strange silence. How could I keep sharing God's love with others when He was not talking to me?

Joyce Heatherley's experience, related in her book *Silent September*,¹ helped me. She discovered that to open herself to close friends and to allow them to support her in her pain somehow made things more bearable. God sometimes uses human means to meet human need. I too found relief from the loneliness of God's silence as I shared what I was experiencing with others.

I have now come to discover that this silence is rather predictable. Larry Yeagley describes

what often happens when people lose a loved one. It's as if a cloud comes between them and God. They are unable to sense God's presence, and they feel abandoned by Him at a time when they need Him most. By opening to someone outside the situation, someone not under the same cloud blocking connection with God, the grieving are able to receive reassurance of God's presence, love, and forgiveness.²

Even Jesus, aware of His humanity, needed friends. Referring to His close relationship with Lazarus and his sisters, Ellen White says, "Here He found a sincere welcome, and pure, holy friendship. . . . Our Saviour appreciated a quiet home and interested listeners. He longed for human tenderness, courtesy, and affection."³

We see Him in the garden, under the crushing load of our sins, which separated Him from God, and we hear Him ask for Peter, James, and John to be close to Him and pray with Him. Jesus Himself needed friends to support Him.

REACT

1. Is there room in my belief about God for the ministry of supportive friends?

2. If I were in crisis now, which of my friends could I turn to?

1. Joyce L. Heatherley, *Silent September* (Austin, Tex.: Balcony Pub., Inc., 1988).

2. Larry Yeagley, *Grief Recovery* (Keene, Tex.: published by author, 1981), p. 46.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 524.

by Warren Kay

Warren Kay is campus pastor for Canadian Union College and Parkview Adventist Academy, College Heights, Alberta.

Lesson 3, April 12-18

When All Else Fails . . .



“These things happened to them as examples and were written down as warnings for us, on whom the fulfillment of the ages has come. So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don’t fall” (1 Cor. 10:11, 12, NIV).

How Could They?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Heb. 2:3

“How often they rebelled against Him in the wilderness, and grieved Him in the desert!” (Ps. 78:40, NASB). “How could they?” “Why did they?” God did so much for the Israelites during the Exodus to show them His love and power. How could they forget that? Why did they keep turning from Him? After all, think of it:

1. *In the “hour of His judgment” upon all the firstborn in Egypt, wherever God saw the blood of the Lamb He passed over the Israelites (see Exod. 12:13; Ps. 105:36; Ps. 136:10).*

2. *He brought them out of slavery by his own “strong hand and outstretched arm” (Ps. 136:11, 12, NASB).*

3. *He silenced in the waters those who would condemn and destroy them (see Exod. 14, 15; Ps. 136:13-15).*

4. *In the wilderness heat and*

barrenness He continually refreshed them with the waters of life from the Rock that needed only once to be smitten by the rod of Moses (Ps. 78:15, 16, 20, NASB); and rained down upon them the “bread of heaven”—the sustenance of angels (Ps. 78:24, 25, NASB).

5. *He was their shelter by day and their light by night (see Ps. 105:39).*

6. *When they were bitten by the serpent fangs, He raised up a crucified cure—a likeness to the curse impaled on a pole, that whoever in humble obedience would look, lived (see Numbers 21:6-9).*

7. *After freeing them from bondage, He guided them through their wanderings, gave them His covenant, and tabernacled in their midst (see Exod. 19-22).*

How could they so easily turn? The answer is uncomfortably close to us all. Check out the mirror. Why do we so easily doubt and deny our Lord? Why do we so easily glide into apathy?

by Richard Fredericks

Richard Fredericks is an associate professor of religion at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Monday, April 13

Magnify the Lord With Me

LOGOS

Ps. 136:1

Fallible Followers, Infallible Leader (read Ps. 78)

This didactic psalm summons God's people to learn "things from of old" (verse 2, NIV). These items, along with the affirmations and identifications in verses 4-6, reveal the psalmist's source and suggest the covenantal link (see verses 10 and 37). He seems to have the book of Deuteronomy in mind. Not only does Deuteronomy highlight the second giving of the law; it is set in covenantal structure.

Most crucial is chapter 4 of Deuteronomy. After reviewing the relations between God and Israel, Moses repeatedly invited the people to understand and learn from the things their eyes had seen and their ears had heard. He outlines for them the distinctive acts and features of Yahweh that should evoke reverence and obedience. After restating the decalogue as part of the covenantal stipulations, he invites the people to love the Lord, embrace His commands, and teach them diligently to their children.

Within this tradition the psalmist approaches his generation. But he is aware of the covenantal failure of his ancestors and therefore anticipates that his generation's instructions to their children will preempt stubbornness, rebellion, and disloyalty to God (see Ps.

78:7, 8). What follows is a recitation of God's actions on behalf of Israel as revealed in the Exodus experience.

How do your actions as an individual contrast with God's providential leadings on your behalf?

Israel's continual rebellion is contrasted with God's steadfast love in verses 17-32. They showed no genuine repentance or long-term obedience.

Why was Israel so disloyal? They forgot the central and pivotal experience that made them a people. They forgot what God had done for them and His redemptive acts of the Exodus.

How should gratitude be expressed to God for redemption through the death and resurrection of Jesus?

Not only did Israel demonstrate ingratitude for the Exodus; they did for the Promised Land too. He therefore rejected them.

The only ray of hope in the whole psalm comes at the end. After God chose Judah, He selected David. It closes on a positive note with the faithfulness of God and the extraordinary things He has done for His people.

God's Consistency (read Ps. 105)

Closely allied to Psalm 78 is

by Dr. Bertram Melbourne

Dr. Bertram Melbourne is the chairman of the religion department at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Psalm 105. The former parallels the twin themes of Israel's inconsistency and God's consistency. Here the predominant theme is thanksgiving to God. It begins and ends with hallelujah.²

The first seven verses summon the people to give thanks and praise to God and to announce to the nations what He had accomplished. The people need to look to Him for strength and must seek His face. He is a covenant-keeping God. He renewed with Isaac His covenant to give the descendants of Abraham the land of Canaan.

The psalmist notes that in times of famine God's providence was evident. He sent Joseph to Egypt and disciplined him so he could pave the way for his father and brethren. When Israel's period of trouble expired, God delivered them with much spoils after plagues on the Egyptians. The psalm climaxes by presenting the Exodus experiences and the conquest as climactic examples of the faithfulness of a God who keeps His promises.

A Catalog of Failures (read Ps. 106)

This psalm is the flip side of the preceding one. Picking up at the Exodus, it highlights the faithlessness and failures of Israel. Like Psalm 105, it begins and ends with hallelujah. The people are invited to give thanks to God, since He is good, His love is enduring, and His mighty acts are unutterable. So overwhelmed is the psalmist at this thought that he utters a prayer to God requesting a share in the joy of His chosen nation and a part with His inheritance in giving praise. He even entered into confession on behalf of the nation and its founding fathers.

What would you say to a friend

who suggests that he can act as he chooses, since God is forgiving and kind and Jesus died for his sins anyway?

Magnify the Lord With Me (read Ps. 136)

This psalm provides a fitting climax to this discussion. It focuses attention once more on the goodness of God. It emphasizes His uniqueness and grace with the significant refrain: "His love endures for ever." It invites us to "give thanks to the Lord." Derek Kidner suggests that this is an inadequate translation. To him the psalm invites thoughtful and grateful worship and spells out what we know or have experienced of God's glory and deeds.³

The psalm highlights five major characteristics of God that deserve praise. Thoughtful, grateful worship must be given to God for:

1. He is the supreme God (see verses 1-3).
2. He is Creator (see verses 4-9).
3. He is the great Liberator (see verses 10-15).
4. He is Leader and Sustainer (see verses 16-22).
5. He is the great Provider (see verses 23-25).

God is great and magnificent. He deserves worship and praise. When all else fails, He is there. Let's not wait for that exigency, however, to praise Him and commit ourselves to His lordship.

1. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company), p. 24.

2. Marion McH. Hull, *Two Thousand Hours in the Psalms* (Chicago: John A. Dickson Publishing Company, 1934), p. 403. He suggests that the hallelujah at the end of Psalm 104 belongs at the beginning of Psalm 105.

3. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (London: InterVarsity Press, 1975), p. 457.

Tuesday, April 14

Don't Forget to Remember

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 105:5

"Upon us is shining the accumulated light of past ages. The record of Israel's forgetfulness has been preserved for our enlightenment. In this age God has set His hand to gather unto Himself a people from every nation, kindred, and tongue."¹

God wants to use us as His instruments to gather others to Himself. He wants to employ everyone who is willing to be instruments of His love. "But ye are a chosen generation, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a peculiar people; that ye should shew forth the praises of Him who hath called you out of darkness into His marvellous light" (1 Pet. 2:9).

As a chosen people, though, we run into problems when we take our eyes off Jesus because we then tend to forget the goodness of God. In these last days one of the worst things that could happen to a Christian is that he forget God and all of His goodness.

"As I see what God has wrought, I am filled with astonishment, and with confidence in Christ as leader. We have nothing to fear for the future except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us."²

God had blessed Israel by leading them from bondage and on to the Promised Land. Israel, blessed by God and given freedom from oppression, was then

to "press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3:14). That high calling of God was for them to be witnesses of His to the world. Israel failed to be a witness for God, however, because they forgot the great and mighty works He had wrought for them. "Why did ancient Israel so easily forget God's dealings? The people did not retain in their memory His works of greatness and power or His words of warning."³

We too, as spiritual Israel, have been set free from the chains of sin, and are to press on as God's people to be His witnesses. We, who were once bound in sin but are now found in Christ, are not to forget God. We have a high calling to be witnesses of God. To be chosen, and yet still to forget who chose us, and to fail would be a terrible tragedy and a great loss. "Wherefore let him that thinketh he standeth take heed lest he fall" (1 Cor. 10:12).

Let the people of God continue to seek Him lest they forget His goodness and fall.

REACT

1. What are some of the reasons that we lose our focus and forget God?
2. When is it appropriate to remind others of their forgetfulness?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 115.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 31.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 113, 114.

by Darren D. White

Darren D. White is a junior theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Spiritual Forget-Me-Nots

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 78:5-7

Psalms 78, 105, 106, 136 were all known as national hymns of Israel. For Christians these psalms give instruction in righteous living and emphasize the covenant relationship between God and Israel.

The psalmist demonstrates God's kindness to rebellious Israel. At the same time, he shows the consequences Israel suffered as a result of her disloyalty. The children of Ephraim (descendants of Joseph) "did not keep God's covenant . . . and forgot what he had done, the wonders he had shown them" (Ps. 78:10, 11, NIV). As a result, "He [God] rejected the tents of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which He loved" (verses 67, 68). 2 Samuel 6:1-8 records the story of David's bringing the ark of God to Jerusalem, and the territory of Judah becoming its new home.

The psalmist repeatedly refers to God's mighty acts of deliverance of Israel as demonstrations of His love and mercy. Yet the Israelites continually forgot these things and turned from God (see verse 7).

We too must remember the grace God has shown us in the past if we wish to stay in communion with Him. When we forget God's blessings, we become anxious about the future. Ellen White wrote: "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall for-

get the way the Lord has led us, and His teaching in our past history."^{*}

We must continually refer to our deliverance 2,000 years ago at a place called Calvary. There God proclaimed to Satan: "Let my people go." Just as Israel faced the overpowering fear of the Red Sea, which appeared to be the end of their hopes but in fact finished off their enemy for good, so the disciples saw Christ die. But when the stone was rolled away the waters of hopelessness parted, and God sealed Satan's fate. The New Testament church, the "Israel of God," sprang forth in victory from this seeming defeat.

Now as we journey to the Promised Land, we must seek His will in our lives. We must have faith in His promises and be willing to trust and follow Him even if it means facing the giants that occupy the place where God has called us to dwell. We must always remember that what God did through Jesus Christ 2,000 years ago assures us of His ability to keep His redeemed secure to the end.

"May the God of peace, who through the blood of the eternal covenant brought back from the dead our Lord Jesus, that great Shepherd of the sheep, equip you with everything good for doing his will, and may he work in us what is pleasing to him, through Jesus Christ, to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen" (Heb. 13:20, 21).

^{*}Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 10.

by Chester N. Hitchcock

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

Thursday, April 16

Making God's Work Real

HOW-TO

Key Texts: Ps. 105:4, 5; Rom. 5:1, 2

This week's lesson has focused on psalms that speak of how God has provided for the needs of His people, even when they didn't want to acknowledge Him. Despite human failings, God has always reached out to save His creation. The central theme of the Bible is God's salvation work through Jesus Christ.

1. *Remember God's salvation.* Take a few minutes at the beginning of each week to read and meditate on the stories in Scripture that show how God saved His people. The Old Testament stories graphically illustrate how God saved Israel from physical slavery and foretell God's plan to save man from spiritual slavery.

Pay special attention to the New Testament accounts of how God has saved us through the death of Christ on the cross. Read one of the Gospel accounts of the crucifixion, or chapters like Romans 3, 4, or 5, or Ephesians 2. As you remember that Christ has saved you by taking your punishment and giving you His life, you will be assured of His continued work in your life today.

2. *Communicate with God.* Begin a list of your needs to bring before God. Be specific and incor-

porate every area of your life. Include physical needs and relationships where you need help. Ask God to provide understanding for Bible passages that you don't understand or special strength in resisting a temptation. Add to this list during the week. Bring your needs before God, ask His help, and thank Him for His answers.

At the end of the week, on Friday evening or Sabbath, take a few quiet minutes to review your list. Think about how God has answered your prayers and provided for your needs. Thank Him again for this help, even for requests for which you haven't seen an answer yet. Keep a record of your needs and answers in a journal.

3. *Share what God has done.* Sharing what God has done in your life is an encouragement to other Christians and a witness to non-Christians. You can incorporate this sharing into your daily life.

Letters are a good way to share with nonbelievers. You can include a paragraph about how God has helped you during the week. Since God is a part of your life, it is entirely natural for you to talk of Him as you would of any other news.

REACT

When does God stop working to reach an individual who continually rejects His salvation?

by Michelle Rader

Michelle Rader is a senior religion and English major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

When All Else Fails, Seek and Remember

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 105:4, 5

Jane reached with bare hand into the icy depths of the cooler. She lost her breath for a quick moment as the chill hit every limb. "Perfect!" she said as she pulled the equally cold bottle of juice to the surface.

"Here, catch!" She tossed the bottle into the center of the group that huddled around the fire. They squealed.

"Don't you think hot cocoa would have been more appropriate?" Dan chuckled. He placed the bottle on the ground and rubbed his hands together furiously, extending them toward the fire.

"Jane," Dan said, "we've read Psalms 105 and 106, as you asked. Frankly, it's a pitiful sight. These Israelites were downright disobedient! The ironic thing is that Psalm 105:42-45 says that God 'brought forth his people with joy, . . . so that they might keep his statutes, and observe his laws!' The depressing thing is that I can relate. I think I'm an Israelite too! How can we get out of this mess?"

"You've spotted a great dilemma," Jane observed. "God provides an answer. Sue, could you read Psalm 105:4, 5 and

share what you find?"

"Seek the Lord, and his strength: seek his face evermore. Remember his marvellous works that he hath done, his wonders, and the judgments of his mouth.' It says to me here that we need only to seek and remember."

"Imagine that the fire represents God; and the bottle, each one of us," Jane said. "In the presence of the fire, the bottle became warm like the fire. Its molecules obey the heat and jump into action. What would happen if you were to throw it ten feet behind you onto the frozen ground away from the source of heat? It's all a matter of presence! That's why we are reminded to seek the Lord continually."

"But how do we seek Him, especially when He's not tangible?" Dan asked.

"The key word is *remember*," Jane said. "Remember the wonders that God has performed for you in the past. And most important, remember the judgments that have already been uttered for you, on the cross, for the security of your salvation!"

REACT

1. Why is it so important to remember God's wonders?

2. What does it mean in everyday terms to remember God's wonders?

by Jennifer Ferrell

Jennifer Ferrell is a senior theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Lesson 4, April 19-25

God of the Gaps



“O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is unfailing love and with him is full redemption” (Ps. 130:7, NIV).

Over the Shoulder

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 88:1, 2

Beside me as I write lies a card I received when I graduated from college. On fine ivory parchment, embossed hands press together, suggesting prayer. Above this, bronzed foil lettering spells out, "Wishing You God's Blessings"; then, in smaller letters, "at this time of sorrow." The verse inside the card extols family, friends, and faith as blessings that can be my strength and help during "this time of sadness."

The designers in the sympathy department at Hallmark Cards, Inc., probably didn't expect recipients of this card to burst out laughing upon reading it, as I did. But it was funny to me because it played with *audience* and with *occasion*. (And also because its giver and I had shared the dubious distinction of taking procrastination to its extreme in our literary-history-and-research class.)

It played with audience in that it poked fun at me—one who had been known to take seriously things that had been meant purely as jokes. It treated me, the joyous graduate, as someone who was grieving over some deep loss.

It played with occasion in that it treated a jubilant celebration (punctuated by the wild applause of family members who never thought they'd see this day, the

flinging of mortar boards into the air, the proud display of diplomas, and the cheesy grins in front of cameras) with the gravity and solemnity appropriate for a funeral.

But humor is only one possible result of swapping audiences and confusing occasions. When I misconstrue the audience and occasion as I read the psalms, I misunderstand them and end up frustrated.

Because I forget that the primary receiver (audience) of most of the psalms was meant to be God, and not me, I often believe it is my job to drum up some interpretation that declares God "not guilty" of the crimes the psalmists accuse Him of.

And because it's often unclear what circumstances (occasion) prompted the writing of a given psalm, it often seems to me that the psalmist is wallowing needlessly in despair, depression, and self-pity.

The psalms that we'll be reading this week contain despair, praise, a sense of abandonment by God, blaming of God, and faith in God's mercy. If I view myself as merely an "over-God's-shoulder" reader of the pages of someone else's daily journal, I don't expect that everything is going to be neat and orderly. The theology will probably appear to be inconsistent at times, and the emotions will be as chaotic as life itself. I do expect, though, that the writing is going to be honest. And that it is.

by Gayle Saxby

Gayle Saxby was a teacher of English and religion at Loma Linda Academy and University, Loma Linda, California, when she wrote this article.

Monday, April 20

God of the Gaps

LOGOS

Ps. 130:7, NIV

Feelings of Dark Despair (read Ps. 88)

"Why, O Lord, do you reject me and hide your face from me?" (Ps. 88:14, NIV).

In each person's life there is a time when God seems to be silent, when there seems to be a gap in our relationship and communication with Him. Yet even in these moments of despair, God is there.

Psalms is not only a book of praise for God; it also includes cries for help, for rescue, for vengeance upon enemies, reflecting the human emotions of the writers pouring out their hearts and souls to God.

Psalm 88 was written by Heman the Ezrahite. From a careful reading of the chapter, it appears that he had contracted some dreadful disease, perhaps leprosy, during his youth (see verse 15). This affliction has disfigured him to the point that he is repulsive to his friends (see verses 8 and 18), and they have deserted him. Perhaps through his disfigurement or by their deaths, his family is gone too (see verse 18). And now his disease has spread to the point that death seems inevitable. In this setting he has nowhere to turn but to God.

He pleads with God to save him. Day and night he prays for relief (see verses 1, 2, 9, 13). He

acknowledges that he is close to death, but makes the eloquent plea, "Do you show your wonders to the dead? Do those who are dead rise up and praise you? Is your love declared in the grave, your faithfulness in Destruction?" (verses 10 and 11). He exclaims, God, when I die, I won't be able to praise you. I won't be able to feel your love or faithfulness. Lord, save me from the inevitable death!

He ends the psalm on the note of despair. No resolution comes to him, his plea remaining on his lips.

During the Reformation many Christians were martyred for their new-found faith in Jesus. Two men, attending a hanging in the town square, leaned with deep sorrow on each other's shoulders. The father of one of the martyrs turned to his friend and in deep anguish asked, "Where is God?" His friend answered him, "God is right beside your son; God is right beside him."

Have you ever been through difficulties in which you felt separated from God? Were you drawn closer by the situation or were you driven farther away from God? Why?

Appealing to God (read Ps. 86)

"Hear my prayer, O Lord; listen to my cry for mercy" (Ps. 86:6, NIV).

In this psalm David too is asking God to intervene, but from a

by Ed Meelhuysen

Ed Meelhuysen is a professional engineer and is involved in a young-adult Sabbath School in Loma Linda, California.

different angle than that of Heman in Psalm 88. Although David asks God to answer him (see verse 1) and to have mercy on him (see verse 16), he spends the majority of the psalm praising God.

He acknowledges God as being kind and forgiving, abounding in love (see verse 5) and has faith that God will respond (see verse 7). He offers a teachable attitude toward God (see verse 11) and humbles himself in the sight of God. He thanks God for rescuing him from the depths of the grave (see verse 13) and glorifies the name of God (see verse 12).

It is interesting to note that David does not appeal to God from an attitude of self-righteousness, but from humility, throwing himself upon God's goodness and mercy, trusting that God will respond because of who God is, and not because of who David is.

How much we could learn from David, who, God said, was a man after His own heart; who, in spite of difficulties and despair, recognized God's goodness and chose to praise Him rather than complain!

Why do you think it is difficult to praise God during times of despair?

Put Your Hope in the Lord (read Ps. 130)

"O Israel, put your hope in the Lord, for with the Lord is full redemption" (Ps. 130:7, NIV).

The writer of this psalm moves quickly from making a request to be heard by God, to a position of waiting in faith for the answer. He acknowledges that if God were

not a forgiving God there would be no hope, but since God is loving and forgiving, He is respected and revered.

In the days of the Old Testament it was common for a city or village to have a wall around it and watchmen to keep an eye out for possible marauders. Watchmen looked forward to the dawn, when their responsibilities would be taken over by others. The writer here waits in eager anticipation of God's response, even more eager than the watchmen to whom he compares himself.

Sin can separate us from God. When Jesus was hanging on the cross on Calvary, He felt the heavy weight of the accumulated guilt of all the ages, separating Him from His father's presence. It was in this state that He cried out, "My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?" (Matt. 27:46, NIV). Christ went through this ordeal to redeem us, to provide us with the gift of eternal life. But we must accept Him by faith, acknowledging that we don't deserve to be saved. John says, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9, NIV).

When we have Jesus in our hearts, we can, like David, even in times of despair, acknowledge the glory of God, recognizing through faith that God is right beside us.

How has having Christ in your heart changed your outlook in a potentially lonely situation? How can we be assured that God is there even if we cannot sense His presence?

Tuesday, April 21

The Problem of Painlessness

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Pet. 3:17

We are all well acquainted with the problem of pain. We know how hard it is to justify the existence of a loving God in an unlovely world. But there is the opposite, yet equally difficult, task of justifying the existence of a loving God in times of no pain.

Remember when you were a child and you wanted to try some new adventure before your parents thought you were ready? They'd tell you of the dangers and advise you to wait, but you wanted to experience this new adventure at the risk of the pain.

There are rare patients in the medical field who suffer from underdeveloped pain reactions. They might not have to deal with pain, but they might also not be able to react appropriately if confronted with dangerous situations about which they have normally been forewarned by painful stimuli. If life goes by without any stimuli, painful or otherwise, what kind of life is that? And how many people today feel they are drifting through life without anything worth living for?

Ellen White understood this phenomenon just as did the psalmists. In commenting on a life of no pain, she says: "Many are ruined by their desire for a life of ease and pleasure. Self-denial is disagreeable to them. They are constantly seeking to escape trials that are inseparable

from a course of fidelity to God. They set their hearts upon having the good things of this life. This is human success, but is it not won at the expense of future, eternal interests? The great business of life is to show ourselves to be true servants of God, loving righteousness and hating iniquity."¹

Ellen White gives an antidote for this self-centered illness. She says, "The more a person's heart is in communion with God, and the more his affections are centered in Christ, the less will he be disturbed by the roughness and hardships he meets in this life. Those who are growing up to the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus, will become more and more like Christ in character, rising above the disposition to murmur and be discontented. They will despise to be fault-finders."²

It appears that circumstances, such as the "gaps" we read of in this week's selection of the psalms, are not to be the driving motivation in a Christian's decision whether or not he or she is walking with God. Rather, a conscious choice of walking is, in itself, a measure of the woman or man of Christ.

REACT

In what ways can absence of pain be a problem in a Christian's life?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 70.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 483, 484.

by Charles M. Liu

Charles M. Liu is campus chaplain and pastor for campus ministry at Campus Hill Church, Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Affirming the Negative

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Exod. 2:23-25

"The psalms are profoundly subversive of the dominant culture, which wants to deny and cover over the darkness we are called to enter. Personally we shun negativity. Publicly we deny the failure of our attempts to exercise control. The last desperate effort at control through nuclear weapons is a stark admission of our failure to control. But through its propaganda and the ideology of consumerism, our society goes its way in pretense. Against all of this the Psalms issue a mighty protest and invite us into a more honest facing of the darkness. The reason the darkness may be faced and lived in is that even in the darkness, there is One to address. . . . Because this One has promised to be in the darkness with us, we find the darkness strangely transformed, not by the power of easy light, but by the power of relentless solidarity."¹

In Psalm 86 we read a personal lament. There are three main concerns: "(a) There is the *petition*, which asks God to act on behalf of a needy covenant partner. . . . (b) The actual *complaint*, which tells God how bad it is. . . . (c) The third element concerns *resolve for a new life* after the deliverance, which is here utterly certain."²

"Psalm 88 is an embarrassment to conventional faith. It is

the cry of a believer (who sounds like Job) whose life has gone awry, who desperately seeks contact with Yahweh, but who is unable to evoke a response from God. This is indeed 'the dark night of the soul,' when the troubled person must be and must stay in the darkness of abandonment, utterly alone."³

"This psalm accords well with Luther's theology of the cross. Psalm 88 shows us that the cross is about *faithfulness* in scenes of complete *abandonment*."⁴

Brueggemann sees Psalm 130 as "the miserable cry of a nobody from nowhere. The cry penetrates the veil of heaven! It is heard and received. This prayer makes available to us again and again the cry of Exod. 2:23-25 with which our history of faith began. The gospel affirms that the cries from the depth are the voices to which Yahweh is peculiarly attuned. This God is palpable, available—a staggering comment both about God and about the speaker. Moreover, the Lord is attentive to and moved by the beggar. A new solidarity is forged in the moment of speaking between the Lord and 'the least,' a new binding between the throne and the depths."⁵

1. Walter Brueggemann, *The Message of the Psalms* (Nashville: Augsburg Publishing House, 1984), pp. 11, 12.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 60, 61.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 78.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 81.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 104, 105.

by W. Clarence Schilt

W. Clarence Schilt is an associate professor on the faculty of religion at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Thursday, April 23

Waiting for the Lord

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 37:7

Like David, we all sometimes struggle through dark, difficult times in our lives. In such situations you feel utterly alone, powerless, and unloved. You could feel this way when you're far from home in a foreign country, committed to stay but lonely and unable to understand the language. You might feel like this when you're in trouble at school or work. You could go through such a time when a friendship has just broken up through no choice of your own.

Assuming that you choose to continue to have faith in God, you may still have to wait for the Lord. In other words, time is going to pass before you see any answer or relief for your pain. David, in some of his psalms, also pleaded with God to arise quickly and act on his behalf.

Waiting on the Lord is a skill that some display more fully than others. There is only a small measure of consolation in the fact that it seems to have been painful for David, as well (see Psalms 88 and 130). You might question why a loving, caring, personal God would make His child wait for relief or peace. This may be one of those I-choose-to-live-with-it, unanswered questions.

Waiting for the Lord may not be easy. But here are a few approaches that may help:

1. *Be honest with God.* Tell

Him your hurts and frustrations, your insecurities and feelings of loneliness or powerlessness.

David was not afraid to tell God exactly how he felt about seeing the wicked succeed, and neither should we be.

2. *Tell God what you think you need.* He may not agree with your solution or timing, but when He does make His answer clear to you, you'll see how He outdid your expectations.

3. *Acknowledge that there is hope in spite of trouble.* Sometimes we take morbid satisfaction from feeling that we have the worst situation on earth. More dangerous than that, we may actually feel totally hopeless, with no reward or hope in sight. David, in the midst of his laments, would suddenly talk of hope or praise. So should we.

4. *Remember that waiting is not a passive activity.* Although this may not be a pun intended by the writers of the psalms, "waiting on the Lord" also means serving Him, as a servant waits on his master. We often find our answers in service, in focusing on helping others.

5. *Look for God's answer in unexpected places.* It is so easy to become angry with God at a seemingly long wait, when He is in the process of meeting our needs at that very moment. Look around and you'll likely see His quiet providence already at work for you.

by Ginger Ketting

Ginger Ketting teaches sixth grade at Redlands Junior Academy, Redlands, California.

The Problem of Suffering

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 130:5

For David the time during which he wrote many of his psalms was a time of fierce struggle for power. He feared for his life and was disturbed by the apparent success of his enemies. He was certain, however, that at the end of it all his God had the best in reserve for him.

In many circumstances, living in Western society today is not much different. One could divide society into two main groups of people: those who achieved success and comfort, and those who have not been able to reach such status. The latter group could be further divided into young people and immigrants in search of a dream, by welfare recipients who have accepted the minimal advantages offered by a wealthy society, and by those who have slipped in the social scale and have little hope of turning their luck around.

Among those certain to secure their dreams are many of my classmates. In one of our class discussions on the subject of God and human suffering, I was rather surprised to find out that many had never had a major disappointment in their lives. Therefore, when requested to address the problem of suffering, a blank stare, or genuine difficulty in grasping the meaning of misfortune was the response. In

spite of an appearance of autonomy and self-confidence in their attitude, they showed a certain emptiness and loneliness that cannot be fulfilled by the high-tech forms of entertainment.

Utter despair and pain versus meaningless existence and nonchalance toward the suffering of others have been the extremes of life on earth. One way or another, only by learning to depend on God through adversity do the words of the key text become explicit in people's lives: "I wait for the Lord." Those who learn that are the ones who "know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28, NIV).

By not allowing ourselves to become enthralled with the allures of prosperity, power, and comfort, we find that life flourishes. By sharing the blessings we have received and by allowing ourselves to become sensitive to the needs of those around us, we attain happiness. By not yielding to callousness when submitted to suffering or hardships, we obtain a spirit comforted by the promises of God.

REACT

1. Have I allowed myself to ignore the needs of those who are around me?
2. What is the first step to take in getting more involved with helping others?

by Joilo C. Barbosa

Joilo C. Barbosa is a junior medical student at Loma Linda University, Loma Linda, California.

Lesson 5, April 26–May 2

When the Going Gets Tough



“Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men” (Ps. 107:8, NIV).

I Hated My Life

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Rom. 4:20, 21

I hate pain. Unfortunately, it has been my sad discovery that, try as I might to flee from it, pain inevitably runs much faster than I!

In four months I had five major appliances go bad. My wife's income dropped from \$2,800 a month to \$700, my daughter came home from school three times with head lice, my two-year-old son wreaked havoc on my sanity, my marriage became a battle zone, and I spiraled headlong into a two-year bout of deepest depression. I hated every day of my life.

Pain had gripped me with a vengeance, and my God seemed nowhere to be found!

But the worst did not come to pass! God wrought mighty miracles on my behalf, and the "demonic siege" was lifted. My appliances were fixed or replaced, my wife got a different and better-paying job, our marriage became bathed in healing love, my son turned three, the head lice were removed, and the terrible depression was replaced with the Holy Spirit's power, music, and light! God was in control of my life, and all was right with the universe.

So how do you get there from here? What finally causes the divine breakthrough to occur? Here

are two of the spiritual rocks I clung to when the furious waves of tribulation crashed over me.

1. *I learned a lesson from Saul.* He lost a glorious future when he crumbled under life's pressures. Because he failed to wait patiently for seven days as Samuel had warned, the rest of his life was spent in bitterness, frustration, and despair (see 1 Sam. 10:8; 13:1-14; 16:14). I disliked my pain so much that I was willing to do anything to avoid a *lifetime* of it! Even if it did mean applying those dreaded words, "patient endurance" (Rev. 13:10).

2. *The second lesson I learned was from my own hand.* When I would doubt the existence of my loving God, who for reasons of His own remained silent and hidden, I would look at my hand. This always reminded me that my own hand *did not* make itself, which reassured me, Yes, God did exist (see Rom. 1:20).

Let me encourage you, then, that the God who made *your* hand will, in due time, reach down to you with a great deliverance, and your patient endurance will bring forth a great reward, and not just in the hereafter. Job's blessings came while he was still on this earth, and so will yours (see Job 42:10-17).

"Wait, I say, upon the Lord!"

by Spiritual Borg

Spiritual Borg is a prayer group leader on the La Sierra University campus.

Monday, April 27

Our Pollyanna Tendencies

LOGOS

Ps. 107

“Just because your plane didn’t crash,” Jesus would say to us today, “don’t get the idea that you are better than the folks aboard the flight that went down. It’s not that God loves you more than He loves them.”

When He was talking with some friends a couple thousand years ago, He put it in terms of the 18 people who were accidentally crushed to death under the collapsing Tower of Siloam. Likewise, but not so accidentally, a greater number had just been butchered by Roman troops in one of Pontius Pilate’s uglier betrayals.

In either case, Jesus continues, it was not that these victims had it coming more than any of their neighbors. Rather, the survivors should take these happenings as warnings to keep their own relationships with God strong. Sometimes it takes a tragedy to spur us to repentance.

Psalm 107, the main psalm on which our lesson centers this week, moves in a similar direction. On the surface its message is one of real reassurance and comfort. But on a deeper level it also undercuts any of our Pollyanna tendencies to cheapen this message. The psalm has no illusions about life’s hardships, even for true believers.

Let’s start with the overtones:

Psalm 107 is a celebration—unabashed and without apology. To get its feeling, we must envision crowds of pilgrims who have arrived at Jerusalem through risky passages, sometimes involving desert or sea. No small matter, to take oneself and dependents on a religious journey in those days!

Now, having made it, the worshipers stream together toward the temple: a confluence of celebrants, palm branches, and thank offerings. The sonorous ram’s-horn blasts, the smoke of incense and sacrifice, the congregation’s unison shouts in response to the priestly chants, all make up a moving, festal scene that still comes through on the page to us today.

Take a moment with the psalm’s form, which follows its traditional function: the psalm opens (verse 1-3) with the call to praise and thank Yahweh, who has safely gathered His people from east and west, north and south. Then a recitation follows, in four stanzas, of the kinds of trials through which He has brought His people: deserts and dungeons, sickness and storms, all have been surmounted. Each of these four stanzas ends with the priests’ invitation to the “congregation of the people” (verse 32) to extol God’s protection and mercy (see verses 8, 15, 21, 31).

But there is another refrain in verses 6, 13, 19, and 28: “They cried to the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them from their

by John R. Jones

John R. Jones is dean of the school of religion, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

distress" (NIV). This brings us to the psalm's undertone. For there is simply no pretense that all goes well, that the journey is easy. The psalm is not primarily interested in the question of why such suffering happens, even though verses 11 and 17 attribute the hardships to apostasy. Rather, the interest lies entirely in the people's cry and what God does for them. The point is not that we don't have troubles, but that we do, and that God delivers us through them.

Pilgrimage experiences provide a metaphor for all of life. That is clear from the last part of the psalm. It breaks into a hymn in verse 33 that generalizes God's action in the world. The Lord's "steadfast love" (verse 43) especially comes into our lives in times of "oppression, trouble, and sorrow" (verse 39).

But not for our sakes alone. This is where Psalm 83 comes in. When the psalmist calls on God to step in and make things right for His suffering people, it is in order to bring God's enemies around to seeking His name (see verse 16). It is not simply so He can deliver His chosen ones from difficulties, but so all will recognize that God alone is the Most High over all the earth (see verse 18). God's "loving kindness," then, is not only toward His children whom He delivers, but toward all, even His enemies.

This is the ultimate issue, and it means that we can't dictate to God what He shall do in a given situation. Daniel's classmates apparently understood this when they told King Nebuchadnezzar that they would not presume to say whether or not God would

spare them in the flames of the furnace (see Dan. 3:16-18). Either way they would be faithful to Him. In their case they were spared. But have you ever noticed how the catalog of heroes in Hebrews 11 changes tone about verses 35 and 36? The long list of triumphs over all kinds of adversities becomes a list of victory *through* suffering and death. The point is clear. Faith is a guarantee of strength and courage to bear up under those hardships and heartbreaks that God in His loving wisdom allows us to suffer.

That is why the apostle Paul wrote Romans 8:28. It was not to pretend that God sees to it that only good things happen to us, as some of us may have understood the verse when we were children. Rather, it was to affirm that whatever happens in our lives, God will work good through it, in conjunction with us. But of course that can take place only when we cannot be scared off by "death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature" (Rom. 8:38, 39, KJV). Because no matter what happens, we are still firmly connected to the "love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord" (verse 39), and thus "more than conquerors" (verse 37).

That's the good that God promises, not the good of pain-avoidance, but the more mature and maturing good of carrying us through the sufferings—sometimes sparing us, sometimes strengthening us to endure, as He sees best for His loving program in this world.

Tuesday, April 28

Does God Have AIDS?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt: 25:40

With some apprehension I contemplated an invitation to give some devotional talks at a camp meeting for homosexuals several years ago. One thing I will never forget about that week was a talk entitled "God Has AIDS." It described a man who was "despised and rejected" by humanity, a man of "deep sorrow and loneliness" who was "familiar with suffering," a man who took our "infirmities, diseases and sin" and who continues to identify with the "poor, the oppressed and the afflicted." Not only does Jesus make His presence very real to those who suffer (see Ps. 139:8); not only has He identified with those who suffer in the past tense (see Isa. 53); but He is best known and found today, as one who presently enters into the suffering, pain, and disease of His human children (see Matt. 25:40).

One summer I had the privilege of briefly visiting with Mother Teresa at her convent headquarters in Calcutta, India. This 79-year-old woman who has inspired millions of people all over the world through her selfless service to suffering humanity seems to be driven by one simple truth. Jesus is so identified with His suffering children that when they hurt, He hurts; when they suffer, He suffers; and when they are ministered to, He is ministered to as well.

In many ways her words reminded me of words I had encountered before.

"I saw that Christ identifies Himself with suffering humanity, and that what we have the privilege of doing for even the least of His children, whom He calls His brethren, we do to the Son of God."¹

"Jesus told His disciples that they were to be hated of all men, to be persecuted and afflicted. Many would be driven from their homes, and brought to poverty. Many would be in distress through disease and privation. Many would be cast into prison. To all who forsake friends or home for His sake He had promised in this life a hundredfold. Now He assured a special blessing to all who should minister to their brethren. In all who suffer for My name, said Jesus, you are to recognize Me. As you would minister to Me, so you are to minister to them. This is the evidence that you are My disciples."²

REACT

1. Do you believe that in some way God really feels and experiences the pain and suffering of His children here on earth?
2. If so, what are the implications of this for you and me?
3. Explain why you agree or disagree that the title to today's part of the lesson is blasphemous.

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, pp. 173, 174.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 637, 638.

by Steven Daily

Steven Daily is a professor of religion and psychology, and the chaplain of La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Of Pineapples and Protection

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 139:9, 10

I knew I was driving too fast. But it was late at night, and I had been living in Hong Kong long enough to know well the twisting little country road that wound out through the hilly peninsula to South China Adventist College and home. Classes would come soon enough in the morning, and I had stayed far too late at the hospital with my wife and three-day-old daughter, our first child.

As I guided the little VW coupe around the turns, my mind was on the new life we had brought into the world and the troubled conditions in which our little family was living. Clashes and upheavals across the border in the mainland were progressively spilling over into the colony, and Westerners were increasingly being targeted by certain factions.

Flying up over the crest of a rise, ready for the steep drop and the climbing curve beyond, I found a truck across the road at the bottom of the hill. It was turning around and blocking most of the road. But by throwing the car into the opposite lane, I was just able to flash past him.

I hardly caught the driver's shout as I whirled by. *Some Cantonese epithet*, I supposed. *He's probably not very happy with me for that stunt. Sounded as if he had yelled "Po-loah!"* I had picked up enough of the local Cantonese to recognize the term for a pine-

apple. Funny thing to yell . . .

But all at once I stood on the brakes, fighting to keep the car on the road around the turn. I called on God, realizing why the truck was turning back, remembering the slangy meaning of the popular nickname for a bomb.

There the bombs were, caught as the headlights swung around the turn. Three of them, so spaced in the narrow road that not even a small car could miss. The car finally screeched to a stop, hardly a car length to spare. Gingerly shifting into reverse and carefully backing down around the turn, I caught a glimpse of the disappearing tail-lights of the truck whose driver had saved my life.

A family who lived back down the road telephoned the police when I awoke them and told them my story. It was after 2:00 a.m. by the time the bomb squad could arrive; they were having a very busy night. Sometimes the bombs would turn out to be fakes; all three of these proved lethally real. The last of the three, in fact, exploded as the police, working with long rods from behind big shields, were encasing it in one of their big blast-proof containers. No one was hurt, but it blew a crater in the asphalt pavement. "A right wicked setup," the British officer termed it. When I answered his questions about what had happened, he simply said, "The good Lord must have some more for you to do in this life. That's all I can say."

Exactly.

by John R. Jones

John R. Jones is dean of the school of religion, La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Thursday, April 30

Double Bad for the Devil

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 107:8

Sometimes this “great controversy” sounds like my big brother going to beat up the guy who stole my lunch money. So Satan’s big and bad. Well, God created Lucifer in the first place. God should be able to handle this guy, nothing to worry about.

But our confidence shrinks after we hear of a murder in town, Aunt Louise has terminal cancer, or the boy across your street was kidnapped while playing on the lawn. Why can’t human beings do anything right? Where’s the love? Did Satan mess love up, or do we minimize tragedies by taking responsibility for ourselves and respecting human rights?

Although some theologians say that the Bible offers no philosophical explanation for the origin of sin, we tend to blame Lucifer’s pride for inventing it. Many Christians also hold Satan responsible for wars in the Middle East, heart disease, and traffic jams. Even the Bible gives us reasons to be fearful of the devil.

John, the writer of Revelation, describes in shivering imagery a being called Satan. In chapter 12 John portrays Satan as a frothing, somewhat hungry, dragon. It sounds as though Satan is trying to kill the people of God. Even though John’s writings can sometimes make us afraid, the good news about Jesus far outweighs any dragon scare. We can jump

up and down and cheer because Christ’s victory is sure. But we still must realize that Satan is on the loose. He knows his time is short. So how can Christ help us overcome Satan?

First, we should know what Jesus says about the devil. In John 8:44, Jesus sets the record straight. “He was a murderer from the beginning, not holding to the truth, for there is no truth in him. When he lies, he speaks his native language, for he is a liar and the father of lies” (NIV). Ouch! Those are harsh words, but Satan gives us no reason to believe otherwise. If we seek Christ’s love and shine it on others, Satan has no place to stand and nothing to grip.

After we know the scoop about Satan, we can face life’s challenges and hardships by holding God’s hand. Psalm 107:8 assures us that God will not forget us when we need the power. We can learn from bad experiences and find more meaning about God through the rough times.

God’s love always makes things doubly bad for the devil. Not only does Satan lose when we are blessed, he is totally burned off when we are put through the fire and come out as gold.

REACT

1. Why does God allow Satan to use elements of righteousness to confuse love and rebellion?
2. In what ways does Satan gain power or strength by causing human suffering?

by Aubrey Scarbrough

Aubrey Scarbrough is a junior liberal-arts major at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

No Pity Parties

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 10:16-18

Only dead people don't have difficulties. Suffering through times of trouble is an inescapable facet of our human experience. How we deal with suffering determines whether it will be a way of life or merely a wayside on the road of life.

Perhaps the best way to approach trouble is to look in the Bible for examples of others who experienced difficulties. What did *they* do? The answer is simple: they ran into the arms of God.

David was on rather intimate terms with trouble. In Psalm 10:1 he didn't mope or throw a pity party; his response to difficulty was immediately to search out God: "Why, O Lord, do you stand far off? Why do you hide yourself in times of trouble?"

At times God does seem to hide His face from us. A great deal of wisdom lies behind the bumper sticker that states, "Wise men still seek Him."

But what is the end of seeking out God? We find Him! As in Psalm 24, we climb the hill to receive the Holy of Holies—where God dwells and reveals Himself. This psalm indicates that seeking God will be an uphill climb, but the reward is well worth the struggle.

Psalm 10:16-18 confirms God's promise to hear our cry and live up to His name JEHOVAH-JIREH—"God is our provision." Read the incredible prophetic pas-

sage contained in Ps. 68:7-11. Only when God is put *in front* of His people will we march through the wasteland, the earth will shake, and God will pour out abundant rains to refresh us.

In times of difficulty the first instinct is to overwhelm ourselves in the magnitude of our problems. But the Bible—God's living Word—portrays quite a different response. Search out God's promises and pray these back to Him, because He promised in Isaiah 55:11 that His word (not ours) would not return to Him void and unfulfilled.

In times of trouble, seek God's face fervently, and His face will shine upon you. The prophetic fulfillment of Psalm 68:7-11 is Psalm 67, where the cry—ours—that God's face would shine on us is gloriously fulfilled.

God wills to provide for us and carry our burdens, to lift these from us and instead put strength in our hands and souls: "Praise be to the Lord, to God our Savior, who daily bears our burdens." "Summon your power, O God; show us your strength, O God, as you have done before." "Sing to God, O kingdoms of the earth, sing praise to the Lord, to him who rides the ancient skies above, who thunders with mighty voice. Proclaim the power of God, whose majesty is over Israel, whose power is in the skies. You are awesome, O God, in your sanctuary; the God of Israel gives power and strength to his people. Praise be to God!" (Ps. 68:19, 28, 32-35, NIV).

by Michael Kinnen

Michael Kinnen is a graduate student in medieval literature at La Sierra University, Riverside, California.

Lesson 6, May 3-9

Your Pilgrim's Progress



“All these people were still living by faith when they died. They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth” (Heb. 11:13, NIV).

Hail, Fellow Pilgrims

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Heb. 11:13

When God told Abraham to leave his country and go to a land that would be shown him, Abraham gathered his possessions and left, thus becoming one of God's first pilgrims. Moses, a reluctant pilgrim, first complained of slow speech, but he eventually led the whole nation of Israel on a 40-year pilgrimage ending in the Promised Land. These men, along with a host of others, have been willing to be strangers, yes, aliens, looking for a better land.

Since the early 1600s the word *pilgrim* conjures up a picture of the small band of Englishmen who left Elizabethan England looking for a better way of life. Originally Puritans wanted to reform their church and return it to the pristine godliness of the early Christian church. Characterized by an intense zeal to order every phase of life (personal, family, religious, business affairs, political views, and even recreation) in light of God's command, they finally gave up the idea of reform and separated from the Church of England. After moving to Holland, where they could worship as they desired, they again decided to move on to the hostile shores of North America.

A youthful company in their twenties and thirties (only four were fifty or over), they came as families. The trip over does not

make for pleasant reading. Imagine being crowded and sick, without adequate space to sit or lie, with food and clothing piled about, without refrigeration or sanitary conditions for 66 days! Furthermore, 34 children needed to be entertained and cared for when ill.

We ponder the kind of individual who could withstand such a rigorous pilgrimage. One of the most conspicuous contributions of the English pilgrim was the sturdiness of character produced.

"The Puritan mind was one of the toughest the world has ever had to deal with. . . . No matter what misfortune befell him, he would have been prepared for the worst and would have expected no better."*

However, it was not easy to be a pilgrim. Like the pilgrims spoken of in Hebrews 11:13, "they did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance" (NIV). A year after their trip, at the first Thanksgiving, half of them were in their graves. Neither the biblical pilgrims nor the English pilgrims could have known that, in searching for something better, they had opened the door to a land of promise for peoples of all nations. But think of the earthly rewards in light of those promised to the Christian pilgrims. They can't compare!

**Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 1966 ed., s.v. "Puritanism."

by Shirley Beary

Shirley Beary is a professor of music history at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Monday, May 4

Pictures of a Pilgrimage

LOGOS

Ps. 123:1, 2

David a Pilgrim (read Ps. 120)

"I call on the Lord in my distress, and he answers me" (verse 1, NIV).

We all are pilgrims. We as children of God are "looking forward to the city with foundations, whose architect and builder is God" (Heb. 11:10).

David knew the experience of deliverance from present earthly dangers either through victory or through faith in God's tomorrow. Passing through dangers of eternal significance qualifies one to be a pilgrim for the kingdom of God.

Psalm 120 represents one expression of the faith of David following the death of Samuel, whose spiritual influence provided a restraint against a persecuting Saul. A prayer of deliverance from false accusers, this psalm probably refers to Saul in verse 2 ("lying lips and . . . deceitful tongues"), or perhaps even to Doeg the Edomite (see 1 Sam. 22:22). In verse 7 we have a suggestion that the speaker of the psalm is a king who wants peace rather than war for his citizens.

Notice in your Bible that Psalms 120 through 134 are introduced by the preface "A song of degrees." The Hebrew would be better translated "A song of ascents" (as in NIV) or even "stairs." Many believe these particular psalms were sung during

annual pilgrimages up to Jerusalem or during temple worship services. What blessed assurance to know that while journeying through this life's distresses, God sees, God hears, and cares.

Pilgrimage to Jerusalem (read Ps. 122)

"I rejoiced with those who said to me, 'Let us go to the house of the Lord.' Our feet are standing in your gates, O Jerusalem" (verses 1 and 2, NIV).

Although the previous psalm was a song of sorrow, this psalm is a hymn of joy! The picture is one of a "delegate" to the Jerusalem thanksgiving conference who had had a rare and soul-stirring experience, but who now winds his or her way toward home with fond memories. The mere sight of the City of David conjures up scenes and symbols of the past, and the city silently affirms herself the bond holding together the scattered tribes of Israel. All impressions of Jerusalem are greatly enhanced by the remembrance that this truly is the city where the 12 tribes of the Israelite economy came together for the annual great feasts.

But a nagging reminder from the past also suggests that all may not necessarily remain well with this holy city. Therefore, the praiser prays an imperative for the "peace" of Jerusalem (Hebrew *shalom*, meaning "peace," "security," "prosperity"). David uses a beautiful alliteration in verse 6.

by Mervyn A. Warren

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

In the Hebrew language the following words include the "sh" sound: *pray, peace, Jerusalem, be secure* (or *prosper*, KJV). Does the psalmist offer mere words and good wishes for this city where "the thrones for judgment stand" (verse 5)? No, no! He vows personally to seek her prosperity (see verse 9).

Israel's Distressing Pilgrimage (read Ps. 123)

"Have mercy on us, O Lord, have mercy on us, for we have endured much contempt" (verse 3, NIV).

An earnest appeal to Yahweh for help in times of distress and depression, the lyrics of Psalm 123 change from the singular in the early verses to the plural in the latter, thus suggesting more of a national than a personal appeal. It portrays an upward glance of waiting faith under tyrannical oppression and persecution, perhaps the Babylonian captivity. Because our extremity is God's opportunity, the mercy of God runs toward us on glad feet when we turn our eyes to Him. Contempt from the enemy, reinforced by their words of ridicule, may sting and even defame, but God's is an enabling mercy, which both provides endurance and prevents irreparable damage.

Israel's Deliverance (read Ps. 124)

"Praise be to the Lord, who has not let us be torn by their teeth. . . . Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (verses 6 and 8, NIV).

Thanksgiving is the theme of this fifth song of ascents, and it offers an eloquent paean of praise in response to deliverance from powerful enemies symbolized by a "flood," beasts of prey ("teeth"), and traps ("fowler's snare"). Unequivocally and clearly, the psalm

asserts, "Our help is in the name of the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth" (verse 8).

This song divides itself into two stanzas and thereby allowed for an antiphonal recital with the leader, probably a Levite, speaking in verses 1 through 5 and the worshipers answering in verses 6 through 8.

The Pilgrims' Rest (read Ps. 132)

"Let us go to his dwelling place; let us worship at his footstool—arise, O Lord, and come to your resting place, you and the ark of your might" (verses 7 and 8, NIV).

Based mainly on verses 8 through 10, the words of which are on the lips of Solomon at the dedication of the temple (see 2 Chron. 6:41, 42), Psalm 132 is believed by some to be a prayer for God's favor on this son of David, who is reigning on David's throne. Just as the Promised Land of Canaan was the resting place of Israel at the end of her 40 years of wandering (see Num. 10:33; Josh. 1:13; Mic. 2:10), and the temple was the resting place of Yahweh after having been housed in the tent tabernacle (see 2 Sam. 7:6; 1 Chron. 28:2), Jesus Christ promises rest to all who come to Him (see Matt. 11:28).

This particular psalm may boast of being one of only two in which the sacred ark is mentioned (see Ps. 78:61). The ark was always the focal point of temple services and divine contemplation. The presence of the ark meant rest when Israel maintained a covenant relationship with God, thus refusing to permit the symbol of the ark to eclipse its substance.

Augustine was right when he said: "O, God, Thou made us for Thyself; and our hearts are restless until they find rest in Thee."

Tuesday, May 5

The Pilgrims' Promise

TESTIMONY

Key Text: *Isa. 51:3*

Thank God that we are only pilgrims in this present world of mistrust, disappointment, unwanted surprises, and broken relationships. "In all ages," Ellen White writes, "the Saviour's chosen have been educated and disciplined in the school of trial. They walked in narrow paths on earth; they were purified in the furnace of affliction. . . . They endured opposition, hatred. . . . They followed Him through conflicts sore; they endured self-denial and experienced bitter disappointments."¹

Shall such a pilgrimage cause us to be bitter or to give up on right doing? Never, because "a sense of the infinite sacrifice made for its [sin's] cure humbles them in their own sight and fills their hearts with gratitude and praise which those who have never fallen cannot appreciate. They love much because they have been forgiven much. Having been partakers of Christ's sufferings, they are fitted to be partakers with Him in His glory."²

Make good of every experience and opportunity, for "the life on earth is the beginning of the life in heaven; education on earth is an initiation into the principles of heaven; the lifework here is a

training for the lifework there. What we now are, in character and holy service, is the sure foreshadowing of what we shall be."³

"Some day, life's journey will be o'er," the song says, "and I shall reach that distant shore."⁴ "The two Adams are about to meet. The Son of God is standing with outstretched arms. . . . Adam . . . casts himself at His feet, crying: 'Worthy, worthy is the Lamb that was slain!' Tenderly the Saviour lifts him up and bids him look once more upon the Eden home from which he has so long been exiled."⁵

Sin has separated us too long from God. Present events tell us that soon, time will be no more. Christ will come. "All the perplexities of life's experience will then be made plain. Where to us have appeared only confusion and disappointment, broken purposes and thwarted plans, will be seen a grand, overruling, victorious purpose, a divine harmony."⁶ Face to face we shall behold Him!

REACT

How do we know that we are pilgrims in this world and that there is a place in heaven for us?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 649.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 650.

3. *Education*, p. 307.

4. Song, "Jesus Led Me All the Way."

5. *The Great Controversy*, p. 647.

6. *Education*, p. 305.

by Lovey D. Verdun

Lovey D. Verdun is the director of the admissions and records office, Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

The Christian Obstacle Course

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Heb. 11:13

In his book *Reflections on the Psalms*, C. S. Lewis makes the following observations: "It seems quite clear that in most parts of the Old Testament there is little or no belief in an after life." However, he further pointed out that this perception by Jews was quite different at the time our Lord was here on earth. "The Sadducees held to the old view; the Pharisees and apparently many more believed in the life of the world to come."¹

But the concept of an afterlife must have been well understood in Old Testament times as evidenced in Job's assertion, "I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God. I myself will see him with my eyes—I, and not another" (Job 19:25-27, NIV). Old Testament believers went to their graves in expectancy and not in despair.

Another important truth emerging from our text is the following: "All these people were still living by faith when they died." Without faith, the pilgrim's progress will come to an inevitable halt.

Psalm 120 records the lament of one seeking deliverance from Meshech and Kedar. Similarly, the contemporary believer in Christ longs for deliverance from life's long pilgrimage of death, dis-

appointment, and sorrow. But he must be mindful of another pitfall that lurks along the way. It is not uncommon to hear a remark like this: "You must do well in college to ensure a good life after college." This attitude really represents a subtle invasion of materialism in Christian thinking.

Perhaps our lack of faith and the insidious intrusion of materialism need our devoted attention so that with divine assistance they will cease hindering our pilgrimage. Then as we journey on, the sentiment of the shepherd boy's song in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* can truly be ours too:

He that is down needs fear no fall,
He that is low no pride;
He that is humble, ever shall
Have God to be his Guide.
I am content with what I have,
Little be it or much:
And Lord, contentment still I
crave,
Because thou savest such.
Fulness to such a burden is
That go on Pilgrimage;
Here little, and hereafter Bliss,
Is best from age to age.²

REACT

Besides lack of faith and materialism, what other hindrances are there to the pilgrim's progress?

1. C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1958), pp. 36, 39.

2. John Bunyan, *Pilgrim's Progress* (New York: P. F. Collier & Son Corp., 1957), pp. 210, 211.

by Ashton Gibbons

Ashton Gibbons is professor and chairman of the department of biological sciences at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Thursday, May 7

Anticipating Our Heavenly Home

HOW-TO

Key Text: Heb. 11:10

When you think of home, what are some of the thoughts that come to mind? For me, home is a haven, a place where I can experience peace and safety. Whenever I travel, I look forward to returning home because of this. I also realize that this sense of security provides me with strength to face each new day.

I believe that God had this in mind when He incorporated into the plan of salvation the building of the New Jerusalem. He knew that because of sin we would never feel truly secure on such a chaotic and unstable planet. Thus He prepared a more stable home for us, and He admonishes us to remember that we are not permanent residents here.

The knowledge that this world is a temporary abode should impact how we live from day to day. Here are a few things that we must always keep in mind:

1. *We can enjoy earth and its material goods, but must recognize that they are only temporary in duration.* God blesses us with material possessions because He wants us to enjoy them and share them with others. However, we must remember that these earthly treasures are temporary.

This will prevent us from getting too attached to this world.

2. *Christ admonishes us to occupy till He comes (see Luke 19:13).* In the parable of the talents and the ten servants, Christ tells us that we must use wisely the gifts bestowed upon us while we await His return. These gifts can be utilized in our personal, social, educational, and professional lives. God will accept no excuse from us if we do not fully use the things He gives to us.

3. *Trials and pain are a part of living on this earth.* As Christians we must realize that pain and sorrow are inevitable while we live in this world. But we also know that God has prepared a permanent home for us that will be free of these experiences. This should enable us to put our trials in perspective and provide us with strength to endure them.

Let us ask for God's grace on a daily basis as we attempt to live productive lives on earth while anticipating the home that He has built for us.

REACT

If pain is an inevitable part of this life, why should Christians make any effort to avoid suffering and sorrow?

by Magna James

Magna James is an assistant professor of psychology at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Life's Obstacles vs. Glorious Outcome

OPINION

Key Text: Heb. 11:15, 16

"If they [men and women of faith] had wanted to, they could have gone back to the good things of this world. But they didn't want to. They were living for heaven. And now God is not ashamed to be called their God, for he has made a heavenly city for them" (Heb. 11:15, 16, TLB).

This text really puts life's pilgrimage in proper perspective. The emphasis is appropriately placed on the outcome. Victory—how sweet it is!

The trouble is, we sometimes forget the result because we are so busy concentrating on the present. Life's journey is so unpredictable. So many obstacles can impede progress. The pathway is narrow and difficult. We sometimes become confused by the other paths leading on and off the main road. It's easy to take a wrong turn. Now and then we are even forced off the road. In some instances the pathway just seems to disappear as if it were gone forever.

We don't always recognize the obstacles. For instance, we are headed on our pilgrimage toward the New Jerusalem, and we decide to get off the narrow path and rest a while. This is what David did, and it cost him the life of his son. Fortunately, David's earlier experiences taught him how to get back on the pathway.

Focusing on outcomes brings another benefit; it makes pain more bearable. We saw this during World War II. Pain was everywhere. People understood the meaning of a meager existence, destruction, devastation, separation from loved ones, and loss of life. These obstacles loomed tall and seemed inescapable. But when victory came, words were inadequate to describe the joy. Schools closed; business stopped; work ceased. Men, women, and children were in the street—laughing, crying, yelling, running. Horns were honking; whistles blowing. The war was over. Victory was an electrifying experience.

This is a pitiful example of the victory we're about to experience. Our pilgrimage will soon end. Victory is in sight. Even though the wicked seem to prosper for a time, God's kingdom will eventually overrule. Let's focus on the outcome. All life's obstacles will soon be solved with His glorious coming.

REACT

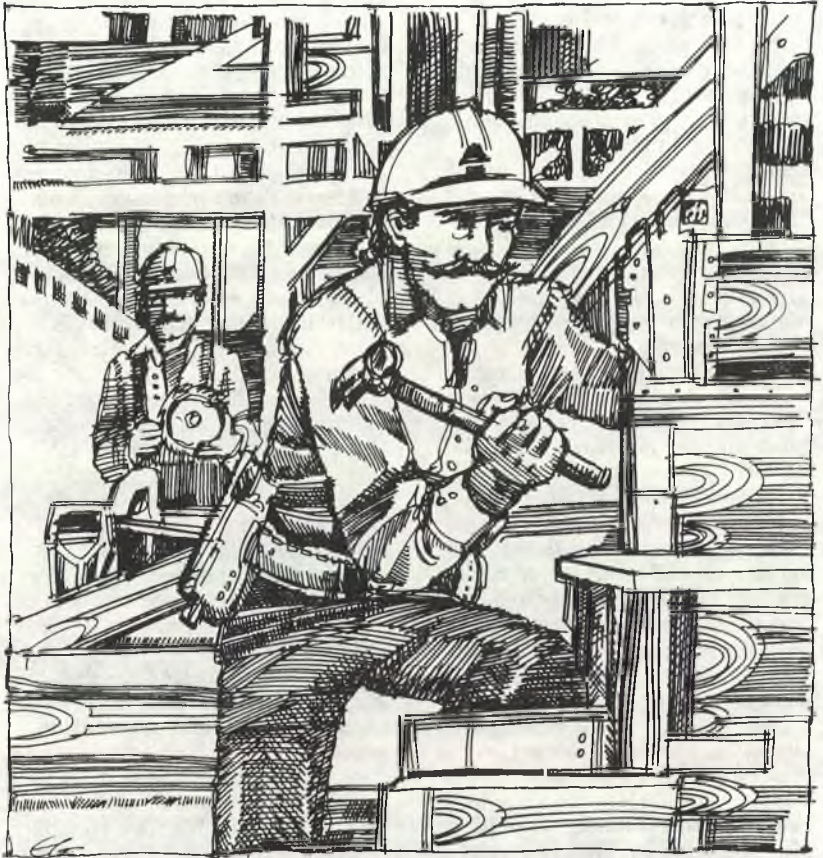
1. What obstacles impede a pilgrim's progress the most—guilt/despair? trials/persecution? success/wealth?
2. Which experiences most prepared David for a successful pilgrimage—his life as a shepherd boy or his trials and persecution?
3. Compare or contrast David's pilgrimage with Saul's. What kept Saul from getting back on the pilgrim way?

by Sandra Price

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

Lesson 7, May 10-16

On the Rock or on the Rocks?



“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain” (Ps. 127:1, NIV).

Sunday, May 10

Build It Right the First Time

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 128:2

It is such a fun song to sing! If you doubt it, just watch the faces of the kids in the Sabbath School room for three-year-olds. They love it! Especially the part where the house goes splat! With smiles and a nearly devilish cheer they clap over the collapse of the foolish man's house.

It is true that a house built without God is in serious jeopardy. But we should have grown out of the celebrating-somebody's-collapse mentality of the three-year-old. What can be done for the homes around us that are falling under the pressures of life without God?

What can you do if you find yourself in one of those homes?

At the time of this writing, the world is watching the Persian Gulf for news about war. People from all parts of society are concerned about the effects the war will have on their lifestyles. There are so many opinions, but are people looking in vain? How do non-Christian people view the world around them? Do the events make more sense to Christians? Do the events make even more sense to Seventh-day Adventists?

The good news/bad news of Psalm 128:2 is very personal and direct. If we eat the results of our choices, how can we make sure that we will enjoy the meal?

by Keith Jacobson

Keith Jacobson is pastor of the Palo Cedro (California) SDA Church.

Monday, May 11

Never Home Alone

LOGOS

Ps. 101, 127, 133

The old adage “an Englishman’s home is his castle” fits quite well with us all. No one, apart from the incurably restless, can refuse a place of his own, that one place in which his real identities can flourish.

The truth is, we can never escape obligations, even when hiding behind chintz curtains. Among other things, families usually interfere. As a friend of mine once muttered, “I have no friends; I have relations.” He could either put up with his nearest and dearest or make a run for it—two options that, in his opinion, were equally unappealing.

As brutal as my friend seems, I’m sure we can at times imagine how he felt. We are, in a sense, hostages to one another’s needs, and it’s a rare saint who never complains. Mercifully God, who planned things this way, gave us love to keep the system well oiled. The problem begins, however, when people opt for a freedom without the lubrication. The results are plain. A divorce epidemic and a depression rate ten times that of the previous generation reveal huge cracks in the castle walls of our go-it-alone society.

The Blueprint (read Ps. 101)

“I will be careful to lead a blameless life—when will you

come to me? I will walk in my house with blameless heart” (verse 2).

Today many young adults are realizing what David realized, that God is indispensable in a home and that the grand experiment of anarchy in a human heart simply doesn’t pay off. Psalm 101 is a manifesto, a blueprint for keeping the king’s house, or royal court, in order. For years David lived like a weasel running from one burrow to another until no man knew more of anarchy than he. Small wonder this psalm aims for a clean administration, harnessed to God.

Verse 1 deals with loyalty (Hebrew, *hesed*) and justice pointing to the covenant among the king, the people, and God. Verse 2 shows that David is world-weary. He’s tired of sin and wants wholeness for himself and for his people. The request for God’s leading is made from the distilled wisdom of David’s experiences.

Laying the Foundations (read Ps. 127)

“Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders labor in vain. Unless the Lord watches over the city, the watchmen stand guard in vain” (verse 1, NIV).

How futile, the psalmist warns, are the plans of men without God’s leading. No matter if the city in verse 2 bustles with commerce, it isn’t worth the effort if God is not the cornerstone. There is simply no room for compromise.

by David Wood

David Wood is a senior theology major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

There's a word-play on *house*, which in Hebrew means a "dwelling" or a "family."⁴ And in this sense the true meaning emerges. Dedicating buildings is insignificant compared to dedicating hearts and families, and in this more important role the builder never ceases. It's an exciting picture. Our children themselves become builders as all of God's people share in growth. It is no accident that Jesus used similar imagery in His parable of the houses built on sand and rock.

Living with God means that we're never home alone. The regular problems of life certainly won't vanish overnight, but they will become infinitely more manageable. The curse of my friend's relatives or college dorm roommates can even be transformed into the opposite—a blessing.

The Grand Opening (read Ps. 133)

"How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" (verse 1).

The finished product of a family reveling in love for one another has a greater impact on the street than any number of sermons or any amount of witnessing. It's the touchstone, the proof of the pudding that convinces friends and neighbors that we have something special. In today's highly stressed society, people need proof beyond mere words. The family, in the hands of God, amounts to a public-relations masterpiece that can provide just that.

Psalm 133 goes one stage further in its concept of family. For the psalmist all believers are the people of God—a huge extended family that greets its new arrivals with joy. There is a certain *Jewish* appeal to this idea, one that has been almost lost in our reserved Western world.

REACT

1. Explain why you agree or disagree that family members are "hostages to one another's needs."

2. How can a happy family have a positive effect on a church family of which it is a part?

Tuesday, May 12

Through Sunshine and Shadow

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Prov. 4:23

“The restoration and uplifting of humanity begins in the home. The work of parents underlies every other. Society is composed of families, and is what the heads of families make it. Out of the heart are ‘the issues of life’ (Proverbs 4:23); and the heart of the community, of the church, and of the nation is the household. The well-being of society, the success of the church, the prosperity of the nation, depend upon home influences.”¹

Did you ever wonder why crime rates are up? Why drug use is up? Why there are more and more illiterate teenagers graduating from high school? Why so many young people seem to be moving from day to day without vision or purpose? Here’s how God’s prophet would answer: “Parents may lay for their children the foundation for a healthy, happy life. They may send them forth from their homes with moral stamina to resist temptation, and courage and strength to wrestle successfully with life’s problems. They may inspire in them the purpose and develop the power to make their lives an honor to God and a blessing to the world. They may make straight paths for their feet, through sunshine and shadow, to

the glorious heights above.”²

These two paragraphs portray the answer to our society’s problems. Repair the families. The most powerful antidote to our nation’s ailments is a family united in Christ. The key to this unity lies in the parents’ hands. Parents should consider it their first duty to direct their families to Christlikeness.

“Youth need a hand stretched out to them in sympathy. Kind words simply spoken, little attentions simply bestowed, will sweep away the clouds of temptation which gather over the soul. . . . If we would show an interest in the youth, invite them to our homes, and surround them with cheering, helpful influences, there are many who would gladly turn their steps into the upward path.”³

There’s power in our families. It is our responsibility as parents or future parents to learn how to utilize this power. Our families can affect the society we live in. They can and will shine as lights amid a world buried in moral darkness.

REACT

Explain why you agree or disagree that the main answer to many of the world’s social problems is stronger families.

1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 349.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 352.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 354, 355.

by Jason Vance

Jason Vance is a senior business major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Oil of Unity

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Exod. 30:25-30

Unity is something that is greatly lacking in the average home today. Strife and bitterness prevail in countless family relationships, yet this is not the way the Lord would have it. By examining the historical and cultural background of Psalm 133 in the light of God's sanctuary service, a picture of God's true plan for unity, in and out of the family, emerges.

In verse 2 David likens the unity between brethren to the "precious ointment upon the head" (KJV). The Hebrew word here used is *shemen*, or "oil." This is not ordinary oil, but rather that sacred oil used to anoint the high priest. This particular oil is spoken of more specifically in Exodus 30:25-30. This passage states that it is "an holy anointing oil" and that the oil was to be used to anoint not only the high priest but also every piece of furniture present in the sanctuary. This anointing was a symbol for sanctification.

Verse 29 says: "And thou shalt sanctify them, that they may be most holy: whatsoever toucheth them shall be holy." This holy

anointing oil, therefore, sanctified the anointed, and anyone who touched the thing that was anointed became holy. This is the parallel that David is making in Psalm 133. The unity between brethren—family members, friends, work associates—is a sanctifying influence in the lives of those who find true unity, and it also imparts holiness to those who come in contact with us.

David also likens this unity to the "dew of Hermon" or the "dew that descended upon the mountains of Zion" (verse 3). This is a symbol of refreshing. When we possess true unity in our relationships with others, it will refresh us and those with whom we come in contact.

It is this sanctifying and refreshing that the Lord desires for each of our families, no matter what damage has already been done. He can anoint us with the holy oil, and as it heals our relationships, its diffusive qualities will impart to those around us holiness and spiritual refreshing.

REACT

1. How can unity be "refreshing"?
2. How can a church promote unity among its members while allowing diversity of opinion?

by Ryan Bell

Ryan Bell is a sophomore biology major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Thursday, May 14

From Tinkertoys to Walls of Joy

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 127

The box looks so thrilling! All the things you can build: planes, tractors, even spaceships. Of course, that is only the basic kit; the real building begins in the super-expanded set with a thousand easy-to-lose pieces. As the kits grow in size and challenge, there is a constant—each box/tube comes with its own set of directions. If a person wants to make what is shown on the cover, there is only one way: follow the directions. Unless you happen to be my four-year-old son, then there is plenty of room for creative interpretation.

But homes are not built with Tinkertoys. Homes are made of minds, characters, and personalities. And the blending of these elements is the challenge that Scripture seeks to resolve.

The mixture becomes a blessing when God is the primary focus. No news in that, only a persistent reminder. All the passages of this week have reminded us that without the Lord, even the finest blending of mind, character, and personality is all in vain!

The walls of joy are estab-

lished first in vision. What do we place before our eyes? Does a flood of wisdom flow through the home? This is the place where it is easy to target TV (see Ps. 101:3). But the concern is not merely with avoiding the evil thing. The vision begins by establishing what will occupy the mind.

Look at all the negative things that are mentioned in this one psalm. If these were gone from us, how much space would there be for those things that build on the solid rock!

Review Psalm 127, 128, 133, and 134. As you read, find elements that you could add to your life. Ask yourself, "Am I building walls of joy?" "Am I a pleasant person to live with?"

Most people look at the package and say, "I'd love to have that." But few seem willing to follow the directions. Our lives are not something to tinker with; why give them less attention than the toys?

REACT

1. On what principle(s) should a Christian decide what are appropriate subjects for occupying the mind?

2. What is your definition of an ideal home?

by Keith Jacobson

Keith Jacobson is pastor of the Palo Cedro (California) SDA Church.

The Ideal Marriage

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 133:1

Think of marriage as a tricycle. The husband and wife are the two small wheels being led by the one big wheel (Jesus). If you take the trike apart and try to put a small wheel in front and move the big wheel to the back, you're going to have a lopsided ride.

God promises that if we walk in His ways He will bless us. This tells me that as Christians we have a real advantage for successful marriages. It's wise to build on a firm foundation, which we have if Jesus is a part of it.

I've struggled over my own family, the one in which I was raised. It wasn't ideal by any means, and yet because it's all I've known, it's what I have to work with. For a long time I wanted to change my family's dynamics, alter the ways we related. But I've finally come to the conclusion that it's not my job to fix my parents' problems or my siblings' problems. All I can do is to work on my own. I can share my concerns with my family, and I can pray for my family, but I can't change things for them.

It would benefit any relationship, particularly a marital one, if the partners would strive to live David's words in Ps. 101. Psalm 127:1 says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, its builders

labor in vain" (NIV). How much clearer can it be? Non-Christian families may be successful, and even healthy (mentally, not physically), but think how much closer to the ideal they could be if they included God.

The church is a very important family. That's whom Peter is addressing when he says, "You also, like living stones, are being built into a spiritual house to be a holy priesthood, offering up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ" (1 Pet. 2:5).

Psalm 133:1 says, "How good and pleasant it is when brothers live together in unity!" The church family is difficult to keep harmonized. Yet, when I think of the tricycle idea, I remember that if God is the driving force, anything is possible.

I'd like to alter my trike, though, to accommodate all of the members of the church family. Let's make it a boat, pulling millions of water-skiers. Obviously the skiers can't go before the boat, nor can they switch places with it. It just wouldn't work. Go ahead, try it with any type of human relationship. Involving God can and will improve any situation. It takes concentration, devotion, and a lot of hard work to stay on course. But from what we know of God and of His ideal for us, how can we settle for anything less?

by Julie Erlandson

Julie Erlandson is a junior studio-art major at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Lesson 8, May 17-23

The Wonderful World of Worship



“God is spirit, and his worshipers must worship in spirit and in truth” (John 4:24, NIV).

Sunday, May 17

The Love Letter

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 95:1, 2, 6

Dear God:

Thank You for that last letter.

It brings You so much closer to me when I hear all the plans You have for us. The house and yard sound so lovely, especially the garden. It reminds me of the daily walks we used to take when we were in college.

Remember how we would go down to the student park? The early-morning sun would be glistening through the dew on the spring buds. The birds would be out gathering breakfast, and the only other sound would be the murmur of the stream. It was so peaceful.

And we would talk. Oh, how I loved those talks. We could talk about anything. We talked about the pressures of school and work and about our families. I don't know how I would have made it if it weren't for that time together, especially Sabbath mornings. We could relax from the rush of the week and take a little extra time with each other.

That was when we talked about the future, our future together in that beautiful house You're building. It was so exciting to plan and dream.

I know this sounds as if it were all roses. I remember the thornier conversations too. I was so stubborn, so impatient. I always thought my way would be faster. We would argue, and I would pout. But You always had that knack for knowing the best thing for us in the long run. You also always seemed to know the right thing to say. I would be reassured, and we could spend the rest of our day in the afterglow of that early morning walk.

No matter what difficulties came, I always knew that I had the next special morning to look forward to. Although now we have those talks by phone or letter, and they aren't in the most picturesque setting, they still give me strength. I can't wait to finish my job here and come up there to spend every day with You.

I love You deeply. Thank You for keeping that love alive with the hope that we can be together soon. Love, S. D. A.

by Angela S. Holdsworth

Angela S. Holdsworth works at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland, and does some freelance writing.

Monday, May 18

Worship: What's in It for Me?

LOGOS
Ps. 103:1, 2

An Answer to Every Need (read Ps. 84)

"For the Lord God is a sun and shield; the Lord bestows favor and honor; no good thing does he withhold from those whose walk is blameless" (verse 11, NIV).

In Psalm 84 there are three separate occasions on which those who worship God are said to be "blessed" (see verses 4, 5, 12). But the best expressions of the nature of these blessings are found in verse 7 and verse 11. Those who put their trust in God discover that He is able to provide for every need in life. To the weak and helpless, He provides strength. To the lost and perplexed who grope in darkness and confusion, He gives light. To those bending low from the burdens of life on their shoulders or suffering from the assaults of the enemy, He serves as a shield.

As His children journey through life, He showers them with favor and honor, becoming to them what their need requires Him to become: Saviour, Lord, Intercessor, Comforter, Friend. As the psalmist states: "No good thing does he withhold" (verse 11). This does not mean that God will give us everything *we think* is good. Instead, those who worship Him will receive those things that *He knows* are good.

What good things has God blessed you with so far this week? Have you thanked Him for them?

Not Treated As We Deserve (read Ps. 103)

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and do not forget all his benefits" (verse 2, NRSV).

No doubt David was excited when he wrote this passage. As he contemplates the numerous blessings God has bestowed on His creatures, his own heart overflows with praise and thanksgiving. Note the long list of benefits God richly pours out on His children. He forgives their iniquity and heals their diseases (see verse 3). He redeems and crowns with love and mercy (see verse 4). He satisfies their needs and gives them "long life which has retained the vigor of a soaring eagle."¹ The love of God is shown in that He does not treat His people as they deserve (see verse 10). Instead, He has pity and continually makes those who follow Him the objects of His love and mercy (see verse 17).

In a world characterized by change and uncertainty, God is the constant. What He was in David's time He is today and will be tomorrow. No wonder David calls on everything that exists to praise Him.

What specific benefits or blessings can you identify with your relationship with God? Are you inviting others to share in these

by Stan Hobbs

Stan Hobbs is the associate dean of men at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

blessings by leading them to Christ?

A Constant Companion (read Ps. 134)

“Praise the Lord, all you servants of the Lord who minister by night in the house of the Lord” (verse 1, NIV).

This entire psalm is directed toward the watchmen who guard the temple of the Lord at night. Why a psalm for those employed at night but none for those who work during the day?

In the answer we find yet another blessing available to every worshiper of God. In calling for these night watchmen to “bless the Lord,” the psalmist illustrates that God is a 24-hour God: day or night we may call on Him. “It is comparatively easy to bless the Lord in the daytime, when sunshine lies like his smile on nature, and all the world is full of music, and our lives flow on quietly and peacefully. . . . But when

night has draped the earth . . . , and we stand amid the shadows that lurk around us in the sanctuary, facing the inexplicable mysteries of Providence, of history, of life and death; then the song falters on our lips, and chokes our utterance.”¹

What a wonderful blessing: those who trust in God have a constant Friend who will be there regardless of the time or the situation! Jesus Himself made this promise: “And surely I will be with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NIV).

In what ways can you take greater advantage of the fact that you have God’s attention 24 hours a day?

1. Charles Laymon, *The Interpreter’s One-Volume Commentary on the Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1979), p. 290.

2. F. B. Meyer, *Great Verses Through the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1972), p. 243.

Tuesday, May 19

Fitting Your Schedule Into God's Time

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 107:1, 8

Worship is often thought of as a time for praise, a time to give thanks for all the blessings that God has bestowed upon us. The typical schedule of a college student doesn't allow much time for praising God in a daily devotional—unless you make time for it.

David says in Psalm 103, "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name. Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits" (verses 1, 2, NIV).

In *Patriarchs and Prophets*, Ellen White says that in view of all that God has done for us, "our faith should be strong, active, and enduring." Instead of murmuring, the language of our hearts should be in praise to God.¹

Many people have different meanings of worship and ways to worship. People worship on their knees in fervent prayer or in music and song. All through the Bible you see examples of worship; Moses and Miriam danced before the Lord with joyful thanksgiving. David sang psalms to the Lord.

True worship will "purify the heart and renew the mind, giving us a new capacity for knowing and loving God."²

"Both in public and private

worship it is our duty to bow down upon our knees before God when we offer our petitions to Him. This act shows our dependence upon God."³

Ellen White also said, "We are the constant recipients of God's mercies, and yet how little gratitude we express, how little we praise Him for what He has done for us."⁴

So to solve the question of when do college students find the time to enhance their worship, the challenge is not to fit God into your schedule but to fit your schedule around God. God is with you all the time no matter what—don't ignore Him any longer. Praising God is a wonderful experience! Not only does it make you feel good, but it is also giving praise to the Giver of life.

"Prayer is not intended to work any change in God; it brings us into harmony with God."⁵

REACT

1. How is God's relationship to time different from that of our own?

2. How do you think our relationship to time will change in the new earth?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 294.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 189.

3. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 312.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 103.

5. *Messages to Young People*, p. 248.

by Cheryl Merritt

Cheryl Merritt is a senior communications major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

The False Gods of Format

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 134, NIV

Worship is not a spectator sport. Unfortunately, our manifestations of it often lead us to think that it is, what with its generally passive format and its performance by a very small portion of the worshipers. Even our architecture—particularly our Protestant evangelical proclamational tradition—forces us into audience/performer roles.

For this discussion, worship is defined as corporate. Indeed, the psalms selected for this lesson appear to assume congregation.

James F. White states, "Christian worship is actual words and actions and occurs in a specific time and place. It also reminds us that worship is not an abstract theological definition but something that one can experience in the midst of a living, breathing congregation."¹

Experience is the operative word here. Generally we use the word *worship* as a noun, which—as nouns do—separates us from what we are naming. But worship would be better used as a verb which—as verbs do—involves us in the action. Thus we do not observe worship as a discrete item separate from ourselves. Rather, we worship as an action in which we are involved. The leaders of worship are not performers but enablers, assisting us in what we have gathered to do—and that is worship.

But it becomes easier for us to be entertained rather than involved—habituated rather than creative. John Killinger, writing on creative worship, says, "What is heard too long or seen too long or felt too long in the same manner inevitably becomes idolatrous. It is first associated with the object of worship. Then it becomes identified and confused with the object of worship. And it ends, in most cases, by supplanting the object of worship."²

Forms of worship are indeed necessary. As White states, "for common worship to be possible, there must be consensus on structure, words, and actions or else chaos would ensue."³ We must sing the same song at the same time, etc. Yet we are prone to take structure too far, imbuing it with sanctimony, which stifles freedom and creativity and creates false gods of process and format.

As Killinger observes, "When God is identified so clearly with certain patterns of liturgy that His worship is imperiled by altering the patterns, then the patterns have clearly usurped the place of God in our thinking, and it is their removal, not His, that concerns us. Instead of magnifying God they deny Him."⁴

1. James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 22.

2. John Killinger, *Experimental Preaching* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1973), p. 11.

3. James F. White, *Introduction to Christian Worship* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1980), p. 27.

4. John Killinger, *The 11 O'Clock News and Other Experimental Sermons* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1975), p. 14.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Thursday, May 21

What Worship Matters?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 103:1

The church as an organization serves two basic functions, one of outreach and the other inreach. Although the obvious outreach is evangelism, the inreach provides a place for fellowship and worship of our Lord. The blessing of a sacred place to worship can be easily taken for granted in our lives. Many of us may not even know actually what to do with the gift.

As always, the Christian's "owner's manual" for the church is the Bible. In it are mentioned many worship activities. David talks of singing and dancing. Tithing is named. Jesus went to synagogue services and taught people outside as they ate (the forerunner to church potlucks and picnics?). So preaching, offering, and praise are involved. Today, with the gift of creativity God has given each person, thousands of worship activities have been created. We have Sabbath School, church service, special music, sermons, hymns, and prayers. Does this mean that the activity makes "worship"? Let's again check our owner's manual.

Luke 18:10-14 is the familiar

story of the Pharisee and the tax collector contrasted at church in prayer. "The Pharisee stood up and prayed about himself: 'God, I thank you that I am not like other men. . . . I fast twice a week and give a tenth of all I get.' But the tax collector . . . beat his breast and said, 'God, have mercy on me, a sinner'" (NIV). Both men were involved in what seemed to be acts of worship. The difference was in their attitude. Worship involves more than performing the proper ritual. True worship is the humble exaltation, acknowledgment, and praise of a God who is worthy of our praise (see Ps. 103).

Your attitude can turn acts of worship into meaningless motions, or it can transform unconventional acts into mighty praise. "Lift up your hands in the sanctuary and praise the Lord" (Ps. 134:2).

REACT

1. What are some activities that can be considered worship with the right attitude? Be creative.

2. What worship activities have become merely habit for you and how can you turn them into real worship experiences?

by Irene Hiendlmayr

Irene Hiendlmayr is a freelance writer living in Takoma Park, Maryland.

Daily Praise

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 146:1, 2

As Christians we continually seek a daily walk with Jesus, and in order for this walk to be successful it is in need of praise and worship to God. But so often the daily cares and perplexities of life stifle an attitude of praise. David says, "Praise the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits. . . . He redeems my life from the pit and crowns me with love and compassion" (Ps. 103:2-4, NIV). This pit David speaks of can be seen as Satan's daily traps to take our attention off God. How might we overcome these snares in our Christian walk?

Joseph's pit was obvious. After being sold as a slave, how easily Joseph could have lost an attitude of praise to God. But by handling his daily pitfalls, Joseph's character and strength in God were growing, preparing him for the wonderful plans God had for him in the future.

Like Joseph, Daniel was unaware of the trap set for him. Without warning, Daniel's jealous peers covertly went against him by forcing him to choose who should accept his praise and worship. What an example for us in our daily walk! He didn't allow the circumstances of the situation to keep him from worshiping his God, for he knew his reliance and continual need of strength from above.

Both Daniel and Joseph knew the importance of continual praise in their daily walk with the Saviour. Through daily worship and praise they grew closer and closer to their Strength, conquering everyday trials, large or small, and they were molded into true men of God. Though our daily pits may not seem as deep as Joseph's and Daniel's, we can't help but learn from their examples. How Satan tries to keep the mind from a daily attitude of praise! Ellen White writes: "Satan ever seeks to make the religious life one of gloom. He desires it to appear toilsome and difficult; and when the Christian presents in his own life this view of religion, he is, through his unbelief, seconding the falsehood of Satan."*

Whatever this day holds for you, may your strength come from Joseph and Daniel's God. As the days pass in your Christian walk, make it a point to have continual praise and adoration in your heart for the Saviour. Then you will be able to overcome daily "pits" and have a growing walk with Jesus.

REACT

1. What little things happen during my day that prevent me from praising God?

2. How can I keep focused in my Christian walk?

*Steps to Christ, p. 116.

by Peter Kroll

Peter Kroll is a sophomore premed student at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

Lesson 9, May 24-30

The Lord God Made It All



“Know that the Lord is God. It is he who made us, and we are his; we are his people, the sheep of his pasture” (Ps. 100:3, NIV).

Sunday, May 24

God's Gift to Us

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 58:14

It was finally Friday evening. All of my classes were over for the day. I didn't have to work, and I had the whole weekend to look forward to. I had finished all of my chores, so I grabbed a blanket and walked over to the duck pond.

When I arrived, the ducks were getting ready to bed down for the night. Their light chatter blended with the chirping of the crickets. I spread my blanket down on the cool green grass and watched the blazing colors of the sunset in the west. The red, orange, purple, and blue hues formed a backdrop against the huge ball of fire on the horizon. The lake was tranquil and still, except for an occasional ripple from a chattering mallard. The air was cool, and I just sat, hugging my knees to my chest, and breathlessly taking it all in. The oranges and reds slowly turned to deep violet as the sun slipped be-

hind the hills, and I marveled at the beauty God created for us.

The sunset is one of God's many gifts to us. No giant movie screen, sound system, or any kind of modern computer technology could match the beauty of that simple sunset. As God's Sabbath day dawned, through the colors of the sunset, I saw His magnificent love for us. Jesus meant for the Sabbath to be a day of delight for us. Too many times, trying to be faithful followers, we seem to get caught up in the legalities of Sabbath keeping and forget about the happiness that the Sabbath can truly bring. The Sabbath isn't a mere law; it is a present to us from God! A keepsake! An offering wrapped in the beautiful colors of the sunset.

This week, as you study in Psalms about the Sabbath and Creation, unwrap your gift from God and see what He has given you. Ask yourself how the Sabbath and the Creation relate to each other. Maybe once this week you can take the time to watch a sunset or sunrise!

by Lisa Trubey Knudsen

Lisa Trubey Knudsen is a graduating nursing student from Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Monday, May 25

Chaos and Beauty

LOGOS

Ps. 111:2

The Bible clearly states that this world began in a condition of absolute chaos—without beauty or order. God's mind, planning, imagination, and powerful inventiveness produced this world in its original beauty and our ancestors as its first human inhabitants. Though sin has marred God's handiwork in many ways, God's signature can still be seen, His voice heard. The Scriptures declare that "God created the heavens and the earth" (Gen. 1:1, NIV), that "the heavens declare the glory of God" (Ps. 19:1), and that He "made us, and we are his" (Ps. 100:3, NIV).

Creation Versus Evolution

Various psalms emphasize God's creatorship, thus directing attention to the Sabbath as a memorial to God's work during Creation week. Significantly the modern revival of Sabbath observance by forerunners of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in the 1840s coincided with attempts to undermine belief in the Creator and His memorial. In 1836 Charles Darwin developed his evolutionary theory of life on earth. His study culminated in the publication of *On the Origin of Species* in 1859.

Every individual wants to know where he came from and what the future holds. Psalms 92, 100, 104, 111, and 112 express

the answer to these questions by focusing on the Creator and Master Planner. It is appropriate to worship the Creator, but also to see in the intricacies of nature the evidence of a magnificent plan fulfilled with love and care, especially when the world has been beguiled by almost a century and a half of evolutionary theorizing and propaganda.

The sequence of verses in Psalm 104 seems to follow the order of the days of Creation week rather closely—except toward the end of the psalm, where the complex world is portrayed.

Day 1, Psalm 104:2, light (Gen. 1:3-5).

Day 2, Psalm 104:2-4, firmament (Gen. 1:6-8).

Day 3, Psalm 104:9-13, dry land (Gen. 1:9, 10); Psalm 104:14-17, vegetation (Gen. 1:11-13).

Day 4, Psalm 104:19-23, heavenly lights (Gen. 1:14-19).

Day 5, Psalm 104:25, 26, sea and air creatures (Gen. 1:20-23).

Day 6, Psalm 104:20-23, 27-34, man, land, and animals (Gen. 1:24-31).

Some scholars have noted that the wording of Psalm 104 parallels that of a poem by Egyptian Pharaoh Akhenaton, a monotheist who revered the sun. Psalm 104 and the "Hymn to the Sun" by Akhenaton are parallel only up to a point. Akhenaton thinks especially of the mysteries concerning birth and human diversity. The psalm, however, views with wonder the beautiful works of the Creator, singing praise to His

by Lloyd A. Willis

Lloyd A. Willis is a professor of religion at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

name. The psalmist focuses on the beautiful, the powerful, the majestic, and the intriguing purely to glorify God's power, control, and creativity.

A Psalm for the Sabbath Day (read Ps. 92)

1. Just as the Lord had declared the work of each Creation day as "good," so now the psalmist declares that the praise of the Creator is good (see verses 1-3).

2. It is God's "deeds," the "works" of His hands (verses 4, 5), which give a basis for our praise to Him.

3. The lives of those who do not recognize God and His love, grace, and creative power are doomed to eventual failure and disappointment (see verses 6-11).

4. Those who recognize and respond to God's goodness, who praise Him for His mighty works, are described as "the righteous" (verse 12), and they can be likened to beautiful, flourishing, fruitful trees that will stand as witnesses to God's great and magnanimous character (see verses 12-15).

The imagery of greenness, durability, and fruitfulness in this psalm reflects beautiful, harmonious creatorship. Furthermore, the types of tree mentioned express dignity, grace, and grandeur: the palm tree and the cedar of Lebanon, each by its distinctive charm, magnify the Creator.

The psalm is especially appropriate "for the Sabbath day." The three main emphases in the psalm—thoughts of the Creator, appreciation of His handiwork, and a desire to demonstrate the renewing power of the Creator in the personal life—certainly fit the concept of a rich, fulfilling Sabbath, God's own chosen memorial.

Giving Thanks (read Ps. 100)

This five-verse psalm has been widely used in Christian worship as an expression of praise to God. It is sometimes known as "Jubilate," and has been the basis of several hymns, including "All People That on Earth Do Dwell." The psalm has a festival or community approach to singing and rejoicing, and it calls for the whole earth to join in the praise (see verse 1). This is based upon the Lord's creatorship, although in this psalm the emphasis is particularly upon His work in creating a special people.

Praise the Lord (read Ps. 111 and 112)

Psalm 111 begins with "Hallelujah" or "Praise the Lord" and is carefully constructed in acrostic pattern, following the sequence of letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Both these comments also apply to Psalm 112, its "twin," but the emphasis shifts. Psalm 111 depicts God and His works; whereas, Ps. 112 portrays man in relationship with God. Psalm 111 refers to God's created wonders as well as His bountiful provisions for the needs of His children. The Christian has a special appreciation and perspective in the study of these things, and true Sabbath observance with its focus on the Creator contributes to this understanding.

REACT

1. When did I last take a walk in nature to allow God to speak to me through the sounds and the silences of nature?

2. How does man's creativity relate to God's creativity?

3. How can creativity be a form of worship?

Tuesday, May 26

All Creatures Great and Small

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 92:4, 5

"Kelly, look! I caught a new bug!" As anyone would, I politely admired the black, crawly creature that had more legs than I had seen in a long time. Inside, I was less thrilled than the six-year-old boy who stood before me. Why? Loaded with studies, work, rehearsals, and everything else, I saw no reason to get worked up over something that small, that insignificant. But what right do I have to call another of God's creations insignificant? That insect, no matter how ugly or worthless I found it personally, was still created by the same loving God who created me. By beholding God's creations, we come closer to our Creator.

"On everything upon the earth, from the loftiest tree of the forest to the lichen that clings to the rock, from the boundless ocean to the tiniest shell on the shore, . . . [we] may behold the image and superscription of God."¹

God created the beauty and splendor of nature for us that we might learn of Him and of His boundless love for us, His children.

"Let . . . [a child] behold the glorious scenes painted by the

great Master Artist upon the shifting canvas of the heavens, let him become acquainted with the wonders of the earth and sea, let him watch the unfolding mysteries of the changing seasons, and, in all His works, learn of the Creator."²

In the preceding passage, Ellen White is referring to a child, but can we not take a lesson from this also? What is amazing about a child is his ability to look at a dandelion and to see the pretty, bright yellow flower instead of the blight that the weed is to an adult. God created that flower; sin made it a problem. In the words of Isaiah, "A little child will lead them" (11:7). Maybe, with the help of a child who really appreciates God and His marvelous creations, we can come closer to Him, our Father and our Creator.

REACT

1. What is God trying to tell us through His beautiful works?
2. What benefit can the expression "Stop and smell the roses" have for the Christian especially?
3. Explain why you agree or disagree that God has created some things just for the fun of it.

1. *Education*, p. 100.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 101.

by Kelly Ann Koppelman

Kelly Ann Koppelman is an elementary-education major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

The SN1 Approach

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rev. 3:20

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me” (Rev. 3:20).

Object lessons from organic chemistry show subtle parallels to God’s efforts to reach sinful man. A nucleophile is an electron-rich atom or a cluster of atoms in search of an electron-poor center where it can deposit its abundance of electrons. It makes its deposit by bonding to the reactive species. The first of these processes is known as the bimolecular nucleophilic substitutions (SN2), and the second is unimolecular nucleophilic substitutions (SN1).

The SN2 process is controlled by the rate at which the nucleophile *attacks* the reactive species to *force* away a leaving group and make a center for itself. The reactive species does not have to extend an invitation for the attack to occur. However, with the SN1 process, the nucleophile does not bind until the reactive species has prepared for its binding by forming a site that *invites* the presence of the waiting nucleophile.

Two forces contend for mankind spiritually. In one the nucleophile (the adversary) does not wait for an invitation, but attacks the reactive species (man). The other nucleophile for the SN1 (Christ) stands back and waits pa-

tiently for an invitation to fellowship with the reactive species (man). The former has no right to be so forward, for he has not made any provision that would require man even to give him an audience. On the contrary, the other has made all provisions and could demand everything, but He doesn’t. He simply waits to be invited.

Why does He wait? First, He knows that His presence with us is the only way by which we can be saved. He is the only way that we can be introduced to *grace* that will help us to stand as subjects (sons and daughters of God). In the presence of the King of kings we find grace; not condemnation, not vengeance, but the unearned kindness of God.

Second, He knows that His fellowship with us will equip us with a spirit that will not just passively endure trouble or pressure. We’ll have a spirit that will actively overcome and conquer the trials and temptations in our lives.

Christ’s objective is to produce fortitude in our lives that will give rise to character, and from character, hope. Hope, in this case, is not an illusion, but a reality. A hope in God is a hope in love, an everlasting love (see Jer. 31:3) that is backed by an everlasting power (see Matt. 28:18).

REACT

Can you think of other object lessons from science to show Jesus’ role in your salvation?

by Barbara Crutch Jones

Barbara Crutch Jones is a professor of organic chemistry and biochemistry at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Thursday, May 28

Quality Time With God

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 111:10

Communication is a critical element in any human relationship. We probably communicate with dozens of people each day at a superficial level. Our most significant relationships, however, may not be with those who are nearby. We decide whom we will seek out, in whom we will confide, and at what inconvenience or cost.

A housewife once commented about her relationship with her doctor-husband. His practice demanded irregular hours, and he often arrived home long after the whole family was in bed. Regardless of the hour, he always awakened her so that they could converse about the events of the day. Far from resenting her loss of sleep, she credited the strength of their relationship to his attentiveness in communication.

Quality time is a controversial modern term. The concept is used by some to justify infrequent contact with life's significant others. There is real benefit, though, in targeting specific time periods to be used to enhance relationships.

The Sabbath is God's attempt to ensure that man never allows the press of life to obscure the important eternal truths that give meaning to our special spiritual

relationship with Him. We can do several things to make sure the Sabbath is quality time with God.

1. *Review the truths of Scripture regarding the plan of salvation.* We need to remind ourselves of what we know about the Lord and His love, and that what we know is more valid than how we may feel at the moment.

2. *Reflect on the specific events of the past week and the evidences of God's leading.* If it was a bad week, we may be tempted to ask, "What has God done for me lately?" That question can best be countered by reviewing what He has done for us ultimately. Present problems can cause us to forget, like the disciples on the lake, that Jesus is on board even in the storm.

3. *Consider again the peace we can have when we recognize that the Creator of the universe is willing to help us order our lives.* The Sabbath reminds us that we become masters of circumstance through our union with the Master of Circumstances.

REACT

How does the idea that we are to be in communion with God at all times relate to the concept of quality time?

by W. G. Nelson

W. G. Nelson is the assistant academic vice-president at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Trash-Can Realities

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 104:24

It really is true: "God don't make junk." People do. Consider the following facts cited in an article on the problem of waste management:

"Cumulatively, Americans generate about 160 million tons of garbage each year, according to estimates from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency. Of that, paper, leaves and grass clippings, pieces of wood, and food wastes are thought to make up about 70 percent of the total. In other words, the vast majority of our garbage is biodegradable, technically speaking. Of the remainder, nearly 20 percent is glass, metal, and cloth. Despite a widespread impression that plastics are at the core of the garbage crisis, EPA numbers suggest that plastics constitute less than 10 percent of the garbage load by weight, although their relative volume is somewhat greater.

"And it is volume, not mass, that is the greater public policy crisis. According to EPA, more than half the landfills in the United States will reach capacity in eight years."¹

The same article suggested that each person should pay attention to the three R's of personal waste management. They are "reduce, reuse, and recycle in that order."²

Today, as I am writing this ar-

ticle, I requested my secretary to do something that would have wasted a lot of paper. Thinking of the three R's, I reconsidered and thought of another way to do the same thing, using a third of the paper. It made me feel good!

Is caring about the environment a spiritual duty? As we have studied about Creation this week, should the subject of the environment even come up? I think so. Adventists should be known as environmentalists. We should understand the dangers of acid rain, the depletion of the ozone layer, and the cutting of rain forests. At the very least we should become more aware of how we can personally contribute to preserving our environment. How can we be anything but environmentalists and say, "O Lord, how manifold are thy works! In wisdom hast thou made them all: the earth is full of thy riches" (Ps. 104:24)?

REACT

1. Why do you think Adventists aren't more involved in environmental issues?

2. What are some strategies for involving ourselves in environmental issues? Personally? Locally? Institutionally?

3. What biblical principles teach us to be sensitive to environmental issues?

1. Jon R. Luoma, "Trash Can Realities," in *Audubon*, March 1990, p. 88.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 91.

by Victor F. Brown

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

Lesson 10, May 31–June 6

The Blessing Book



“I call out to you; save me and I will keep your statutes”
(Ps. 119:146, NIV).

I Delight to Meditate

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Psalm 119

"Come on, girls, it's time for worship." Bible in hand, Mom entered the den, where Jenny and Kara were settling down in front of the TV.

Kara didn't look up. "Can't we do it later?" she asked.

"It's almost eight o'clock," Mom told her. "I had a long phone call. Now turn off the TV and come into the living room."

"If you insist," Jenny grumbled. She snapped off the TV and made a face at her sister.

"What shall we read tonight?" Mom asked. Her cheerful voice got on Jenny's nerves.

"Why don't we read the 119th psalm?" Jenny asked sarcastically.

She didn't see her mother smile, but she couldn't ignore her reply. "That's a wonderful idea. Get your Bibles," she said to both girls. "We'll take turns reading it verse by verse."

"That will take forever," Kara moaned.

"Oh—not more than half an hour."

"I was going to watch 'Cosby.'"

"This will be a lot more fun—and educational," Mom said.

"Grandma!" she called to her own mother. "Get your Bible and join

us for worship. We're going to read the 119th psalm."

It took 30 minutes to read it one verse at a time. After five minutes Jenny began to see the humor of the situation.

To most Christians, Psalm 119 is not a favorite passage of Scripture. Besides being long, its exaltation of the law disturbs us. We may unconsciously echo the faint praise given it by the Old Testament scholar Artur Weiser. He comments condescendingly "that the kind of piety, based on the law, such as is presented to us in the psalm does not yet exhibit that degeneration and hardening into a legalistic form of religion to which it succumbed in late Judaism and which provoked Jesus' rebuke."* As Seventh-day Adventist Christians, we feel ambivalent toward the psalm. We uphold law but are wary about legalism.

Yet as we shall see this week, Psalm 119 does not exalt God's law as much as it does God Himself. Just as we treasure letters from a loved one, so the worshiper treasures God's letters—His Scripture, His self-revelation. To love the law, we must first love God. And Psalm 119 is the exaltation of such love.

*Artur Weiser, *The Psalms: A Commentary* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1962), p. 740.

by Gerald Wheeler

Gerald Wheeler is editor of *The Winner* at the Review and Herald Publishing Association, Hagerstown, Maryland.

Monday, June 1

Happy Are Those . . .

LOGOS

Psalm 119

Psalm 119 is one of several acrostic poems that also include Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145. An acrostic poem starts each line with a word beginning with letters in alphabetical order. In Hebrew the first word in a line begins with *aleph*, the first word in the second line with *beth*, and so forth. Here, however, eight consecutive stanzas start with one of the 22 Hebrew letters.

To give us an idea of how this works, the *SDA Bible Commentary* places the Hebrew letter before each verse of the psalm, while the Tanakh, the 1985 translation of the Hebrew scriptures by the Jewish Publication Society, puts the Hebrew letter before each group of eight lines. Following such a scheme at times leads to a rather haphazard order of thoughts and ideas, as quickly becomes obvious to the modern reader. The author is not interested in working toward some logical order or conclusion, however, but in creating an emotional and spiritual experience through a cascade of thoughts that he repeats in joyful variation.

In addition to the alphabetical structure, the author employs one of eight major synonyms in each verse to tie the whole psalm together. They include *law*, *testimonies*, *precepts*, *statutes*, *commandments*, *ordinances*, *word*, and *promise*. However, verse 90

has a ninth synonym; verse 122 has none at all. A number of other words also speak of God's self-revelation, which is really what the Old-Testament writers had in mind when they spoke of God's love. Verses 84 and 121 do not have any reference to God's revelation.

A superficial reading of the psalm may give the impression that the author has written a paean of praise to rules and regulations. Many have dismissed the psalm as extolling a religion of law and legalism. The modern Christian, steeped in the gospel and God's demonstration of grace at the cross, can be particularly repulsed by what he thinks he sees in this psalm. But a more careful examination will reveal that the psalm is a multifaceted seeking after, and praising of, the God who stands revealed in all Scripture. In the Old Testament, as in the New, God is the only source of salvation and meaning in life. And the way to find out about Him is through Scripture.

To praise or to meditate on the law—as the psalmist so powerfully urges us to do—is to seek God with fervent intensity. It is not some meaningless academic pursuit. Rather, the psalmist longs for God because of who He is. The Lord is wonderful, and therefore it is worth knowing Scripture, His self-revelation. "Happy are those who keep his decrees, who seek him with their whole heart" (verse 2, NRSV). "With my whole heart I seek you"

by Gerald Wheeler

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(verse 10). "Let your steadfast love come to me, O Lord, your salvation according to your promise" (verse 41). "When I think of your ways, I turn my feet to your decrees" (verse 59). This goes on throughout the entire psalm. In the words of one writer, "The psalmist seems to be peering into the mystery of a personal, loving, caring God."¹

The author not only seeks God; he does so while suffering. Princes plot against him (see verse 23). He is in distress (see verse 50), needs comfort (see verse 76), and fears he might perish (see verse 92) because the wicked lie in wait to destroy him (see verses 61, 95; cf. verses 114-118).

The law is wonderful because the God it speaks about is wonderful. It is a delight because the Lord is a delight. And the psalmist can praise the law because his God is praiseworthy. Although he wants to obey God's commandments and precepts, he realizes that he cannot do it in his own power. God alone gives one the power to do so as the believer prayerfully comes into His presence (see verses 145-147). And the psalmist is intimately aware of his need for God's help (see verse 176).

He is not some self-righteous legalist convinced that he can observe God's commandments

through his own efforts. Rather, he is seeking a relationship with God, a relationship that can alone save him.

"The note of urgent need on which the psalm ends . . . is proof enough that the love of Scripture, which has motivated the scribes of every age, need not harden into academic pride. This man would have taken his stance not with the self-congratulating Pharisee of the parable, but with the publican who stood afar off, but went home justified."²

The Christian loves the New Testament because it reveals the divine love of the cross. The man and woman of the Old Testament loved what Scriptures had been given him or her because they too revealed a merciful Saviour. Then, as now, the believer can respond only in praise and awe, and a desire to spend life in meditation of the One that law reveals. As the psalmist declared, "Let me live that I may praise you" (verse 175).

REACT

What should a Christian's response be to man-made rules and regulations?

1. *Harper's Bible Commentary* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), p. 487.

2. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150: A Commentary on Books III-V of the Psalms* (Leicester, England: InterVarsity Press, 1975), p. 429.

Tuesday, June 2

More Than a Mirror

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: Ps. 119:75-77, 173, 174

Although Ellen White often speaks—as we do—of the law in Psalm 119 as commandments and statutes (see, for example, her comments on the psalm in *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 1152, 1153), at the same time she reminds us what the law really is: the revelation of the character of God Himself.

In *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, she observes, “The will of God is expressed in the precepts of His holy law, and the principles of this law are the principles of heaven. The angels of heaven attain unto no higher knowledge than to know the will of God, and to do His will is the highest service that can engage their powers.

“But in heaven, service is not rendered in the spirit of legality. When Satan rebelled against the law of Jehovah, the thought that there was a law came to the angels almost as an awakening to something unthought of. In their ministry the angels are not as servants, but as sons. There is perfect unity between them and their Creator. Obedience is to them no drudgery. Love for God makes their service a joy. So in every soul wherein Christ, the hope of glory, dwells, His words are re-echoed, ‘I delight to do thy will, O my God: yea, thy law is within my heart.’ Psalm 40:8” (p. 109).

The law of God is not abstract

jurisprudence or arbitrary demands, but “a revelation of the will and the character of its Author.”¹ It is what He is like and what He would do if He were in our situation. Elsewhere she adds, “The law is but a transcript of the character of God.”² One can joyfully meditate on God’s law because it is not legal prescriptions but the graciously given revelation of God Himself. God tells us what He is like, and we discover that He is truly a wonderful Person.

In the Old Testament we have the portrait in words and deeds of a merciful, loving, and long-suffering God. He was not arbitrary, fickle, and secretive like the gods of the nations around Israel. Nor did the God of Israel hide Himself from all but an exclusive priesthood. He revealed Himself to all who desired to know His will and character. The God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob wanted His people to know Him, because to know Him was to love Him.

The New Testament reveals God even more clearly. Of Christ, Ellen White says, “He was the embodiment of the law of God, which is the transcript of His character.”³

With Ellen White, as well as with the psalmist, to meditate on the law is to dwell joyfully on the revelation of what a loving God is like.

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 467.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 77.

3. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1131.

by Gerald Wheeler

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Law Is More Than a Dusty Tome

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Ps. 119:11-16, 18-20, 23, 24

It is difficult for most of us to understand someone avidly studying the laws and statutes of the Bible, especially those of the Old Testament, unless it was one of those “nerdy” religion majors. How could anyone delight in the dusty law codes of Scripture?

However, *torah*, the main Hebrew word translated here and elsewhere in the Old Testament as *law*, means more than *jurisprudence*. As we have already seen, it has the sense of *revelation*, and applies to all Scripture as well as to those parts we today think of as laws. *Torah* signifies all that God has revealed of Himself to humanity.

Although the Adventist student in his Bible Doctrines class might wish that God had not revealed so much in Scripture, the typical worshiper in the ancient Near East faced the opposite problem. He was frustrated by the fact that his god would disclose almost nothing about himself or herself.

The Mesopotamian gods spoke primarily to the priesthood, who kept many things to themselves for professional advantage, and what the gods and the cultic priests did disclose about the divine will was at best rather general and vague in detail. It was hard to obey your god's will because he rarely told you what it was.

Thus when suffering, disease, or tragedy entered one's life, he believed that it came because he had done something to displease his god. He would go through a ritual to try to find out what his sin was or offer an all-purpose confession that covered all the bases in an attempt to hit whatever his sin might have been. Thus he might recite something like the following:

“I profanely took a solemn oath in your name,

I profaned your decrees, I went too far.

I promised and then reneged: I gave my word but then did not pay.

I did wrong, I spoke improper things,

I repeated . . . [what should not be uttered], improper things were on my lips.

I spoke lies, I pardoned my own sins . . .”*

As for what the god himself was like, that was denied the average worshiper. Even the priests did not know much of the character of the deity they served.

In contrast, the Israelite rejoiced not only that he did know his God's will for him but that He willingly revealed His nature and character to all His people. Truly *Torah* was a wonderful thing, something to praise endlessly.

*Quoted in John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1989), p. 155.

by Gerald Wheeler

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Thursday, June 4

Loving the Law!

HOW-TO

Key Texts: Ps. 119:97-104, 137-140, 174

The psalmist's exclamation, "Oh, how I love your law!" is not the cry of a theologian or canon scholar, but is, as we have seen, the response of a worshiper who has discovered the true and awesome nature of his God. The law here is the revelation, the autobiography in deeds and words, of a loving God who wants to know and be known by His people.

The psalmist declares, "I delight in your commandments because I love them" (verse 47, NIV). What he loves is not rules and rituals, ordinances and decrees, but the God behind them. To meditate truly on His law, we must meditate on Him.

Because I have degrees in literature and Old Testament and have worked as an editor for nearly a quarter of a century, I guess I am partial to the narratives of Scripture, both in the Old Testament and the Gospels and book of Acts of the New Testament. I meditate on the God who will dialogue with Abraham and Jacob, who takes them so seriously that He speaks to them almost as equals. I meditate on the God who lets Gideon, Naomi, Job, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk vent their fears and frustrations to Him and does not take offense. As Abraham and Moses plead with Him for the salvation of others, I see that He is indeed "a God merciful and gracious,

slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness" (Exod. 34:6, 7).

The God whom we too often think of as harsh and demanding is anything but that when we see Him in action with His stubborn, hard-nosed, often cruel children.

When Jesus came to earth, He revealed the divine law and the God behind it in the most clear expression yet. The cross is the greatest key to understanding all the commandments, decrees, precepts, and ordinances. And the book of Acts demonstrates the transformation that takes place in people who have come to understand what the cross means.

To meditate on the law is to meditate on the God who gave of Himself to save us. To read Scripture's regulations on marriage and other human relationships is to discover a God who will never violate any type of relationship. To explore the significance of the commandment against falsehood is to encounter a deity who will never deceive or trick us. But the law is more than that. It is all Scripture, all divine revelation given to humanity.

Never immerse yourself in the Epistles, prophecies, or any other nonnarrative section of the Bible without balancing it with the biblical stories of God and His people. The books of Ruth, Esther, Kings, Chronicles, Song of Solomon, the Gospels, and the book of Acts are also God's law for us to meditate on. They also reveal a God whom to know is to love.

by Gerald Wheeler

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I Am Yours

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 119:94

Ellen White attributes Psalm 119 to King David (see, for example, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, pp. 1152, 1153; as well as *The Desire of Ages*, p. 398; *Gospel Workers*, p. 257; and *Testimonies*, vol. 4, p. 534). Scholars point out similarities between Psalm 119 and such books of the Bible as Jeremiah and Isaiah, which raise problems of chronology, though the later books could be drawing on Psalm 119 or a common source. But David did make similar statements in psalms elsewhere ascribed to him (for example, Psalm 19).

David praised the law. In Psalm 19 he said it was perfect (see verse 7), right (see verse 8), and true and righteous (see verse 9). To him, God's ordinances were more desirable than gold and sweeter than honey (see verse 10). But is that what we remember him for? As a theologian and exponent of religious law?

No, we remember David for his relationship with God. God said of David that he was a man after His own heart (see Acts 13:22), not because the shepherd-king was perfect in his observance of His commandments, but because he responded to the God whom they revealed. David loved and praised the law because he first loved God, just as we treasure a photograph of a person because

we have a positive relationship with the person in the photograph.

In Psalm 119:126 (NRSV) the author declares, "It is time for the Lord to act, for your law has been broken." Verse 136 states, "My eyes shed streams of tears because your law is not kept." Similar refrains appear throughout the psalm. "My zeal consumes me because my foes forget your words" (verse 139). "I look at the faithless with disgust, because they do not keep your commands" (verse 158).

The psalmist is not concerned so much with a violation of law as he is about a rejection of the One to whom God's revelation testifies. In verse 174 he said to God, "Your law is my delight" (NIV). Why? Because "I long for your salvation, O Lord." He sensed his need for God (see verse 176) and begged, "Let me live that I may praise you" (verse 175).

David had such an intense longing for God that anything that told him more of His deity and Saviour was itself wonderful. Until we begin seeking the One behind Scripture, we will never fully appreciate Scripture itself. To meditate on the law is to think loving thoughts of God.

REACT

1. How could God consider David "after His heart" when David was such a sinner?

2. Why are the terms *law* and *love* often considered contradictory?

by Gerald Wheeler

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Lesson 11, June 7-13

A King for All Seasons



“For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the Lord made the heavens” (Ps. 96:5, NIV).

The Northern Lights

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 96

As Tom Blake said goodbye to his fellow research botanist and turned to leave her office, his eyes were drawn, as usual, to the picture hanging over her desk. The northern lights blazed above the black waters of a north-woods lake, but Tom's attention riveted on the small card taped to the frame. It said, "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handiwork" (Ps. 19:1). Tom shouldered his field-work backpack and walked to his car, idly wondering about his colleague. How could she, a scientist who knew the scientific basis for the aurora, put a sign like that over the very desk where she did so much rational work?

Tom enjoyed field work. Several days later he had driven far into the Canadian Shield to the very end of the roads. He would complete the last 30 miles to the remote data station by canoe. His wilderness days were pleasant. Late in the afternoon of the day he had planned to reach the station, he was still several miles away and decided to press on.

At dusk Tom arrived on the south shore of a large lake, across

from the state station on the north shore. He lighted a fire and cooked supper, then dozed before the coals. When he finally set off across the lake, it was nearly midnight. The rhythmic drip of the paddle caressed the stillness of the night as he hung suspended between the stars and their reflection.

Suddenly a hint of color in the northern sky caught his eye. As he watched, the colors mounted and spread into mysterious streamers and ghostly searchlights, then into vast, shimmering curtains. The sky washed the lake with rich greens, reds, and purples. Tom found himself on his knees in the canoe, tears streaming down his cheeks. He felt unaccountable awe, wonder, and joy. An indescribable majestic Presence filled the wilderness night, towering mightily above him into the glittering heavens, yet draping his shoulders like a warm blanket. He recalled the scientific explanations for the aurora, but they no longer satisfied by themselves. Instead of calming his ecstasy, they sent more waves of wonder and meaning crashing through him. There under the northern lights, Tom Blake discarded his modern god of science and found the ancient God of science.

by Shandelle Henson and Michael Battistone

Shandelle Henson is a graduate student in mathematics, and Michael Battistone is a medical student at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Monday, June 8

Free at Last

LOGOS

Ps. 93, 96, 97, 100

What would it mean for us to live under a king? How would the rule of this king shape our lives? These are questions most of us in the modern world can approach only speculatively, since monarchies have been largely rejected by our world in favor of other types of government that can function profitably in a world-market economy.

Because most people have not had the experience of living under a king, can Christians comprehend the meaning of the proclamation: "God is King"? In Sabbath School, children joyfully sing songs announcing God as Lord of all, yet as we mature into adulthood, we find it hard to let the rule of this King extend into every part of our lives. We are uncomfortable with someone having this much power and control over us.

However, the vacuum created when God is removed from the center of our lives needs to be filled with something. Traditionally Christians have referred to any substitute for God as an idol. Although there are a plethora of idols in this world, one in particular seems to be at the core of them all: the "I" king, God's greatest foe. Christians have been taught to place high value on the individual, but the value is defined by a world that does not regard God as its king. Christians

find themselves accepting the world's philosophy that regards individuals as autonomous and free to choose anything as long as it does not interfere with the personal rights of another. The temptation to be our own king is a tantalizing idol. The autonomous self threatens the church that, as a unified community, seeks to worship God.

Although freedom is certainly desirable, Christians need to ask serious questions about the meaning of individuality and freedom. What does it mean to be free? From what or whom are we being freed? Where do we go once freed? The psalms under investigation this week make it clear that God is the King of the universe. King David uses three major themes about God to reorient his readers' attention to the true King, who is more worthy to receive praise and adoration than all the idols and gods in the world.

God the Creator (read Ps. 93 and 96:4, 5)

In composing his hymns, King David publicly honored God as the rightful ruler over all creation. God is the only true king because He is the Creator. God's throne is established forever (see Ps. 93:2), and only He has the power to control the raging chaos in the world symbolized by thunders, floods, and many waters (see verse 4).

More than just extolling God as the greatest force in the universe, the creatorship of God can

by Brian Harper

Brian Harper is a graduate student in ethics at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

help us define individuality and freedom. In God's universe freedom can be understood only in terms of relationships. This suggests that there is no such thing as complete freedom as we often imagine it, for we are intimately connected to one another in numerous ways.

The best freedom we can know is to be in a relationship with a God who loves us. David makes it clear that we are not on the same level as God, but despite this fact, God finds in the mystery of His love the ability to treat us as if we were close friends (see Ps. 97:10).

The more we insist on worshipping the idol of individual freedom, the less we remember that God created us for relationships. When we forget the purpose and good ends for which our relationships were created, we begin abusing one another, even in Christian churches.

How much does culture determine and define how Christian men and women relate to one another?

If this world is God's gift to us, then how should Christians see their relationship to the environment?

God as Judge (read Ps. 97)

The foundations of God's throne are righteousness and justice (see verse 2), over which the earth both rejoices and trembles (see verses 1 and 4). The earth trembles because it knows it has ignored the purposes for which our relationships were created.

The earth rejoices because it yearns for the harmony God brings to relationships.

Lasting relationships depend on principles spelled out in God's law and illuminated by Christ's example. God's form of relationship depends on self-sacrificing love from all parties. Superficial forms are not enough. Total commitment to service is necessary. We can fool ourselves and rationalize, but God reads our true motives and illuminates our understanding—if we are willing. In the future, God will free the universe from people who insist on selfish relationships, and harmony will once again be restored.

God as Saviour (read Ps. 110)

This psalm is often thought to be a prophetic announcement of Christ. Here the character of God the Judge is revealed. Unlike any judge we have on earth, God is also the Priest and Saviour of those He judges (see verse 4). The disposition of our God toward His people is one of love and forgiveness. The church sometimes accepts the standards of society for relationships. However, despite our failure to be faithful, God still works with us. Because the church is built on Jesus Christ, it has the opportunity to witness to the world God's plan for proper relationships.

REACT

What would it mean to let God define and control our relationships?

Tuesday, June 9

Every Throb of the Heart

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Job 37:5-14

Often when we consider the works of our Creator King in nature, we focus on that primeval burst of activity described in the first chapter of Genesis. Because of the antiquity of that event, we may imagine God to be an absentee Creator who set in motion the earth's mechanisms and then moved on to lavish His creative power on undeveloped parts of the universe.

"In dwelling upon the laws of matter and the laws of nature, many lose sight of, if they do not deny, the continual and direct agency of God. . . . The natural is ascribed to ordinary causes, unconnected with the power of God. . . . It is supposed . . . that nature is endowed with certain properties and placed subject to laws, and is then left to itself to obey these laws and perform the work originally commanded.

"This is false science; there is nothing in the word of God to sustain it. . . . It is not by an original power inherent in nature that year by year the earth yields its bounties and continues its march around the sun. The hand of infinite power is perpetually at work guiding this planet. It is God's power momentarily exercised that keeps it in position in its rotation.

"The God of heaven is constantly at work. It is by His

power that vegetation is caused to flourish, that every leaf appears and every flower blooms."¹

"There is life in the seed, there is power in the soil; but unless infinite power is exercised day and night, the seed will yield no return. . . . The life which the Creator has implanted, He alone can call forth. Every seed grows, every plant develops, by the power of God."²

"The mechanism of the human body cannot be fully understood; it presents mysteries that baffle the most intelligent. It is not as the result of a mechanism, which, once set in motion, continues its work, that the pulse beats and breath follows breath. . . . Every breath, every throb of the heart, is a continual evidence of the power of an ever-present God."³

"From the smallest insect to man, every living creature is daily dependent upon His providence."⁴

As subjects of the Creator King, we need never feel alone or forgotten. For as long as there is breath in us, we may know that our Lord is very near.

REACT

Explain why you agree or disagree that God has continued to demonstrate His creative power even after Creation week.

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, pp. 259, 260.

2. *Education*, p. 104.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 8, p. 260.

4. *Education*, p. 131.

by David Taylor

David Taylor, from Hillsborough, North Carolina, is a molecular biologist employed in the pharmaceutical industry.

Cosmic King

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 93

Israel's neighbors—the Canaanites, Egyptians, and Mesopotamians—shared a common belief that the basic issues of existence were located in the forces and phenomena of the physical universe.

“Life itself . . . [was seen to depend] on the rhythm of nature in which water and rain conquered drought, but not so overwhelmingly as to drown what they had come to save. Man, like the plants and animals by which he was fed and served, was at the mercy of forces neither subject to his control nor in any way obligated to heed his desires. In a word, life was always . . . in a struggle with death. Here was located the real issue, and it was no mere abstraction. It involved the forces of the natural universe present in the round of nature, the fertility or sterility of the soil and the flocks, the rain and the drought, the stability and the shakiness of the cosmos itself. . . .

“The natural forces with which man had to deal were conceived as living beings. The rhythm and the struggles of nature were [seen as] due not, as with us, to objectively measurable and recordable data governed by abstract principles and laws. They resulted from the interplay and tensions present in the relationships between the various personalities manifested in the phenomena of nature.”*

It was believed that the assembly of gods was originally in idyllic harmony, but that later a titanic struggle erupted, causing chaos in the universe. One god emerged as the victor in this battle and subdued the others by threatening to destroy the rest of the competitors and bring new chaos.

Given this background, familiar to the people of Israel, the God described and praised in Psalm 93 stands out in stark contrast to the Canaanite gods. Israel's God is responsible for the entire cosmos and all the forces in it. There is no threat of chaos because Israel's God does not have to subdue others to gain control. He has existed “from everlasting,” established the world Himself, and His rule is sure “forevermore.” To emphasize the message, God is also described as superior to floods and thunders of mighty waters—the chief of the Canaanite assembly of gods. The Israelites could thus sing their hymn about God the Cosmic King enthusiastically because He alone represents stability and continuity for the world.

REACT

1. Why do you think it is natural for man to consider nature to be a hostile force?

2. What role do you think chaos plays in the universe?

*Harvey H. Guthrie, Jr., *Israel's Sacred Songs* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1966), pp. 60-64.

by J. Mailen Kootsey

J. Mailen Kootsey applies computer simulation to the study of living systems and is a faculty member of Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Thursday, June 11

Responsibilities of Citizenship

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 96:7-9

Once upon a time there was a kingdom far away named heaven. Everyone in the kingdom lived happily ever after because of the kind and caring King, Jesus. We know that this kingdom is not here yet, but it will be soon. What do we do in the meantime? We can practice being a part of the kingdom. As subjects of our Lord the King, we have certain responsibilities.

1. *Enjoying and rejoicing in the kingdom.* We can find gifts and blessings from the King in every part of our lives. Some are small pleasures, like trying to communicate with a vibrant parakeet perched on your finger. Others are events that earn a permanent place in memory, like napping at the top of a long mountain hike while the ends of the earth sink over the horizons all around us. Make an effort to notice the things worthy of praise and song (see Ps. 96:1, 2; 97:1). Try to find a new blessing each day no matter how insignificant it might seem.

2. *Contributing to the kingdom's growth and prosperity.* Every time we share with one another in praise and worship for the King (see Ps. 97:12; 99:3, 5, 9), we strengthen the unity of the Christian family that makes up the kingdom. We want to share with others (see Ps. 96:2, 3) the

joy and light (see Ps. 97:11) of being part of the kingdom so they also may come in and worship the Lord in the splendor of His holiness (see 96:9).

A king and his subjects want the kingdom to grow, to conquer and save new lands. While we are nurturing the growth of the kingdom in our everyday lives, we will encounter enemies. We need not worry, though, and need only to follow the King's orders: "Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet" (Ps. 110:1).

3. *Sharing hopes, aspirations, and troubles.* Without communication each would be isolated from the other, and soon the kingdom would be in chaos and despair. Prayer, praise, and meditation thus are important responsibilities for a subject. These activities require effort because it is so easy to be engulfed by our busy, day-to-day, minute-to-minute schedules. We don't have time to praise the King (except maybe for a few habitual seconds before meals). As subjects, we have a responsibility to take time for the King so our personal relationship with Him does not crumble. It is hard to receive a blessing when the King is squeezed in at the end of a schedule because there usually isn't time left over.

REACT

How do you reconcile subjection to God with your freedoms and rights as an individual?

by Jose Clay-Flores

Jose Clay-Flores is an undergraduate student at Duke University, Durham, North Carolina.

Let Me First . . .

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 9:59-61

I read the description of God from this week's psalms with my mouth open, reminded anew that He is a majestic God, a strong God, a holy God. He is a God who saves, forgives, and intercedes for His children. In my own little selfish way, I am glad that these psalms tell me that He created me, because I realize my value in a way that my neighbor, who thinks he evolved from primordial slime, never can. My self-esteem grows as I think of the truth that He will protect and save me (see Ps. 97:10). It makes me feel important that a holy King would associate with me (see Ps. 99), that He is coming for me (see Ps. 96:13), and that He is my Priest, interceding for me and forgiving me (see Ps. 110:4; 99:8). I like all that. It is good for me.

But I begin to squirm when I realize that this Creator King, Protector King, Holy King, Coming King, Priest King wants to be the King of my life. I fidget when I recall that Christianity is not about me, but about Him; that "He must increase, but I must decrease." I like to run my own show. I can handle that Thy-kingdom-come-Thy-will-be-done stuff, except when it interferes with my little kingdom and my little will's being done. I am all too much like ancient Israel, who rejected God from being King over them.

I am comfortable saying,

"Jesus is Lord of my life." It is easy to say, but when self must truly die so Christ might live through me, I flinch. God wants to mess with my attitudes, my ways, my thoughts, maybe even my agenda. I am nervous about that. But I guess I'm just like those in Christ's day who were invited to follow Him, but responded "let me first . . ." (Luke 9:59-61).

This passage of Scripture confronts us with the part of Christianity that makes us uncomfortable. Our routine, our wishes, our desires, our wills are to be subservient to His. All things—even important things like relationships, burying our loved ones, saying farewell to family, business luncheons, completion of graduate school, and finishing important projects—must be banished forever to the land of second, third, and fourth. There can be no "let me first" in the Christian life. To all who will die that Christ might reign in you, He promises the abundant life.

This abundant life sounds good. I know that Christ can deliver it, but being used to comfort and having things my own way, yielding and surrendering—even to Christ—is at times a struggle.

REACT

1. What practical concerns keep Christ from being central in your life?

2. How do you intend to win the battle of yielding your will to His?

by David B. Banks

David B. Banks is pastor of the Five Oaks Seventh-day Adventist Church, Durham, North Carolina.

Lesson 12, June 14-20

God in the Driver's Seat



“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts. See if there is any offensive way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting” (Ps. 139:23, 24, NIV).

Emotional Communication With God

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Ps. 55:1, 2, 16, 17

Prayer. It is an expression of our need of God. It is an emotional outpouring of one's soul before the Lord. It is an intellectual search for understanding. It is the process of resolution of one's inner struggles.

Mankind brings many emotions with him to the Lord; nowhere is this more evident than in the Psalms. In good times David expressed his unabashed, fullhearted praise (see Ps. 145). At other times he felt deserted by God, desolate, alone, and struggled to hold onto his faith (see Ps. 22). He cried in repentance and uttered thanks for forgiveness (see Ps. 32:1-7; 51).

David's life was a lesson in dependence on the Lord. He learned whom he could trust and depend upon. In Psalms 142 and 143 David was once again threatened and surrounded by enemies. But in his despondency, he remembered Him who had provided before: "When my spirit grows faint within me, it is you who know my way" (Ps. 142:3, NIV). The thought of what God had done in the past was not forgotten. "I remember the days of long ago . . . and consider what your hands have done" (Ps. 143:5, NIV). Although the need was desperate, both psalms are assured of fulfillment.

Confidence in the Lord is the

result of a life of trust and obedience. Relying on God since birth makes the Lord a lifelong source of confidence (see Ps. 71:5, 6). The same Lord whom David spent a lifetime learning to know, knew David well. God knew his every thought, anytime, anywhere (see Ps. 139:1-16). It is this kind of relationship that allows us to "approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need" (Heb. 4:16, NIV)

David's confidence assured him that God would provide for his immediate physical need as expressed in Psalm 142, but his confidence in his relationship with the Lord did not end there. David asked God to search him and show him where he was wrong (see Ps. 139:23, 24). The kind of judgment David is here requesting could be asked only of One with whom a trusting relationship had been developed. David had the confidence that God would provide for his spiritual needs as well.

Prayer is our emotional, as well as intellectual, lifeline to God. Our prayer life grows with our Christian experience. From the simple praise and trust of children (see Matt. 21:15, 16), to the mature cry for help (see Ps. 142, 143), prayer is our lifelong contact with God. Praise be to Him who meets our emotional needs—who listens, understands, and loves.

by Rick Cook

Rick Cook is working on his Ph.D. in chemistry at Harvard University.

Monday, June 15

Knowledge, Faith, and Trust

LOGOS

Ps. 143:10

In Psalm 139, David struggles with a spiritual dilemma. In Psalms 142 and 143 he deals with physical dilemmas. A close study of these psalms shows that he handles all three the same way: by believing and having faith in God.

Psalm 139 presents evidence that God knows us better than we can know ourselves. It is split into four strophes, or sections. The first three give evidence as to how well God knows us and that He is present wherever we may be. This is the basis for an important question in the fourth strophe.

Strophe 1: God Knows Me, Day to Day (read Ps. 139:1-6)

"You are familiar with all my ways" (Ps. 139:3, NIV).

These verses give evidence that God knows us in a day-to-day way. Verse 5 confirms that even in seemingly mundane activities, no detail is too small for God's guidance. He will hem us in behind and before, even in matters that we might suppose are beneath His notice. Verse 6 is David's response to knowing God cares enough to direct in the tiniest details of life.

Strophe 2: God Knows Me, Wherever I Am (read Ps. 139:7-12)

"Even there your hand will guide me" (Ps. 139:10, NIV).

"Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?" (Ps. 139:7, NIV).

These questions could be misleading concerning David's attitude. However, "the psalmist does not imply in his question that he desires to escape from the Spirit of God, but rather that there is no place in the vast universe where the Spirit's presence is not felt."* In verses 8, 9, 11, and 12 he lists places where a person might think he could escape God's notice. But, as verse 10 points out, there is no place where God will not care.

Strophe 3: God Knows Me, From Creation to Eternity (read Ps. 139:13-18)

"I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made" (Ps. 139:14, NIV).

Have you ever considered the intricacy of your own body? Have you ever stopped to think what is actually necessary for you to be able to read this page? Walk across the room? Only God is capable of putting together the complex beings that we are; only the Creator is capable of knowing His creation. In verse 14, David praised God because he was aware that he had been "fearfully and wonderfully made." He had the reassurance that God knew him when he was being "woven" together (see verse 15), when he was being "knit together in . . . [his] mother's womb" (see verse 13). Small wonder in verses 17 and 18 David burst into praise.

by Stephen Boyd, Brian Frye, and Lynette M. Wilcox

Stephen Boyd, Brian Frye, and Lynette M. Wilcox are members of the Stoneham, Massachusetts, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

How precious and reassuring this knowledge was to his soul!

Strophe 4: Search Me O God and Know Me (read Ps. 139:19-24)

“Search me, O God, and know my heart; test me and know my anxious thoughts” (Ps. 139:23).

On first reading it may appear that verses 19 to 21 don't fit into the train of thought that has been developed to this point. Read verse 23 again. David is asking God to search him. Is this necessary? In verse 1 he has said, “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me.” Then he spends 17 verses listing the ways God knows him.

A result of the relationship built up in the first three strophes on David's part must have been a progressively clearer understanding of God's character. Note that in Psalm 139:21, David asks a question: “Do I not hate those who hate you, O Lord, and abhor those who rise up against you?” The Lord had commanded David to slay the enemies of His people. When he executed the Lord's judgment, did he do it with a pure heart? Isn't he asking, “Lord, am I right in my walk with You?”

David had a great desire to be right with the Lord. He asks God in verses 23 and 24 to examine him thoroughly. He knows that the God who knows him better than he knows himself would be able to find “any offensive way” in him.

In the midst of a spiritual struggle, David establishes the basis of his faith in God by first

extolling many of His wondrous virtues. He then lays out his problem and, with complete trust in his Lord's response, asks the Lord to aid him.

Psalms 142 and 143: Faith in God (read Ps. 142)

“Let the morning bring me word of your unfailing love, for I have put my trust in you” (Ps. 143:8, NIV).

Psalm 142 may link with 1 Samuel 24. David was in a cave, surrounded by enemies. In Psalm 142 he calls upon his God. In verse 5 he states that God is his refuge. Verses 6 and 7 reaffirm his faith in God's ability to rescue him: “Then the righteous will gather about me because of your goodness to me.”

Read Psalm 143. Again David combines his requests for help with reasons as to why he has faith in the answer God will provide for him. He establishes the basis for his faith: God's faithfulness, righteousness, past works, unfailing love.

Whether the dilemma is of a spiritual nature or a physical one, we, as David did, can look to a wondrous God and know that He will answer our faithful prayers.

REACT

1. What does it mean to you to know that God cares about each one of your daily activities (see Phil. 4:8)?
2. To what extent should a Christian seek God's guidance in life's details?

*SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 3, p. 925.

Tuesday, June 16

Getting to Know Yourself

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 139:23, 24

“The Bible is full, clear, and explicit; the character of the true disciple of Christ is marked out with exactness. We must search the Scriptures with humble hearts, trembling at the word of the Lord, if we would not be in any way deceived in regard to our true character. There must be persevering effort to overcome selfishness and self-confidence.

Self-examination must be thorough, that there be no danger of self-deception. A little catechizing of self on special occasions is not sufficient. Daily examine the foundation of your hope, and see whether you are indeed in the love of Christ. Deal truly with your own hearts, for you cannot afford to run any risk here. Count the cost of being a wholehearted Christian, and then gird on the armor. Study the Pattern; look to Jesus, and be like Him. Your peace of mind, your hope of eternal salvation, depend on faithfulness in this work. As Christians we are less thorough in self-examination than in anything else; it is no wonder, then, that we make such slow advancement in understanding self. . . .

“Self-love will prompt you to make a superficial work of self-examination; but let no vain confidence cheat you out of eternal life. Do not build yourself up

on the mistakes and errors of others, but between God and your own soul settle the important question upon which hangs your eternal destiny.

“Man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart”—the human heart, with its conflicting emotions of joy and sorrow—the wandering, wayward heart, which is the abode of so much impurity and deceit. He knows its motives, its very intents and purposes. Go to Him with your soul all stained as it is. Like the psalmist, throw its chambers open to the all-seeing Eye, exclaiming: ‘Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: and see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.’ Submit your heart to be refined and purified; then you will become a partaker of the divine nature, having escaped the corruption that is in the world through lust. Then you will ‘be ready always to give an answer to every man that asketh you a reason of the hope that is in you with meekness and fear.’ The peace of Christ will be yours.”*

REACT

1. How can we examine ourselves without losing our focus on Christ?
2. How can others play an effective role in this process?

* *Testimonies*, vol. 5, pp. 332, 333.

by Stephen Boyd

Stephen Boyd is a member of the Stoneham, Massachusetts, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

God's Hatred

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Ps. 139:1, 19-24

Readers of Psalm 139 may be tempted to skip over verses 19 to 22 on their way to David's prayer of devotion in verses 23 and 24. Likewise, some scholars have suggested that the strong language of the fourth strophe stands alone as a separate psalm. The last two verses, however, repeat the thought in the first verse, "Search me, O God." A progression of thought compels us to study this psalm as a whole.

David had been reflecting on the infinite attributes of the all-knowing God. Yet there are those (see verse 19) who oppose this God. If left unrestrained, the wicked would undermine His purposes and destroy His work. They must be stopped!

Here David identifies the enemies of God as his own enemies (see verse 22). In verse 21 he expresses his hatred for the wicked in the form of a question addressed toward God. It may be translated as follows, "Is it not your haters, O Lord! that I hate, and against those who rise up against you that I feel loathing?"¹ In other words, "Lord, is my hatred like Your hatred?" In his exposition on Psalm 139, Edward J. Young states, "Wicked men hated God, and their hatred was an evil emotion. David hated, but his hatred was like God's hatred; it proceeded from no evil emotion,

but rather from the earnest and thoroughly sincere desire that the purposes of God must stand and that wickedness must perish."²

Though David is ambivalent about his feelings toward the wicked, the attention of his hatred is not on finding an excuse to slay the wicked himself. The real focus is stated in verse 1 and again in verses 23 and 24. His desire is that by God's searching, He will find and remove any offensive or wrong emotion. Again Edward J. Young states, "Of course, we are in no position to pass an infallible judgment upon what individuals are God's and what individuals are His enemies. All we can do is to oppose evil wherever we find it, and to deal in love with those individuals who are doing wrong and apparently opposing God."³

If God's purposes are to be fulfilled, David knows that he must turn wholeheartedly against all that stands in the way of God's plan. It must be this way with us too. To do this we must open ourselves to the examination of God and, by the grace of His Son, walk in the way everlasting.

REACT

If hatred is the opposite of love—as some say—how can God truly hate anything?

1. Edward J. Young, *Psalm 139* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1965), p. 104.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 105.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 107.

by Craig Wilcox

Craig Wilcox is in charge of strategic planning for New England Memorial Hospital in Stoneham, Massachusetts.

Thursday, June 18

An "Ideal" Relationship

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 139:23, 24

If you had an ideal relationship, would you not naturally value and preserve it? For a relationship to be of value, both sides would have to give their part. Just as both sides have to spend time and work together to develop a healthy relationship, we have to fulfill our part in developing a relationship with God.

What is our part in this relationship?

1. *Making God our number-one priority.* Once we acknowledge Jesus Christ as our Saviour and desire His saving power, we must place Him above any other relationship or material possession (see Matt. 6:33). If our closest friend or relative needed our help, we would naturally be right there to do all we could. Just as our most valued relationships here on earth take precedence over those less valued, our relationship with God, being an eternal relationship, must be our number-one priority.

2. *Seeking God's guidance.* David acknowledged God's all-knowing wisdom and ability and yearned for His guidance. It was through this great desire of David's to know God and what His will was for his life that God was able to use David and guide him through day by day. "Teach

me to do your will, for you are my God" (Ps. 143:10, NIV; see also Ps. 143:6; 139:23, 24; Strophe 4 of "Logos").

3. *Communing daily with God.* Just as a personal relationship takes continual communication, our communion with God needs to be continuous. If God is truly our number-one priority, we will look to Him daily. Looking to Him through study and prayer each day will allow Him to direct our lives. If we will only give Him the opportunity, He will give us direction and insight (see Ps. 143:5-8).

4. *Putting it into practice.* The most ideal relationship we could ever expect to have here on earth will fall far short of the relationship that is possible between our heavenly Father and us. By acknowledging our need for Christ and asking for His guidance each day, we can begin to develop a relationship with Him. With Christ as our example, we should surrender to Him our plans daily for His guidance and direction, just as Jesus prayed, "Not my will, but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). If we will only look to God for everything we do, say, and think, He will direct our lives and bring us closer to Him. Nothing can "separate us from the love of God" (Rom. 8:39).

REACT

How will an ideal relationship with God affect earthly relationships?

by Jim Warman and Warner McClure

Jim Warman, a carpenter, and Warner McClure, a computer scientist, are members of the Stoneham, Massachusetts, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Claim to Humanity

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 139:16

Procreation in human terms has come to be viewed dispassionately. A sperm joins with an egg to form a single cell. That cell then divides. As it continues to divide, it becomes an embryo. *The American Heritage Dictionary* defines an embryo as: "An organism in its early stages of development, especially before it has reached a distinctively recognizable form . . . in humans, the pre-fetal product of conception up to the beginning of the third month of pregnancy."¹ As the embryo continues to mature, it becomes a fetus. Again a definition according to the same dictionary: "The unborn young of a viviparous vertebrate [offspring that lives in its mother's womb]; in humans, the unborn young from the end of the eighth week to the moment of birth."²

According to our legal system, it is only after the 24th week of existence that this lump of organic material has any possible legal rights as a human being. There are people who insist that the cell/embryo/fetus has no claim to humanity until it is born.

But what is God's perspective of an unborn child? How does the Creator view His creation? Psalm 139:13, 15 give information as to when God views us as humans:

when we were knit together,
when we were woven together in
our mother's womb. How does
God value us at this point? Verse
16 gives further evidence: "Your
eyes saw my unformed body. All
the days ordained for me were
written in your book before one of
them came to be" (NIV). At the
time when we were being knit in
our mother's womb, God knew
what would happen to us every
single day of our lives. This knowl-
edge does not apply merely to our
earthly life, but to our heavenly
days as well. At the moment of
conception, God sees us as we are,
then, a single cell; and He knows
our entire life for all eternity, pro-
viding, of course, we choose a life
that leads to eternity.

God's intimate knowledge of us, as described in Psalm 139, declares that there is no point in our lives that God does not care enough about us to know everything there is to know about us. He knows us from the moment of conception, He cares about our daily activities, and He knows every one of our days before they ever come to be.

REACT

How does Ps. 139 affect your views on abortion?

1. *The American Heritage Dictionary* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1985), p. 499.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 448.

by Lynette M. Wilcox

Lynette M. Wilcox has received her master's degree in music from the New England Conservatory of Music and is currently pursuing a career in opera.

Lesson 13, June 21-27

Praise the Lord Anyway!



“Let everything that has breath praise the Lord. Praise the Lord” (Ps. 150:6, NIV).

Praise God for Garbage

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 145:2

“Praise the Lord!” This is how most of the psalms for this week begin and end. It’s not a shy request, nor is it a heavy-handed, do-this-or-else-and-don’t-ask-why command. Instead, it is an emphatic command for which many reasons are given, and many of them are everyday events. Yet at times I find myself forgetting this, saying a flat Thank You almost as an afterthought, and wondering when something truly wonderful is going to happen so I can exclaim, “Praise the Lord,” along with David.

Have you ever tried making a list of some ordinary things and for each item listing things that are attributed to those items for which you are thankful, for which you can praise the Lord? Here’s an example: teeth. I’m thankful for teeth because without them I wouldn’t be able to talk to other people; I wouldn’t be able to eat whole apples or corn on the cob; I wouldn’t be able to play the trombone.

There are so many ordinary things for which we can praise the Lord, things we might even complain about. I was reminded of one of these when I read an anecdote in *Reader’s Digest*.^{*} A man relates the following story. When his daughter was still a child, she saw him carrying a heavy garbage can out to the curb and told

him that she was sorry he had to lift such a heavy thing. He replied, “Don’t be. Putting out the garbage means we have a home, food, things we need, and things we don’t need.” Even taxes are cause for praise—at least to me they are. The mere fact that I pay taxes suggests that I have an income of some sort, even though it’s small, and I may not see much of it. So praise the Lord for garbage and taxes.

Garbage, taxes, and teeth are all fairly obvious reasons for praise—when we take time to think about them. After all, we can see them and feel them. Yet we may still be waiting for the Lord’s “mighty acts” and His “wondrous works” so we can, with David, say, “Praise the Lord!”

Perhaps, though, the things that deserve the loudest praise are those that we can’t see. In Psalm 145, David gives us an entire list of things we can’t see, hear, taste, smell, or feel. These are all attributes of God. He is righteous, gracious, merciful, compassionate, faithful, and just, to name a few. Another reason we can praise the Lord is this: “Our God is in the heavens; he does whatever he pleases” (Ps. 115:3, RSV). When we combine that thought with God’s attributes and everything else we have—our garbage, our taxes, and our teeth—we really can shout with David, “Praise the Lord!”

^{*}*Reader’s Digest*, January 1991, p. 54.

by Tony Zenoniani

Tony Zenoniani is a senior English and premed major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Monday, June 22

The Dance of Holy Joy

LOGOS

Ps. 112, 113, 115, 145, 147, 149,
150

With the continual bombardment of secularism, humanism, and all the other “isms” that we try to impress each other with as we expand our vocabulary and our supposed sphere of influence, Christianity may be suffering from a severe case of religious intellectualism, the unique art of being well versed in the information about the Christian way of life, but without the experience of being intimately involved and in love with the Author of that which we believe. After we have all the facts straight and have assimilated all the information in the prescribed way, often we feel just a bit cheated in this whole thing called the “Christian experience.” Psalms is our opportunity to change all that and participate in an intimate relationship with our God.

With all the talk today about meaningful communication and relationships filled with purpose, too often we Christians have nothing more to offer than a memorized prayer that our grandparents taught our parents, who taught it to us, and a God whom we can describe only by using charts and rules and theories. Don't misunderstand. There may be nothing wrong with charts, rules, or theories, but the Psalms open up David's diary with the divine. It lays open, for all to see,

his discussions, delights, depressions, debates, and determination to stay true to God through disaster or deliverance. A diary shares deepest feelings and emotions. It cuts through the small talk and minces no words as it pours out the writer's soul in confidence that this is a safe place to perform such a societally unacceptable practice. Does that describe your experience with God? Psalms shows us the real meaning of intimate communion with our Maker.

The seven psalms that we are looking at this week center on unique aspects of praise to God. Praising may sound a bit too Pentecostal an activity to indulge in, but a careful blending of refined emotion and valid intellectual activity may bring us all a double portion of God's blessings.

Psalm 112 describes 13 ways that a person will be blessed if he “fears the Lord” and “finds great delight in his commands” (verse 1, NIV). Fearing and finding delight are an interesting blend of emotions. A Christian's relationship to the Creator of the universe is a unique blend of reverence and rejoicing as we consider a God who could form every atom and molecule that exists simply by speaking the word and then would come and die for a rebellious creation. If that is not enough, then consider the same God offering us eternal life for free. That is an exciting God.

Psalm 113 begins a series of six songs recited at the major

by Rich Carlson

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

feast of the Jews. Jesus and His disciples sang stanzas of these songs in the upper room (see Matt. 26:30; Mark 14:26; *Education*, p. 166; *The Desire of Ages*, p. 672).

The image is presented in verses 5 and 6 of an immensely large and powerful God enthroned on high, stooping down from the universe to care for the poor and needy when He could be orchestrating the arrangements of galaxies or solar systems. According to Romans 1:20-22, a lack of the ability or willingness to express gratitude often marks the beginning of apostasy. There must be some correlation between acknowledging God's greatness and maintaining an appropriate relationship with God that ensures positive growth in our quest to be with and like Him.

Psalm 115 begins with a verse that describes the key to that positive growth. Simply put, "Who gets the credit?" Great progress could be made if we would ask ourselves this question as a criterion for decisions in life. Almost in mocking, when the people say, "Where is . . . [your] God?" (verse 2), the psalmist says, "God is in heaven; he does whatever pleases him" (verse 3, NIV). Praise is again enhanced when I consider with assurance God's control in life even when, or especially when, He may not seem evident.

Psalm 145 is the first of six triumphant hymns evidently composed for liturgical use. It speaks of our need to praise God every day and to meditate on His wonderful works. He is gracious, compassionate, slow to anger, and rich in love (see verse 8). He is good to all. Meditation on these godly qualities (see verse 5) gives us reason to praise and reason to have confidence in His leading.

Psalm 147 is a praise to God for His goodness to His chosen people and for His blessings to the earth. Nothing is more appropriate than for man, who owes so much to God, to show gratitude to the Lord. God takes no delight in our strength, but in our willingness to hope in His unfailing love (see verses 10, 11). These last five psalms are called "Hallelujah psalms." Note later this week the emphasis on "Hallelujah."

Psalm 149 builds the praise theme to a crescendo as David responds to the greatness of God with singing, musical instruments, and dance. The sacred dance of holy joy was a thing far different from the frivolous and suggestive dance of today. Some suggest that the Hebrew word for *dance* may be equally translated as a percussion instrument and may not be dancing, as we know it, at all. But even if it is bodily motion, it is an emotional response to their love for God and not an activity of sensual excitement.

Psalm 150, the final of the hallelujah psalms, gives one last burst of emotional enthusiasm in response to God's greatness. Whether it is God's outpouring of blessings (see chapter 112), His omnipotence (see chapter 113), His omnipresence (see chapter 115), His omniscience (see chapter 147), His oasis of love (see chapter 145), or the outbursts of emotions of appreciation that He accepts (see chapters 149, 150, NIV), it is "good . . . to sing praises to our God," it is "pleasant and fitting to praise him!" (Ps. 147:1, NIV).

REACT

What limits, if any, should we place on our enthusiasm over our relationship with God?

Tuesday, June 23

Individually Blessed

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 145:18

A teacher is blessed when she sees understanding dawn in the eyes of a student. An accountant is blessed when he completes an auditing job and discovers that his client's debits and credits match. A minister is blessed when a grateful member sincerely thanks him for the knowledge and encouragement shared each Sabbath from the pulpit. Each one has been blessed by God.

As Christians we know that God has promised to bless us. Ellen White expands this concept by adding that we will be virtually surrounded by blessings. "Every good thing of earth was placed here by the bountiful hand of God as an expression of His love to men."¹

It has been said that life is a stage with God as its director. In the play entitled *Blessings*, every Christian plays a part. Ellen White has instructed, "He thus makes man the medium through which to distribute His blessings on earth."² An incentive has also been provided. "So by imparting we increase our blessings. God's promise assures a sufficiency that we may continue to give. More than this: as we impart the blessings of this life, gratitude in the recipient prepares the heart to receive spiritual truth, and a harvest is produced unto life everlasting."³

The Bible says that by behold-

ing we are changed. Ellen White states that in the same way, by blessing, we ourselves are blessed. "The sower multiplies his seed by casting it away. So it is with those who are faithful in distributing God's gifts. By imparting they increase their blessings."⁴ She states again, "In blessing others, you will realize a blessing yourselves."⁵

"All our blessings come from His bountiful hand."⁶ God lovingly showers us with countless blessings. It is our privilege to acknowledge them and to return thanks to our Creator. Ellen White affirms, "The mercies of God surround you every moment; and it would be profitable for you to consider how and whence your blessings come every day. Let the precious blessings of God awaken gratitude in you. You cannot number the blessings of God, the constant loving-kindness expressed to you, for they are as numerous as the refreshing drops of rain."⁷

REACT

1. When should a Christian ask for more blessings than the ones already sent from God?

2. What spiritual conditions must you meet to expect God to bless you?

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 255.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Education*, p. 110.

4. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 345.

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 534.

6. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 75.

7. *Messages to Young People*, p. 409.

by Rachel Scott

Rachel Scott is a senior elementary-education major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Hallelujah!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 150

“Hallelujah! Yes, praise the Lord! Praise him in his Temple, and in the heavens he made with mighty power. . . . Let everything alive give praises to the Lord! You praise him! Hallelujah!” (Ps. 150:1, 6, TLB).

One word embodies all the psalmist is saying with his praise. In the last part of the psalms this term keeps coming up. This word, the Hebrew phrase *hallelu yah*, or *hallelujah*, occurs only in Psalms 104-150, but in that space it is used 23 times. This expression, which is nearly synonymous with praise to God, comes to us from two separate roots. The first one, *hallelu*, has the following meanings: to praise, to make a show, to make a spectacle of one's self, or to be clamorously foolish in zeal. The second part, *yah*, is an abbreviation of *Yahweh*, or the LORD. Most Bibles translate the expression *hallelu yah* as Praise the LORD. However, a few Bibles simply convert the Hebrew letters to English letters and use the word *hallelujah*.

This term was used in the Psalms to praise God for His work of creation, His freeing of Israel, and especially for His mighty power. In Psalms 146-150, the so-called “*hallelujah psalms*,” all that God has done or will do is given as the reason for praise.²

The phrase *hallelujah* was also used as a response in the temple services. It was made into a song in which the priests led the people. The song went as follows:

The Levites began: Hallelujah
The people repeated: Hallelu
Yah

The Levites: Hallelu
The people responded: Hallelu
Yah

The Levites: Hallelu
The people responded: Hallelu
Yah.³

This song may sound vaguely familiar to anyone who has been to a junior Sabbath School lately. The use of this song gives an idea of how the typical Jewish service was filled with exaltations.

Hallelujah has had a very special place in worship since ancient times. Currently it is used hesitantly in many Adventist services, but it has the ability to bring joy and a real sense of praise to our hearts. By studying how it was used, we may learn how we, as twentieth-century Christians, should give worship to our Creator.

REACT

What effect would the more frequent use of the expression *hallelujah* have on the Adventist worship service?

1. *Harper's Bible Dictionary*. Paul J. Achtemeier, ed. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1985), p. 369.

2. *Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* (New York: Abingdon, 1962), vol. 2, p. 514.

3. C. H. Spurgeon, *Treasury of David* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls, 1881), p. 239.

by Aaron S. Hatfield

Aaron S. Hatfield is a senior theology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Thursday, June 25

A Head Start on Eternity

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 147:10, 11

This morning before dawn, as I started walking around a small lake close to Union College, I asked God to teach me how to praise Him.

Looking around me, I saw the snow and prayed, "God, You commanded the snow to fall. What man could do that?" Through the bleak overcast, the moon was peeking at me; "God, You commanded the moon to revolve around the earth. You are so powerful." "They shall speak of the glory of thy kingdom, and tell of thy power" (Ps. 145:11, RSV).

Does God need to hear that He is wonderful and powerful for Him to exist? No. As I was reading Psalm 145, I wondered whether I would ever reach the place that I was as enthusiastic as David about praising God. Then, the Lord showed me three ways to praise Him.

1. *Jesus: "I enjoy it when you are personal with Me."* Praising God is being personal with your Creator. God wants to know how you feel about Him. Share with Him your feelings about how He has handled your life lately. Thank Him for making that Christian-ethics test easier than you thought, even though you hadn't prepared adequately for it. But don't forget to talk with Him

also just for no good reason. He loves that. When was the last time you whispered "sweet nothings" in God's ear?

2. *Jesus: "I enjoy seeing you develop the habits that I had while I was on earth."* Praise God by allowing Him to control your desires, passions, and affections. It's not just your neighbors who are watching this drama between good and evil. Your reflection of God's character proves to the universe that Jesus' sacrifice took your sin away and put Jesus' character in you. Just think how Jesus feels seeing the results of His hard labor for us. I'm sure it gives Him goose bumps.

3. *Jesus: "I enjoy it when you understand My character."* Praise God by visualizing the different elements of His character. Picture Jesus as a peaceful person, lying on the side of a hill in the spring, just enjoying the beauty His own hands created. Picture Jesus as bubbling over with joy, with a face so full of happiness it can't keep from smiling.

Getting started with these three steps will give you a head start on eternity, where we will be praising God forever. Our God enjoys fellowship with us more than we will ever know.

REACT

Why do you think God responds to our praise for Him?

by Leland W. Krum

Leland W. Krum is a senior computer-science major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Becoming Changed

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 115:8

As I was reading the psalms for this lesson, I came across a seemingly strange section in Psalm 115. Here, David lists all the attributes of the idols of the heathen nations, rather interesting content for a psalm.

Actually this section contains an important spiritual principle: that we become like whatever we worship. Ellen White would say "that by beholding we become changed."¹ And the apostle Paul expresses that truth in these words, "Beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, [we] are changed into the same image" (2 Cor. 3:18). David's words are found in Ps. 115:8, "They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

This principle has some interesting and even frightening implications. Not only is having idols in our lives a sin in itself, but it will affect the way we behave and how our characters develop. Paul describes this in detail in Romans 1:23-32. Men changed the glory of God into images of men and beasts, they worshiped the creature rather than the Creator, and they did not retain God in their knowledge. Because of this, God let them go their own way, and their lusts and fallen minds soon took over. The people became corrupted, women desired women, and men desired men. They com-

mitted all kinds of sin (see verses 29-31). So we can see that having the wrong thing at the center of our life can be disastrous. Ellen White describes the outworking of the principle in these words, "Man will rise no higher than his conceptions of truth, purity, and holiness. If the mind is never exalted above the level of humanity, if it is not uplifted by faith to contemplate infinite wisdom and love, the man will be constantly sinking lower and lower."²

This can work the other way, also. If we put Christ at the center of our lives and behold Him, we will become more like Him. This is why Ellen White tells us that we should spend a thoughtful hour each day contemplating the life of Christ.³ Then we can be changed "from glory to glory" (2 Cor. 3:18).

So we have a choice. We can choose to put something other than God at the center of our lives, or we can put Christ at the center and begin a relationship that will lead us to true happiness and eternal life.

REACT

1. What idols do I have in my own life?
2. What are some ways I could put Christ at the center of my life?
3. What is the relationship of Rom. 1:23-32 to the topic of homosexuality?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 91.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

by Mike Carner

Mike Carner is a theology major at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.

Next Quarter's Lessons

1 Peter

If you have not yet received a copy of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY for third quarter 1992, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1:

Scripture: Acts 4:19

Theme: Lovingly Jesus worked with Peter as He works with us, encouraging what was good and valuable, softening what was harsh, smoothing what was rugged, and purging what was offensive.

Lesson 2:

Scripture: 1 Pet. 1:2

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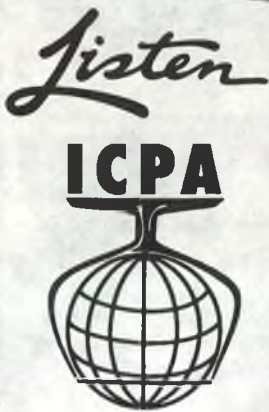
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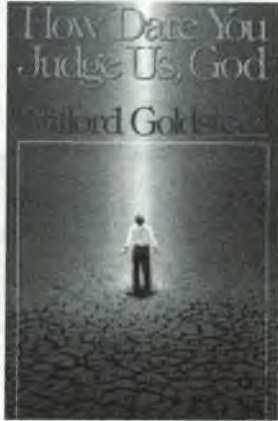
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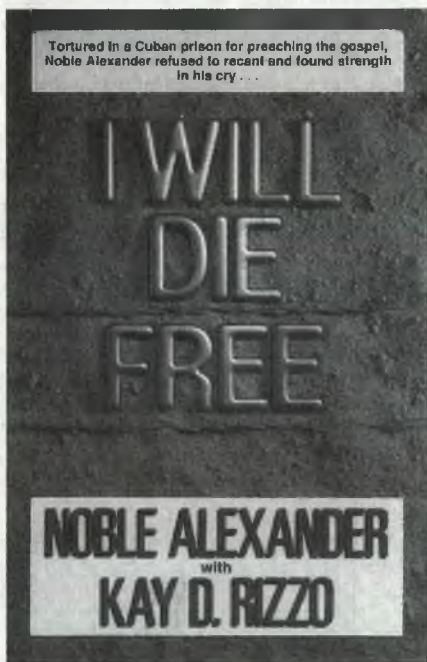
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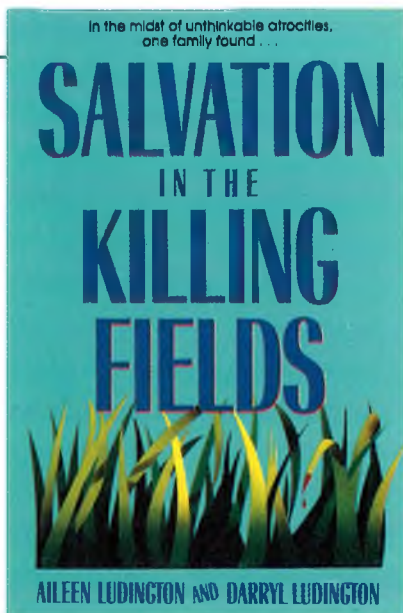
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