



APRIL-JUNE 1994

**CQ**

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

**JEREMIAH &  
LAMENTATIONS**

**CAUGHT IN  
THE CROSSFIRE**

“Please don’t let the sun set.”

# Till Morning Breaks

by  
Elaine Egbert

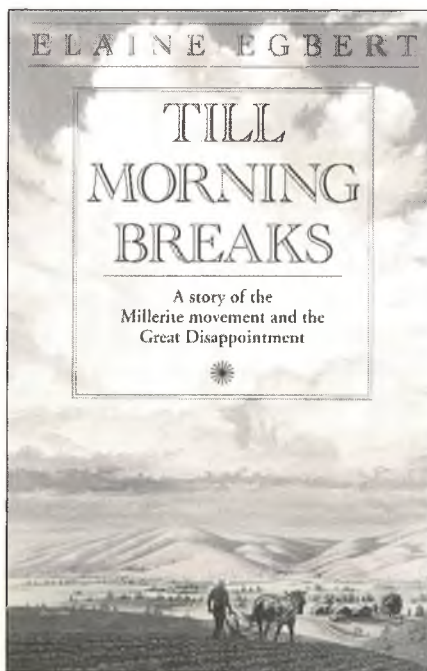
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# JEREMIAH & LAMENTATIONS: CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE

APRIL — JUNE 1994

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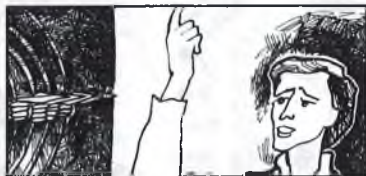
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# CAUGHT IN THE CROSSFIRE



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## This Quarter's Artist



Born the first child of a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in 1956 in Bohemia, Ján Barta experienced the ridicule of his classmates in school. When the communist regime in Czechoslovakia withdrew its approval of Ján's father as a pastor, he turned to working on boats in southern Moravia. "I made my first attempts at painting during this time," Ján recalls.

Because he was a Christian, Ján had little choice in his education. He was unable to study art or art history, as he wished, so he became a house painter and, later, a coal miner to avoid military service. "I feel," he says, "that my time spent as a house painter, plus the 12 years as a coal miner, was good experience because I learned not only from nature, but also from the lives of ordinary people."

He conducted his first art exhibition in 1984 in Ostrava, the largest town in Moravia. Three years later he moved to Prague, where he started work as a designer in the Seventh-day Adventist publishing house there. Since then he has had five more exhibitions in Czechoslovakia and one in England. He has illustrated several religious books, including the New Testament translated into Czech by Living Bibles International.

# Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

## Facts You Should Know

*CQ* is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed 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 young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than 200 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 35,000.

## Pointers for Study

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

2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

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

4. Read remaining sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.

5. 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.

## *CQ* and the Church

*CQ* 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.*

# AT THE BREAKING POINT



**“The Lord said unto me, Say not, I am a child: for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee” (Jer. 1:7).**



# Marital Counseling

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Jer. 2:13, 19, 32**

I was holding evangelistic meetings in San Luis Potosi, a state capital in northern Mexico. Because it is a strongly Catholic city, I started the series with two topics on marriage. After the second meeting a couple made an appointment to see me. Their marriage was at a breaking point. They had come to see me as a last resort. When we started the conversation, I thought something could be done to save their marriage, but how wrong I was. Their relationship was so badly broken that they refused to continue together. How they hurt each other with their words!

In the first two chapters of Jeremiah, two things stand out: (1) Jeremiah's call to the ministry and (2) a marriage at the breaking point. This second part gives a feeling of uneasiness. How is it possible the nation chosen to be God's bride in a marriage that had a bright future was now at the point of divorce from God? With heartbreaking language chapter 2 shows that Judah had been very unfaithful to her marriage covenant with God. She had forgotten her first love and had given herself to the worship of idols. God's people had changed His true glory for a worthless idol. She had exchanged her "fountain of living waters" for broken cisterns.

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## **Most of us will agree that a marriage relationship does not go down the drain instantly.**

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Judah was spiritually apathetic. She had plainly refused to mend her wrongs. She had deliberately chosen darkness for light, bitter for sweet. She had attempted to serve two masters.

How did this all come about? In view of the unchangeable righteousness of God and His unending faithfulness, one answer remains: Judah had done it all to herself! God had given His warnings of the impending doom, but it seems as though it had all fallen on deaf ears. He had sought Judah with an everlasting love, but to no avail. Unfortunately, their marriage relationship was at a breaking point. If you knew that your partner was being unfaithful to you, would you still maintain a faithful relationship?

Judging by our own personal experience, most of us will agree that a marriage relationship does not go down the drain instantly. It takes some time. Judah had almost reached the bottom in her relationship with God. And through messages from the prophet Jeremiah, He was doing His best to save the marriage. This made Jeremiah's commission very difficult, but, as you will read in this quarterly, he fulfilled his mission faithfully till the very end. It cost him tears, beatings, and, ultimately, death, but he was ready to take his place in God's plans.

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*By Jaime Cruz, professor of Greek and applied theology at Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.*

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# Born With a Mission

## LOGOS

### Jer. 1, 2

#### The Call of Jeremiah (Jer. 1:1-10)

*"Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, and before you were born I consecrated you; I appointed you a prophet to the nations" (verse 5, RSV).*

After the introduction to the book of Jeremiah, where the prophet identifies himself and the time in which he performed his prophetic office (verses 1-4), the author presents God's call. The Lord, who knew the end from the beginning, had elected Jeremiah as His mouthpiece before he was born (verse 5). This, no doubt, suggests God's intention of giving security and confidence to Jeremiah.

But the divine charge was particularly and circumstantially difficult. Hence, Jeremiah tried to avoid the divine calling by alleging that he did not know how to speak (probably referring to public speaking) and that he was too young to be God's messenger (verse 6); he was probably younger than King Josiah, who was 20 or 21 years old. The Lord, however, knew Jeremiah's problem was fear, and He gave him assurance that He would be with him to deliver him (verse 8) and would enable him to present God's message (verse 9).

When God elects His servants to perform a task, He not only makes them responsible for transmitting His message, but He enables them to fulfill the assigned duty and promises to protect them and be with them, all with the purpose of giving security and courage. This is one of the greatest spiritual lessons we learn from this passage.

*Am I conscious that the Lord knows me? How can I know the plans He has for me?*

#### Two Visions: Explanation of His Mission (Jer. 1:11-18)

*"They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you" (verse 19).*

Following the call, the Lord gave Jeremiah two symbolic representations, evidently in vision, of what his mission would be. In the first one Jeremiah saw an almond rod. The symbol involved a play on words, since the Hebrew word for almond tree is *shaged* ("the tree that awakes," because it was the first tree to blossom in the spring), and the verbal form for "watching" is *shoged*. So the Lord said to Jeremiah: "I am watching to see that my word is fulfilled" (verse 12, NIV). In this way the Lord assures Jeremiah that He will fulfill His words. Jeremiah will not be a prophet of unfulfilled promises.

In the second vision the prophet saw "a boiling pot, facing away from the north" (verse 13, RSV). This represented the evil that would come from the north and fall upon Jerusalem and the cities of Judah (verses 14, 15). Now the prophet knows he will be a messenger of divine judgments against his people, a difficult and painful task requiring firmness and courage (verse 17). Therefore, the Lord promises Jeremiah He will make him like a fortified city, an iron pillar, and bronze walls, since he will stand alone against everyone. He again promised to be with him and deliver him (verses 18, 19).

*How has God been with me in difficult times and assignments?*

### **Reason for His Mission (Jer. 2:1-37)**

*“For my people have committed two evils: they have forsaken me, for the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns for themselves, broken cisterns, that can hold no water” (verse 13).*

Through these first oracles the reason for calling Jeremiah to the prophetic office is apparent: God’s people, who included those in Jerusalem, Judah, and Israel, had become unfaithful. God complained that they had abandoned Him and had worshiped other gods, works of their own hands (verses 17, 19; 1:16), and in doing that they had become worthless (2:5). They bowed down on every high hill and under every green tree as a harlot (verse 20). They had said to a tree: “‘You are my father,’ and to a stone: ‘You gave me birth’ ” (verse 27). Even in Judah her gods were as numerous as her cities (verse 28). God compared their spiritual wanderings to the restive young camel and the wild ass, which could not restrain their lust (verses 23, 24). They had no fear of the Lord, nor did they accept correction (verses 19, 30). God accused them of doing what people who worshiped Him had never done before: change gods (verses 10, 11). Living this infatuation, they reached the point of

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## **The Lord had elected Jeremiah as His mouthpiece before he was born.**

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declaring themselves free of sin (verse 35). The Lord, however, revealed their sad condition: “Though you wash yourself with lye and use much soap, the stain of your guilt is still before me” (verse 22).

Because of this open unfaithfulness, God accused them of having “defiled my land, and made my heritage an abomination” (verse 7), as well as having turned into a degenerate and wild vine (verse 21). They finally declared themselves in rebellion against God, saying: “We are free, we will come no more to thee” (verse 31).

For these reasons the cities of Israel had been destroyed, and her land had been made a waste (verses 15-17). Now God announces His judgments upon Judah and Jerusalem with the same results as the Assyrian invasion (verses 36, 37).

It is evident that the call of God to Jeremiah to give this message represented a great challenge for the prophet. Not only had the people forsaken the Lord and lived in rampant idolatry but the prophet himself ran the risk of losing his life, since the prophets were persecuted (verse 30) and innocent people were killed (verse 34). However, the promise of God to the prophet is sure: “They will fight against you; but they shall not prevail against you, for I am with you, says the Lord, to deliver you” (1:19).

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*By Eloy Wade, New Testament professor and chairperson of the theology department at Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.*

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# Me Too, Lord?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Eccl. 12:1

Many youth in the church think what they have to offer God is of limited or no value. God needs them today as much as He needed Jeremiah then. At that time Jerusalem was coming to its end. Today the world is approaching its doom. Make the difference! Be a modern Jeremiah.

“Christ is calling for volunteers to enlist under His standard, and bear the banner of the cross before the world. The church is languishing for the help of young men who will bear a courageous testimony, who will with their ardent zeal stir up the sluggish energies of God’s people, and so increase the power of the church in the world. Young men are wanted who will resist the tide of worldliness, and lift a voice of warning against taking the first steps in immorality and vice.”<sup>1</sup>

“God does not bid the youth to be less aspiring. The elements of character that make a man successful and honored among men—the irrepressible desire for some

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**“The elements of character that make a man successful and honored . . . are not to be crushed out.”**

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greater good, the indomitable will, the strenuous exerting, the untiring perseverance—are not to be crushed out.”<sup>2</sup>

“Young men and women are invited to give God the strength of their youth, that through the exercise of their powers, through keen thought and vigorous action, they may bring glory to Him and salvation to their fellow men.”<sup>3</sup>

“With such an army of workers as our youth, rightly trained, might furnish, how soon the message of a crucified, risen, and soon-coming Saviour might be carried to the whole world! How soon might the end come—the end of suffering and sorrow and sin!”<sup>4</sup>

Neither Jeremiah nor his message was very popular then. There certainly is not much difference today either. Or is there? I am glad Jeremiah was ready to take a place in God’s plan.

## REACT

How does Jeremiah’s age, message, and response to his call relate to me?

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1. *Messages to Young People*, pp. 24, 25.

2. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 602.

3. *Gospel Workers*, p. 67.

4. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 555.

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*By Hector Ramal, associate professor of practical theology at Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.*

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# Holy Radicalism

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Jer. 1:16-19**

The problem of Jeremiah's call reaches beyond its dissonance with his training for the incense-burning, turf-preserving career (1 Chron. 26:16-21; 27:1, 2) he might begin at 30 and end at 50 (Num. 4:3). Years of training to sprinkle blood, tend lamps, and change shewbread engender little of the rhetorical mastery of dramatic presence expected in a "spokesman to the nations." Jeremiah cowers, not from modesty, but from feelings of utter inadequacy.

The problem with Jeremiah's call is its timing—or its inflammatory rhetoric, its anachronistic confrontationalism. How could he stand against his kings, priests, and people, a confounding wall of bronze against all their hostility (Jer. 1:18, 19), in days of royal goodness, united with priestly collaboration, for the realization of national holiness (2 Chron. 34:8-21)? For in Josiah's record, history preserves the memory of a king of unequalled surrender to God. For his radical dedication heaven

## Judah is a waistband rotted in the dirt.

holds back from Judah the hell that the nation deserves (2 Kings 23:25; 2 Chron. 34:26, 27).

He does become a spokesman to the nations (Jer. 25:15-38; 27:1-11; chapters 46-51), as others before (Isa. 14-20), and within his time (Ezek. 25-32). But for sheer relentlessness, his confrontation with high and low in Judah resists any comparison: Jehoiakim will have an ass's burial (Jer. 22:18, 19); God will hurl Jehoiachin and his mother into exile, where they will die (verses 24-26). Zedekiah is hopeless (32:2-5; 34:1-3). Pashur the priest, chief temple officer, inherits a new name, "Terror-on-every-side," for having him beaten and locked in the stocks (20:1-6). And four decades and five kings after God calls, the prophet still defies the popular will, pervertedly resolved to go to Egypt (42:13-22).

His holy absolutism reconciles the poles: Judah is a waistband rotted in the dirt (chapter 13). And Judah is God's: I'm buying shares in Judah (32:6-44).

## REACT

How does Judah's experience have parallels in my own life?

*By Lael O. Caesar, professor of Old Testament at Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.*

# Impossible Missions

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Jer. 1:5, 7

**A place in God's plan.** Two statements in the first chapter of Jeremiah establish the frame of action for people who wish to fulfill God's plan: "Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee" (verse 5, KJV); "for thou shalt go to all that I shall send thee" (verse 7).

In these statements God declares Himself as one who knows the past and as one who commits Himself to the future of those who serve Him. "In the youthful Jeremiah God saw one who would be true to His trust, and who would stand for the right against great opposition."\*

**God is responsible for the success of our mission.** It is very natural for us to feel apprehension about the results of our labors. The pressure of success comes from the people we respond to, the people we work with, our own colleagues and friends, our own family, and ourselves. Yet one of the first lessons we need to learn when we agree to serve God is that He assumes responsibility for the results. The

## Jeremiah's story teaches us that being young is no handicap.

statement of Jeremiah 1:8 is very comforting: "Be not afraid of their faces: for I am with thee to deliver thee, saith the Lord."

**What counts is the touch of God.** Jeremiah had many reasons for not accepting such a great task. He named the one that seemingly had no solution: "I am a child." But Christian young people are called for a great mission. "Let no man despise thy youth," wrote Paul to Timothy (1 Tim. 4:12).

Jeremiah's story teaches us that being young is no handicap. The key statement in the study of the life of this prophet is found in Jeremiah 1:9: "Then the Lord put forth his hand, and touched my mouth." When the Lord touches a life, He enables it for "impossible missions."

## REACT

1. Would I help someone who refuses to be helped?
2. How does my answer match God's dealing in my own life?
3. In what specific ways could younger people be used more effectively in the Seventh-day Adventist Church?
4. What are some of the objections older people have about involving young people more actively in church work?

\* *Prophets and Kings*, p. 407.

*By Ismael Castillo, president of Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.*

# The Power of the Word

## OPINION

**Key Text: Jer. 1:4**

“Then the word of the Lord came unto me, saying . . .” (Jer. 1:4, KJV). What a terrible thing to hear: “Word [*dabar*] of the Lord came unto me.” This expression has an important connotation in Middle East culture. The word *dabar* means “word,” “thing,” or “something.” The word was intimately bound with the thing or object.

God “callesh those things which be not as though they were” (Rom. 4:17). When God speaks, it is as if what He said were already a reality. This truth is grounded on the character and power of God, who is faithful to do what He promises (Rom. 4:21). The Roman centurion understood this when he said to Jesus that, as a man having soldiers under his command, these would obey his orders, so Jesus could give the order and his “servant shall be healed” (Luke 7:7).

This was Abraham’s faith, who “against hope believed in hope” and received what was promised (Rom. 4:18). It is also the faith of the heroes of Hebrews 11 that, though they died without receiving what was promised to them (verse 39), God will

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**It is the faith of the heroes that, though they died  
without receiving what was promised to them,  
God will fulfill His promise in its due time.**

---

fulfill His promise in its due time. Isaiah compares the effect of His word to that of the rain that waters the earth and makes it bring forth fruit. “So shall my word be that goeth forth out of my mouth: it shall not return unto me void, but it shall accomplish that which I please, and it shall prosper in the thing whereto I sent it” (Isa. 55:11).

The word of Jehovah brought all things into existence (Ps. 33:6, 9). God announced a child with divine character would be born and would dwell among humanity (Isa. 9:6; 7:14). This became a reality (John 1:1-3, 14). Such is the power of the Word of Jehovah.

For this same reason Jeremiah was frightened by the divine call, since it involved terrible consequences for his people, since he was called to “root out, and to pull down, and to destroy, and to throw down, to build, and to plant” (Jer. 1:10). Not until he was promised, “I am with thee, saith the Lord, to deliver thee” (verse 19), did his heart rest. The power of this word kept him firm through the turbulent years of his ministry. The power of the Word of God will keep us firm to the end if we believe in it.

## REACT

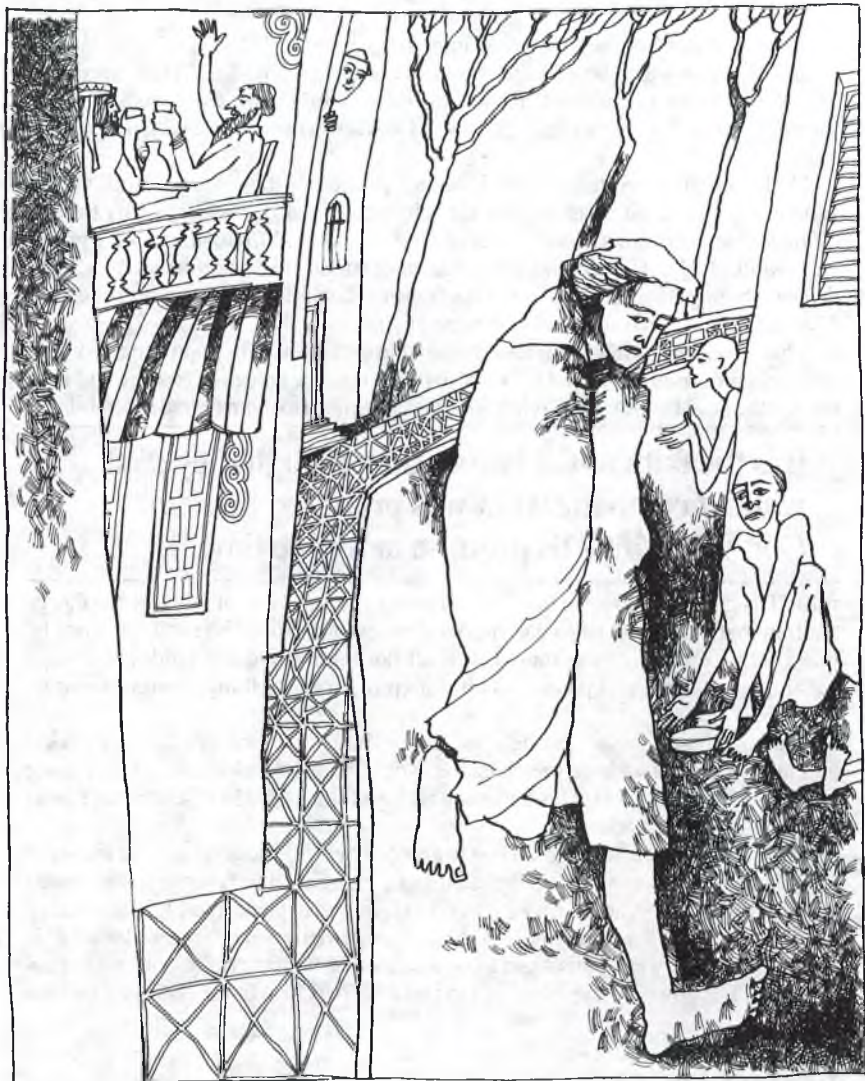
Is my faith in God based on feelings or on what God is able to do?

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*By Armando Juarez, professor of systematic theology at Montemorelos University, Montemorelos, Nuevo Leon, Mexico.*

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# NOW AND THEN



**“I know, O Lord, that a man’s life is not his own; it is not for man to direct his steps” (Jer. 10:23, NIV).**



# Let's Make a Deal

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Matt. 7:24-27**

God has struck a deal with His people, Israel: You stick with Me, and I will look after you. But Israel wanted only half the deal, the latter half. In fact, they became annoyed with Jeremiah, who upheld the whole deal, so they planned to kill him (Jer. 11:18, 19).

Meanwhile, Jeremiah was politely complaining: "You are always righteous, O Lord. . . . Yet I would speak with you about your justice" (12:1, NIV). Then he begins asking why the hypocrites who just talk about God but don't love Him seem to prosper. "Drag them off like sheep to be butchered," he says. "Set them apart for the day of slaughter" (verse 3).

Ever wonder why God lets good things happen to those who just don't deserve it? Prosperity may seem to be theirs, but it will come to nothing. The stuff in your hearts, that's what will last.

It's tough (and boring) thinking of eternal values. Where I am going to be in the next 30 minutes is far more important. I would rather be sitting down watching a

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## **God has struck a deal with His people. But Israel wanted only half the deal.**

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good TV show and eating a huge dish of ice cream than become overconcerned about my spirituality. So I do end up a bit of a couch potato, with an annoying junk-food zit.

Ever heard the expression "No pain, no gain"? Perhaps pain is overrated, and what's the big deal about gain—I've got enough.

Look 20, 30 years down the road. Where will your life be? Look at those your parents' age. Some seem to have done so much better. Nice house, nice car, good career. Some . . . well, they have just managed to get by.

Now look at them again. Who are the deep-down happy ones? Who are the ones who have "peace with God" (Rom. 5:1)? Do you want a veneer of happiness that evaporates in a recession or stock-market crash? Or do you want something more satisfying, more secure and dependable? Is there such a thing?

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*By Paul Wong, an architectural graduate practicing in Newport, South Wales, United Kingdom.*

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# No Life of the Party

## LOGOS

Jer. 11:18–12:4; 14:7-9; 20:14-18; 36:1-32

Giving bad news is never easy—when a doctor tells a patient that it’s cancer, when the officer tells parents their son is missing in action, when I had to tell one of my church members that his mother had just died.

Be honest. Would you risk inviting Jeremiah to a party? Even if he promised to leave his “The end is nigh” placard at the door? I might give him a five-minute slot before the sermon, but for the rest of the week I’d avoid him like the plague. No one likes bad news all the time.

But is it fair to write Jeremiah off like that? Was he really nothing more than a prophet of doom?

Things began well enough: young, though a little naive; an idealist, though somewhat sensitive. Jeremiah began his work as a prophet when there was a breath of optimism in the air. King Josiah was introducing sweeping reforms, bringing people back to God. And Jeremiah was going to be allowed to help. What a privilege. Getting straight to work, Jeremiah let the people have it from the pulpit, his best hell-fire sermons interspersed with graphic illustrations. Josiah backed him up with legislation, and together they began to transform the country. Or so they thought.

Jeremiah came crashing down to earth back home in Anathoth, the village of his fellow priests. A message had come from God that there was a plot to kill him! His friends. His relations. Their apparent support in the past had all been a sham. They actually hated him. Why? He hadn’t done anything wrong. He was just doing God’s will.

Jeremiah’s emotions passed quickly from bewilderment to anger. His revised prayer, “Let me see your vengeance upon them” (11:20, NIV), shows how deeply he was hurt. In the heat of that moment Jeremiah probably really meant it. But perhaps he calmed down a little when God called his bluff. “I will punish them. Their young men will die by the sword, their sons and daughters by famine. Not even a remnant will be left to them, because I will bring disaster on the men of Anathoth in the year of their punishment” (verses 22, 23).

Although Jeremiah continued to pour out his anger to God, the finality of God’s judgment took some of the heat out of him. Is that what I really want for these people? *My* people?

Jeremiah was one of the people himself, and when he pleaded with God on their behalf he would identify with them. Typically he would say “*our* backsliding is great” (14:7) rather than blaming the evil people around him.

With the death of crusading King Josiah, Judah plunged into political and spiritual darkness. Jeremiah couldn’t work with any of the kings who replaced Josiah; in fact, he couldn’t get near them. They wanted him dead as much as the priests of Anathoth had. Surprisingly, though, we don’t see a corresponding hardening of Jeremiah’s attitude. His anger at the sin didn’t turn into a hatred of the people. Surely he kept up his relentless hell-fire preaching, but it was never with an us-and-them attitude. He took God’s criticisms of his people personally, carrying the burden of their sins himself.

It almost crushed him, of course. Bursts of melancholy bubble up throughout his book. “Everyone curses me” (15:10). “My pain [is] unending” (verse 18). “Should good be repaid with evil?” (18:20). But despite this, and despite his very human anger against humanity and sometimes even against God, Jeremiah soldiered doggedly on. Maybe we will never fully understand his motivation. It could be that he was scared of what God might do to *him* if he didn’t do as he was told. After all, Jonah was still fairly recent history! A more likely reason, however, is that Jeremiah’s love for his people was deeper than even he realized—despite their stubbornness, despite their wickedness. Despite their attempts on his life, they were still his people, and he loved them. He didn’t want them dead; he wanted them *saved*. A bit like God, really.

In his life of service to God and his people, Jeremiah had developed a bond with both. The plots against his own life gave him an insight into how God must feel

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## **Be honest. Would you risk inviting Jeremiah to a party?**

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when His people reject Him. And God’s unwavering determination to save His people gave Jeremiah an insight into the value of human life. It was this mature understanding that kept him sane when Jehoiakim cut up and burned the message he had spent a year preparing. When Zedekiah threw him in prison for speaking God’s word on politics, and when Johanan dragged him off to Egypt against his will to die in obscurity, Jeremiah was consistent. God’s will, and his will, was to save the people, at any cost, from the judgment they were bringing upon themselves.

The pattern of Jeremiah’s life has been repeated many times throughout history: God’s people rejecting Him and God communicating His desire to save them at any cost. It’s bound to be repeated, with God being unchanging and humans being, well, human.

### **REACT**

1. How should a person cope when attempts to witness are laughed at?
2. When is righteous anger appropriate?
3. How can you love people who hate you?
4. Which emotions, experienced by Jeremiah, did Christ share?
5. What in my life would I really die for rather than give it up? Why?

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*By John C. Surridge, district minister in West Wales, United Kingdom.*

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# People Who Smell

## TESTIMONY

**Key Texts: 1 John 3:17; Luke 12:33, 34**

“Naturally of a timid and shrinking disposition, Jeremiah longed for the peace and quiet of a life of retirement, where he need not witness the continued impenitence of his beloved nation.”<sup>1</sup>

And me too!

I would love it if Christianity were a life of quiet meditation and contemplation—leafing through tomes of divine inspiration, indulging in deliciously dignified rituals inside superbly crafted monuments of architecture, elevating myself above those lesser things in life.

But when the Lord returns, He will ask, “When I was hungry, did you feed Me; when I was thirsty, did you give Me something to drink; when I was a stranger, did you invite Me in?” The annoying thing about doing the things Christ did is that you get your hands dirty. You deal with people who smell, who are downright

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## The annoying thing about doing the things Christ did is that you get your hands dirty.

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unappealing! But Jesus says when you do this for them, it is as if you were doing it for Him.

Jeremiah identified with his people. I tend to point to the church and criticize. If I identified with *my* people, I would be criticizing myself!

I ponder Ellen White’s quotation of Jeremiah, when he says, “‘Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers.’”<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. Have I ever got my hands dirty for Christ? What effect did it have on my spirituality?
2. Is being Christlike something you are or something you do?
3. In the next 20 years, how much will my social life, career, and spirituality have progressed? Which will have progressed the most?
4. How does a person overcome feelings of timidity, anxiety, or hesitancy about caring for others?
5. Is timidity in such a situation a sin? Explain your answer.
6. How should a caring Christian respond to someone’s apparent ingratitude?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 419, 420.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 420.

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*By Paul Wong, an architectural graduate practicing in Newport, South Wales, United Kingdom.*

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## Does God Plan the Pits?

### EVIDENCE

**Key Texts:** Jer. 18:20; Ps. 40:1-3

Pits! You know what those situations are like in which everything seems to be turning sour—relationships, work, studies, and the world with its wars, famines, diseases—and God appears to have taken time out for a lunch break.

I used to think that God planned pits. I could just imagine Him in a long white robe, thoughtfully stroking His long white beard and designing a unique, me-shaped pitfall in which my character could be curbed. While I waited in my personal pit, this thought was not comforting.

I now know this belief is one of our enemy's most effective lies, both within the Christian church and with those who have no formal belief in God. Consider how many times you have been asked, "Why has God done this to me?" or "my family?" or "the world?" We, as Christians, need to take stock.

Our enemy is Satan. He lays pitfalls in our lives and confuses our minds and perverts the facts so that we often turn and lay the blame for our troubles on God. But Jesus took all blame, for all sin, for all time, at the cross. When He rose from

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**I could just imagine God designing a unique, me-shaped pitfall in which my character could be curbed.**

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death, He gave each person the gift of a brand-new life—in fact, the opportunity to be spiritually born again.

So God does not create pits to punish us, for "there is now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus, because through Christ Jesus the law of the Spirit of life set . . . [us] free from the law of sin and death" (Rom. 8:1, 2, NIV).

That's you! So you will be able to say, "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the slimy pit, out of the mud and mire; he set my feet on a rock and gave me a firm place to stand" (Ps. 40:1, 2).

You have the promise that the Holy Spirit will be constantly present to show you how to navigate the pits in your day-to-day life and on the journey from new birth to Christian maturity. "Whether you turn to the right or to the left, your ears will hear a voice behind you, saying, 'This is the way; walk in it' " (Isa. 30:21).

As Christians we do not have a startling absence of pitfalls in our lives. We do, however, have a Rescuer whom other people need to hear about.

### REACT

1. In practical terms, how can we live in the world but not be of the world and still be able to relate to people who do not know Christ?
2. How did Jesus do this?

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*By Hazel Morris, an occupational therapist who practices in Bristol, England, United Kingdom.*

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## Sooner or Later

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: Ps. 5:3**

“Oh, no! I’ve done it again. Why do I always end up like this? Every time I promise it won’t happen again, yet here I am—two days to go, and I don’t know anything. *Panic*. Why didn’t I start revising sooner?”

“Dear Lord: I know I promised this wouldn’t happen again, but please help me to pass these exams. I know it’s my own fault and I don’t deserve to pass, but please help me. I want to go to college. I’ve learned my lesson this time, and it won’t ever happen again.”

Sound familiar? I’m ashamed to say this has happened to me in the past, and I’m sure it will happen to others in the future. All of a sudden, God is terribly important; we cannot rely on ourselves. We remember He is there, pushed to the back of our lives by college, work, relationships with other people. Suddenly we need the security of God’s presence and definitely His help.

What happens when the results come and we have failed? “Well, serves me right,” or “So God didn’t want me to pass,” we may rationalize. How much better

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### **We all have little parts of our lives that we like and want to keep for ourselves.**

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it would be if we had a close relationship with God, in which we had constant communication with Him, rather than only when a problem arises. Why is this so important?

First, God has a special plan outlined for each of us. There is one different, tailor-made plan just for you. If we have a close relationship with God, we will feel Him guiding us in His plan for our lives, and we will follow. If we didn’t pass, maybe it is because God has other plans for us, but unless we have this relationship, we may not see this, and we may become angry over His seeming lack of help.

Second, we must give our lives to God to do with as He sees fit. Sounds easy, you say, but we all have little parts of our lives that we like and want to keep for ourselves. God needs every part of us (Prov. 16:9). By having a personal relationship with God, we will begin to see that those areas once enjoyed are not so great after all. The controller of our lives must not be ourselves or other people, but God. Through faith we will allow God to enter and direct our steps in His service.

### **REACT**

1. Why are people apprehensive about giving God control of their lives?
2. In everyday terms, what does it mean to give our lives to God?
3. How can a person know when God is directing his or her steps?

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*By Lynn Robertson, who is studying and working in accountancy in Cardiff, South Wales, United Kingdom.*

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# His People

## OPINION

**Key Text: Mark 16:17, 18**

Israel wanted all the benefits of being “God’s people,” but they did not want to be individually or corporately intimate with God or to subject themselves to His rule. This was the agony of Jeremiah’s life.

Does today’s key text describe your church? Does it describe you? Or are we as a people “having a form of godliness but denying its power” (2 Tim. 3:5, NIV)?

A Christian of another denomination was walking through the busy shopping center in town where I work. He felt God impress upon him to shout out, “Jesus loves you.” So he muttered it under his breath. The impression came again, *Shout out*, “*Jesus loves you.*” He spluttered it out quickly, audibly, and then looked around in case anybody heard him. The impression came back again, *Shout out*, “*Jesus loves you!*” This time he really did it. A woman in front of him turned and said, “I didn’t know anybody cared,” and the Christian was able to advise and counsel her over some problems she had been facing.

God the Spirit works miraculously in two ways: on us and through us. First, for salvation He convicts us of sin, righteousness, and judgment (John 16:8, 9).

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## He felt God impress upon him to shout out, “Jesus loves you.”

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Then for our ministry He calls us to play a part in His church—the body of Christ. He also then equips us to do that ministry by giving us a spiritual gift (1 Cor. 12). If you were to take away the miraculous aspects of ministry from your church, how different would it be?

## REACT

1. If so prompted, would I shout out, “Jesus loves you,” in a crowded public place?
2. Am I intimate enough with God to know His voice if so prompted?

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*By Paul Wong, an architectural graduate practicing in Newport, South Wales, United Kingdom.*

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# WHAT'S IN YOUR SUITCASE?



**“He hath made the earth by his power, he hath established the world by his wisdom, and hath stretched out the heavens by his discretion” (Jeremiah 10:12).**



# Regina's Decision

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Matt. 19:21, 22; Ruth 1:16**

Regina, a seven-year-old orphan, had had enough. Her teacher didn't like her; school was the pits, and living in the orphanage was unbearable. So she decided to hit the road and make a better life for herself. When no one was watching, she got out her suitcase and packed for the trip.

The suitcase was very small, so she had to make some hurried decisions. What prized possessions would she leave behind, and which items were indispensable? In a rush she grabbed the two things she couldn't live without—her Bible and a roll of toilet paper. She fit these two necessities neatly, side by side, in her suitcase. She then rushed out the door, tied her precious cargo on the back of her bicycle, and pedaled down the road.

This episode in the life of a small child reminds me of a dilemma we all face. Just what is most important to us? When, in the end, we must decide what is most

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### **In a rush she grabbed the two things she couldn't live without.**

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precious to us, what will we pack in our suitcases? Will we have the simple faith of a child and take the Word of God with us wherever we go, or will we be like the rich young ruler, who couldn't bear to part with his material possessions?

Regina's priorities may seem simplistic to us as adults. Our lives revolve around working to make money, to own nice things, and to be comfortable. But the goods of this world are only temporary. We can't take them with us on the most important journey we will ever make—the journey to heaven. The love, joy, and acceptance that we find in God's Word, however, are possessions that will last forever. These are the things we should be packing to take with us for the new life the Lord has waiting for us.

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*By Janesta Bryant, who teaches English at Mt. Pisgah Academy, Asheville, North Carolina.*

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# The Incessant Lover

## LOGOS

**Jer. 5:1-8; 7:18-20, 29-34; 9:1-8; 10:1-16; 16:10-13**

### The Frustration of Being Ignored (Jer. 8:18–9:9)

*“Lying, not truth, is master in the land. They run from one sin to another, and for me they care nothing” (9:3, NEB).*

Ever since events in the Garden of Eden introduced the separation that results from sin, God had been trying to carry on a long-distance relationship with humankind. With only a few exceptions (Enoch, Abraham, Job, Moses . . .), He had had no success in letting Himself be known *aright* to humanity. When He brought Israel out of Egypt, He met them where they were in their understanding of Him—square one—by trying to introduce Himself in terms they could understand and respect. Over the centuries Israel had not progressed much from the time they left Egypt.

Much like trying to get to know that special someone who seems to gush and make over everyone *except* you, God was trying to reveal Himself to a people who preferred sacrificing their children to Molech and baking cakes for the queen of heaven (32:35; 7:17-19).

### Pursuing Foolishness (Jer. 5:1-8; 10:1-16; 7:18-20)

*“They pour out drink offerings to other gods to provoke me to anger. But am I the one they are provoking? declares the Lord. Are they not rather harming themselves, to their own shame?” (7:18, 19, NIV).*

When we read of the ridiculous, self-destructive course Judah was taking, we wince and shake our heads in disbelief. A typical prayer may have sounded like one of these: “Dear god of the orchard, I know that only yesterday you were an apple-tree trunk. Regardless, I know that you have the power to make me prosperous and to subdue my enemies . . .” “Dear god, Molech, I know you will bless me when you see my children writhing in the flames . . .” “Dear Baal, god of fertility and the biosphere, according to your will I have sexually interacted with all my neighbors . . .” Looking back from our time, we have difficulty seeing the allurements of such gods.

It is interesting to imagine what Jeremiah’s contemporaries would think of our society’s gods. Our obsession with sex outside the context of procreation or the formal practice of religion might really puzzle them. What would they think of our society’s love affair with the automobile? How close do we come to saying (in effect), “Dear god, 300ZX, I know that you have the power to make me popular . . .” What would they say of how we tend to inflict our children with painfully high expectations so we might vicariously taste their success to boost our own ego? Would Jeremiah’s contemporaries share with us a preoccupation with the winning of sports events? Viewed from a distance, it seems today’s gods are just as ridiculous as those in Jeremiah’s time.

### Getting the Attention of Children (Jer. 16:10-13; 7:29-34)

*“My people are fools; they do not know me. They are senseless children; they have no understanding” (4:22).*

Getting people to listen to reason can be one of the most difficult tasks a person (or God) can face. "I will bring on them and those living in Jerusalem and the people of Judah every disaster I pronounced against them, because they have not listened" (36:31).

A farmer, accused of mistreating his stubborn donkey by hitting it on the head with a board, replied, "I was just trying to get its attention." It seems that God was having to use some drastic measures with Judah in hopes of someday gaining their attention.

### **The Persistence of a Lover**

*"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel? . . . For I am God, and not man—the Holy One among you" (Hosea 11:8, 9).*

Jeremiah portrays God as resorting to almost any means to win Judah's affection from the gods of Canaan. Flattery (Jer. 2:2, 3), reason (verses 5, 17, 19), bribery

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## **"I know you will bless me when you see my children writhing in the flames."**

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(3:19), promises of safety (1:19; 15:19, 20), emotional appeals (3:12, 13; 4:13-17), threat of disaster (16:10-13)—virtually every method of persuasion is described. God says through Jeremiah, "I have loved you with an everlasting love" (31:3). Similarly, today God persistently seeks a saving relationship with each of us.

### **REACT**

1. How can God have feelings of jealousy toward inanimate wooden and stone pseudogods?
2. Why does God insist on maintaining our freedom of choice (which allows us to ignore Him), when this makes His task so much more difficult?
3. What trivial pursuits occupy my thoughts and consume my energy?
4. Which of my interests, if any, would appear foolishness in an eternal perspective?
5. How can someone get the attention of a loved one who is choosing a course bound for tragedy?
6. How should we read God's tough talk to Judah (see Jer. 17:4; 16:14, 15; 17:9; 30:12-17)?
7. In what ways is worshiping God as a tyrant considered idolatry?

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*By Laurence Ashcroft, who teaches physics and computer programming in Hendersonville, North Carolina.*

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## Wake-up Call

### TESTIMONY

**Key Texts: Jer. 16:11, 12; 1 Cor. 10:12-14**

Jeremiah's prophecy was a wake-up call. God had called His people to be an example to surrounding nations. What had gone wrong? The Israelites were the depository of God's law, but why weren't they prospering as God had promised?

"During these years of apostasy, the spiritual decline of Israel progressed steadily. How could it be otherwise when their king had united his interests with satanic agencies? Through these agencies the enemy worked to confuse the minds of the Israelites in regard to true and false worship; and they became an easy prey. Commerce with other nations brought them into intimate contact with those who had no love for God, and their own love for Him was greatly lessened. Their keen sense of the high, holy character of God was deadened. Refusing to follow in the path of obedience, they transferred their allegiance to the enemy of righteousness."<sup>1</sup>

The early Christian church struggled with the same condition. "The apostle's words of warning to the Corinthian church are applicable to all time, and are

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### **"Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbathkeepers."**

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especially adapted to our day. By idolatry he meant not only the worship of idols, but self-serving, love of ease, the gratification of appetite and passion. . . . A religion that seeks only to gratify the eye, the ear, and the taste, or that sanctions self-indulgence, is not the religion of Christ."<sup>2</sup>

Today we say, "This wouldn't happen to God's remnant church. After all, we have the benefit of history from which to learn!"

"In the last vision given me, I was shown the startling fact that but a small portion of those who now profess the truth will be sanctified by it and be saved. Many will get above the simplicity of the work. They will conform to the world, cherish idols, and become spiritually dead. . . . Many idols are worshiped, even by professed Sabbathkeepers. . . . The sins and iniquities of rebellious Israel are recorded and the picture presented before us as a warning that if we imitate their example of transgression and depart from God we shall fall as surely as did they."<sup>3</sup>

### **REACT**

Is it possible for someone to make an idol of church organizations, institutions, or status? Explain your answer.

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 58.
  2. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 317.
  3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, pp. 608, 609.

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*By Rod Hartle, owner of an epoxy flooring company in Asheville, North Carolina.*

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# Keeping the Dark in Dark Ages

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts:** Col. 3:5; Exod. 20:17; Ezek. 36:26; Jer. 7:30, 31, 34

Our mental pictures of idolatry often include strangely dressed humans dancing around fires or pouring liquid concoctions over altars. The myriad of idolatrous practices indicates only that an idolatrous seed is at the core of every human being. It's easy to be disgusted by someone else's idolatrous actions. It's a godly gift to see the idolater inside our own natural mind.

Greed is idolatry, and it started early. Lucifer wanted God's power. Eve wanted experiences she would have been better off without. Lot wanted the best opportunities the city could offer his family. Absalom wanted his father's kingdom. Ahab wanted Naboth's patrimony. Jehoiakim wanted to keep Jerusalem, in spite of what Jeremiah had prophesied about Nebuchadnezzar's "trash and burn" plan. Herod killed defenseless babes to protect his kingdom. The Jewish leaders killed Jesus to preserve their nation. The Roman Church kept the dark in Dark Ages by

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## **Greed is one of the major reasons the tenth commandment was written.**

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suppressing the circulation of the Bible. Napoleon wanted the whole world, and so did Hitler.

Greed is one of the major reasons the tenth commandment was written. God knew that covetous, grasping, and greedy desires would cause His created children to break every principle of His sacred law. Spousal and child abuses, both physical and psychological, snuff out the present and future happiness of millions. The relationship-destroying diseases of adultery and fornication are natural to a soul in love with itself. Robbery and lying are born of a possession obsession that destroys honesty and concern for others. Lack of stewardship for God's loving gifts of air, water, and soil means that the earth itself is ready for God to stop environmental greed.

The bright spot in all this sadness is that God is communicating to us His selfless love. This love will, if we choose, obliterate our natural, greedy self-love. That choice is our beautiful, daily opportunity.

## **REACT**

1. How can idolatry be transformed into worship for the God of the Scriptures?
2. Why does love for God increase a believer's respect for and value of other human beings and for the environment?

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*By George Grow, science teacher at Mt. Pisgah Academy, Asheville, North Carolina.*

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# “Me-opia”

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Mark 12:20, 31**

Myopia—nearsightedness—is a common ailment. Most often it’s an acute variety in which all one can see is “me.”

Idolatry is a problem of focus. The focal point of one’s attention is the most important thing in a person’s life—one’s god, if you will. Fortunately, the Great Physician (ophthalmologist) can diagnose and correct our focus. Following is a list of myopias and the Physician’s suggested treatment:

**1. “Me-opia.”** Secular society says, “Look out for number one.” Number one refers to self. Treatment: “The most important [commandment] . . . is this: ‘. . . Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength’ ” (Mark 12:29, 30, NIV).

**2. The One-Who-Dies-With-the-Most-Toys-Wins Myopia.** Having material goods is not wrong, but do you find yourself concentrating more on how much you obtain or on how you can better use what you have? Treatment: “But

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## Christ died for a man named Saddam Hussein.

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seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33).

**3. Am-I-My-Brother’s-Keeper Myopia.** Christ showed concern for all. He died for a man named Saddam Hussein. My true Christianity is revealed by my actions toward others. Treatment: “The second [most important commandment] is this: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Mark 12:31). It’s how you treat the one that reveals how you regard the ninety-nine, because everyone is ultimately a one.”<sup>1</sup>

**4. It’s-Always-Been-Done-This-Way Myopia.** “Are we worshipers of . . . the living God, or of idols? No outward shrines may be visible; there may be no image for the eye to rest upon; yet we may be practicing idolatry. It is as easy to make an idol of cherished ideas or objects as to fashion gods of wood or stone. Thousands have a false conception of God and His attributes. They are as verily serving a false god as were the servants of Baal.”<sup>2</sup> Treatment: We can’t become complacent; our focus needs frequent adjustment. We need to visit the Physician daily.

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1. Steven R. Covey, *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1990), p. 197.

2. Ellen G. White Comments, *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1105.

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By Amy Leslie, a biology student at the University of North Carolina, Asheville.

# Goals and Gods

## OPINION

**Key Texts: Jer. 10:12; Exod. 20:3; Jer. 16:12**

Admit it. We all have other gods. At one time or another we tend to put these gods ahead of God. We tend to view idolatry with a detached smugness. Since cradle roll I have viewed idolatry as something practiced by both ancient and present-day “heathen” societies—usually consisting of a crude idol of some type before which were placed various sacrifices. This is a comfortable view, since none of us in modern, secular, Western culture would even think of doing this.

I believe our idols, our other gods, are more insidious, more difficult to recognize, and therefore ultimately more dangerous. Our other gods take many forms. Personal success, monetary gain, political power, professional standing, other persons, and even worthwhile causes are all gods of this present world.

List all the important things in your life on a piece of paper. Cross out the least important item to you, then the next least important, etc., until only one item is left—the most important item in your life. If you have done this honestly, that item

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### **We tend to view idolatry with a detached smugness.**

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should be your main god, above whom are no other gods. Recent history is strewn with figures who have made monetary gain or political power or revenge their main reason for living. These people sacrificed everything else for the one main driving force in their lives.

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well” (Matt. 6:33, NIV).

Planning for the future plays a large part in our thinking. When we set our 5-, 10-, or 25-year goals, what do we think about? Those things most important to us will determine the goals we set.

Either we believe in God and the Bible, or we don’t. If we do, then our Creator has laid out instructions for a fulfilled life here and hereafter: no other gods before Him. We can certainly have other goals, loves, and aspirations, but He must be our first love and God above all. If we truly believe that, it will greatly influence our tendency to pursue and worship any other gods in our life, for we will have our eyes on the Eternal. If we do not truly believe that, then the world will gladly give us other gods and goals on which to expend our earthly energy.

“What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul?” (Matt. 16:26).

## **REACT**

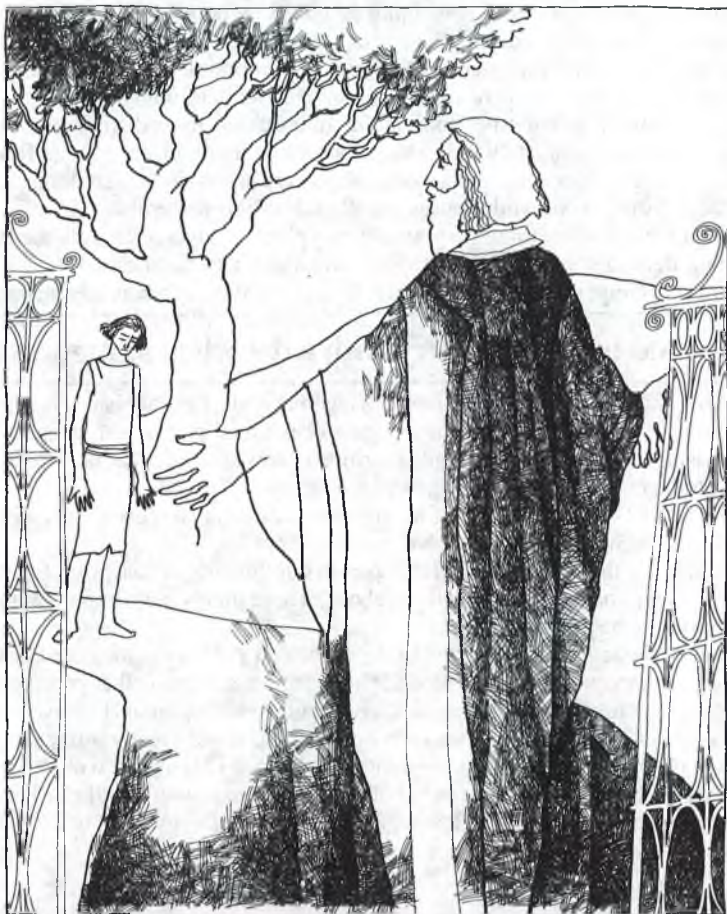
1. Who or what are the gods in my life?
2. Can I truly identify them without defending them?
3. What is my goal for eternity?
4. How does this goal affect all my other goals?

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*By David Markoff, an ophthalmologist in Waynesville, North Carolina.*

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# GOD'S TRADE AGREEMENT



**“But this shall be the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel; After those days, saith the Lord, I will put my law in their inward parts, and write it in their hearts; and will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jer. 31:33).**



# The Four Laws of Commitment

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Jer. 31:31

International trade agreement, peace treaty, confederacy, compact, league, contract, partnership, voucher, vow, gentleman's agreement—these are some of the terms that come to mind as we consider the concept of “covenant.” Many of these terms carry the connotation of a plan or pact, mutual consent, an agreement to collaborate, to build together, with resulting mutual benefits. A broken covenant also generates terms and phrases: exploitation, embezzlement, war, breach of contract, foreclosure, divorce, bad credit, black-listed. All this interrelated phraseology in our language is evidence that this covenant concept exerts considerable influence in our daily lives.

So how does all this fit in with Jeremiah? What does he mean when he speaks a message from the Lord and says, “I will make a new covenant” (31:31)? What message is he trying to convey? Does our notion of peace treaty fit? Is the Lord proposing negotiations? Is He imposing a contract? How can we get at what Jeremiah said thousands of years ago?

Analogies may be useful—but inadequate—aids in our understanding of spiritual things. Fran and I entered into a long-term commitment in June of 1976.

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### **We soon found our agreement, initiated by the simple words *I do*, bore many of the same features of other long-term commitments.**

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We began with a working proposal, confirmed the partnership with a solemn ceremony, celebrated our subsequent successes with family and friends, and began work immediately on the task at hand. However, we were soon to find that our agreement, initiated by the simple words *I do*, bore many of the same features of other long-term commitments, all of which seem to be subject to the same four laws: (1) it takes longer than you think; (2) it's more expensive than you planned; (3) it takes more effort than you imagined; and (4) it's more disruptive than you'd like. Our vows have resulted in a challenging, lifelong learning process about ourselves, each other, and our Creator.

But what about the analogy? Does it, in fact, break down? Do the four laws fit when you consider your past relationship with God? What can marriage teach us about God's proposed covenant with us? What does God mean by *covenant*, anyway? How does a working partnership with God fit into our high-tech, fast-paced lifestyle? These questions are intended to invite you to consider a different perspective as you read, think, and talk about this concept of God's covenant throughout this week.

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*By Larry Rogien, a doctoral candidate in educational psychology, and Fran Rogien, who works in the graduate office of the mathematics department at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.*

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# A Marriage Gone Bad

## LOGOS

**Jer. 3:1-20; 11:1-10; 18:7-10; 22:8, 9; 31:31-34**

### **Forgiveness for Unfaithfulness (Jer. 3:1-20)**

Scripture often refers to the relationship God wants with His people as that of husband and wife. He reminds Israel of its faithfulness in the past: “I remember the devotion of your youth, how as a bride you loved me” (Jer. 2:2, NIV). He reminds them of how much He has done for them, but also shows how illogical is their ungrateful reaction to His love.

In chapter 3 He tries to make His predicament clear by referring to Deuteronomy. Moses had given instruction that a man should not remarry his divorced wife if she had remarried. Israel, the unfaithful wife, had married other gods. Some might question whether the Lord could take her back.

But what may be impossible for humans is not impossible for the Lord: “Return, . . . I will frown on you no longer, for I am merciful, . . . I will not be angry forever” (3:12). The words “Return, . . . for I am your husband” (verse 14) are reminiscent of God’s loving appeal through Hosea more than 100 years before.

### **The Broken Covenant (Jer. 11:1-10)**

“Why are all these bad things happening to us?” Jeremiah’s contemporaries ask. “Where has Yahweh gone? Why is He not protecting us from our enemies?”

In response the Lord reminds His people of the covenant He made when He brought them out of Egypt. “Cursed is the man who does not obey the terms of this covenant” (verse 3). What did the covenant say? “Obey me and do everything I command you, and you will be my people, and I will be your God” (verse 4). How will God bring them to their senses? “I will bring on them a disaster they cannot escape. Although they cry out to me, I will not listen to them” (verse 11).

### **Does God Alter His Plans? (Jer. 18:7-10)**

This text is key to understanding Jeremiah and to interpreting correctly all God’s threats and promises. “It should be remembered that the promises and threatenings of God are alike conditional.”<sup>1</sup> This is a message of hope. “You [Israel] have made a mess of our marriage,” says the Lord, “but just as the potter can remake a marred pot, so I can restore the covenant relationship.”

This hope should have resulted in repentance. However, Israel says, “Each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart” (verse 12). Their response makes no sense, yet we often act no differently. We glibly sing the words penned by Adelaide Pollard, but do we mean them?

Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!  
 Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.  
 Mold me and make me after Thy will,  
 While I am waiting, yielded and still.<sup>2</sup>

### **God Takes a Risk (Jer. 22:8, 9)**

Any time God uses affliction or punishment to get the attention of His people,

He runs the risk of being misunderstood. When He asked Moses to step aside so He could destroy the people who had broken the covenant, Moses objected on the grounds that it would not look good for God. The other nations would not understand (Exod. 32).

In Jeremiah's day God faced the same dilemma. The only hope He had of Israel's repenting was to discipline them. Many, even among His chosen people, completely misunderstood. Have we ever been guilty of falsely judging God when in love He has had to hurt us to get us to listen to Him?

### **The New Covenant (Jer. 31:31-34)**

When one partner in a marriage has been unfaithful, it does not necessarily mean the end of the marriage. The two can make a new covenant to be faithful to each other, thus restoring the relationship. In Jeremiah's day the Lord looked forward to such a homecoming. Chapters 30 and 31 tell of that glorious day.

Why does He call this one new? Isn't it the same one He gave to Adam and to Abraham? Some have explained the covenants in such complicated terms that

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## **Have we ever been guilty of falsely judging God when He has had to hurt us to get us to listen?**

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many Christians have despaired of understanding them. At the risk of oversimplification, we might explain them as follows: The old covenant was ratified at Mt. Sinai and was based on the promises of human beings (see Exod. 19:8; 24:3, 7). The new covenant was ratified at the cross and was based on the promises of God. It does not require great intellect to understand the worthlessness of human promises compared to the infinite promises of God: "Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand."<sup>3</sup>

What is the result? "The same law that was engraved upon the tables of stone, is written by the Holy Spirit upon the tables of the heart. Instead of going about to establish our own righteousness, we accept the righteousness of Christ. His blood atones for our sins. His obedience is accepted for us. Then the heart renewed by the Holy Spirit will bring forth 'the fruits of the Spirit.' Through the grace of Christ we shall live in obedience to the law of God written upon our hearts. Having the Spirit of Christ, we shall walk even as He walked."<sup>4</sup>

### **REACT**

1. Explain why you agree or disagree that the Adventist Church—like Judah—could sin away its day of grace.
2. What can we do to preclude falling out of covenant with God?
3. Explain why you agree or disagree that God sometimes has to "hurt us to get us to listen to Him."

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1. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 67.

2. *The Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, no. 567.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 47.

4. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 372.

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*By Donald Short, pastor of the Bloomington and Spencer, Indiana, Seventh-day Adventist churches.*

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# A Marriage That Works

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Jer. 23:6**

I contemplated backing out of this week's lesson when I discovered what the topic was. I have a somewhat jaded view of marriage and particularly of wedding vows. Both my mother's marriages ended because her husbands no longer wanted to keep their promises. The effect was a violation of the spirit of marriage, of love, and of trust.

But I know there are marriages that do work. I know a couple who have been married for decades. They still love each other with that first love and make marriage look wonderful. These two marvelous people know each other so well they can finish each other's sentences. Neither husband nor wife went into the marriage thinking, "I'll love this person if it kills me—just as long as I'm married, that's all that counts." They have kept their vows because they love each other. It's that simple.

It's just as simple as our part in keeping the wedding vows we made to Christ when we took the name Christian. Ellen White writes, "The plan of beginning outside and trying to work inward has always failed, and always will fail. God's plan

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## I contemplated backing out of this week's lesson when I discovered what the topic was.

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with you is to begin at the very seat of all difficulties, the heart, and then from out of the heart will issue the principles of righteousness; the reformation will be outward as well as inward."<sup>1</sup>

My extraordinary married friends have grown to love each other more because they have spent so much time together, and (yes, I know it sounds like a tired cliché, but it's true) they have logged literally hundreds of hours over the years just talking. Honoring their vows doesn't come up in conversation; it's just something they do for each other out of love.

When we spend this kind of unselfish time getting to know God, He will write His law of love on our hearts. It's really as easy as it sounds: "Looking unto Jesus we obtain brighter and more distinct views of God, and by beholding we become changed. Goodness, love for our fellow men, becomes our natural instinct."<sup>2</sup> Christ lives in us, and His love reigns in our hearts: this is a marriage that works.

## REACT

What constitutes the breaking of a marriage vow?

1. *Counsels on Diet and Foods*, p. 35.
2. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 355.

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By Richard Gallagher, a junior history major at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

# The God Who Breaks the Rules

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Deut. 24:1-4**

The book of Jeremiah draws heavily upon Deuteronomy in its emphasis on the covenant relationship between God and His people. Deuteronomy is first evoked in Jeremiah 3:1-10 when the prophet keys into Deuteronomy 24:4: "Then her first husband, who divorced her, is not allowed to marry her again after she has been defiled. That would be detestable in the eyes of the Lord" (NIV). Continuing with the God = husband / Israel = wife metaphor he introduced in chapter 2, Jeremiah emphasizes that even if the wife wanted to return to her first husband, the law prohibits it. In Israelite society marriage involved a relationship not only between two individuals but between two families. Children born to a man were considered his, not his wife's, and such behavior would result in confusion of clan loyalties and property ownership. Jeremiah's message: what doesn't work between a man and a woman certainly doesn't work between man and God.

Moving on to stronger metaphors, Jeremiah accuses Israel of living "as a prostitute with many lovers" (3:1); she has been "ravished" (verse 2). Both of

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## The Lord, the forsaken lover, is willing to risk all for the object of His love.

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these are rather timid translations of a verb considered in such poor taste that in public readings of Jeremiah it has been replaced by something less offensive.\* The woman depicted here waits by the roadside, ready to pounce on any male willing or unwilling to satisfy her. It is difficult for us who live in an age of promiscuity to imagine the impact of such explicit imagery on the original audience.

To lie down with a man meant to be possessed by him; the word *baal* may be translated "owner" or "owned." Will God, the owner-husband, be so imprudent as to take back His first wife, who is, in a sense, "used merchandise"? Will He violate the if-then certainty of the curses of Deuteronomy, breaking His own law? Jeremiah suggests that He will. The Lord, the forsaken lover, is willing to risk all for the object of His love. Not only will He break the rules; He will even put His reputation on the line for us. "Return, faithless people, . . . for I am your husband" (verse 14). We should need little convincing.

## REACT

In our efforts to preserve the law, Adventists have often been adamant about the idea that God cannot break His own rules. Can you think of any other scriptural examples of the flexibility of God?

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\* Elizabeth Achtemeier, *Jeremiah* (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1987), p. 50.

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By Terese Thonus, a graduate student in linguistics at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.

# Symbiosis

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Gal. 5:22**

In Sequoia National Park stands a sequoia tree named General Sherman. It has been recorded as the largest living tree on our planet. Its total weight is estimated at 13,567,400 pounds, and the diameter of the trunk alone is 36.5 feet.

However, General Sherman is deficient in one key respect. Its root span is only 50 feet, extending downward only 39.4 inches into the ground. By contrast, a corn plant has roots that reach twice as far down. How does this small root system support such an enormous tree? The answer is provided by a minute fungus that infects the sequoia's roots and enables it to absorb more nutrients and water than if the tree had to rely on its roots alone. This symbiotic relationship, one that is mutually beneficial to both participating organisms, allows General Sherman to grow to otherwise unattainable heights.

In looking at how you can mend a broken covenant relationship with God or strengthen an already good one, let's focus on the analogy of the symbiotic con-

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**A fungus infects the sequoia's roots and enables it to absorb more nutrients and water than if the tree had to rely on its roots alone.**

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nection between General Sherman and the tiny fungus.

First, in any kind of relationship gone sour, one of the parties must take the first step and say, "I'm sorry—I need you." Once this has been done, the relationship can begin to grow again.

Second, you can communicate with God daily, not just when you need Him. You might ask, What constitutes a daily interaction like that of the tree and the fungus? Activities will vary from person to person, but probably will include the basics—prayer and Bible study.

Third, as give and take with God becomes part of your everyday lives, others will see the fruit of the Spirit in you (Gal. 5:22). Like the fungus that allows the General to grow into an enormous tree, God permits your spiritual life to flourish and provide beauty and shelter for others: "Verily I say unto you, Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40). If you spend every day in a symbiotic relationship with God and others, you will reap the greatest of human happinesses.

## REACT

1. What parallels do you see in the symbiotic relationships between the tree and the fungus, and between God and His children?
2. How does God benefit from a symbiotic relationship with us?

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*By Jennifer Gregory, a sophomore English and criminal-justice major at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.*

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# I Do . . . and So Does He

## OPINION

**Key Text: Jer. 31:33**

I had decided he was the perfect man for the job. He had all the qualifications I was looking for: humor, patience, intelligence, kindness. He was a handsome, healthy, mentally sound human being, and best of all, I loved him! Yes, I had chosen to marry him, and I knew my family would be delighted with my choice.

But my dilemma was this: though I had observed him from afar, he didn't even know my name yet. So I approached him one sunny day and told him of my career plans, life goals, and reasons for living. I shared with him how good I would be to him: hot meals, clean clothes, a spotless home, paid vacations. I even promised to nurse him from sickness to health—all in all, an irresistible package deal. And I was willing to guarantee it all in writing. I had chosen the date for the engagement party and carefully planned the ceremony. It was to be an evening wedding, and I had written endearing vows for each of us to read to the other. Would he accept my offer?

To my utter dismay, I discovered he wasn't interested. So I again explained that I had *chosen* him; he was to be mine, and he wouldn't have to say a thing. When

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**I shared with him how good I would be to him:  
hot meals, clean clothes, a spotless home,  
paid vacations.**

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it came time for him to take the marriage vow, I would answer for both of us: "I do. . . and so does he." He refused—no way, no time, no place, no how. Clearly, the arranged marriage was off.

When God chose the house of Israel and planned to write His law in their hearts, He yearned to enrich their lives and bind them to Himself through love forever. From His point of view, they were His people, and He was their God. But Israel refused to be part of His covenant. Good marriages develop only when both parties take the vows. One person making the decisions, implementing the plans, writing the contract can never create a loving relationship. Both must be willing to say, "I do."

God has chosen to make a covenant with you and to be your Lord. He has already said, "I do." Now it's your turn.

## REACT

1. Some cultures still encourage arranged marriages. How would you respond to a contract wedding?
2. What benefits are gained from relationships based on mutual respect, love, and consent?

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*By Beverly Wesner-Hoehn, assistant professor of music in the harp department at Indiana University, Bloomington, Indiana.*

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# BREATH OF THE SOUL



**“Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee” (Jer. 32:17).**



# Prayer for Schmucks

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: James 5:16

Prayer. A convenient practice. It comes in handy before Canadian history finals, while running red lights (in front of police), and prior to important public speeches. How many times, in tense situations, have you muttered a few half-sincere words to any deity who might be listening?

Prayer seems to have lost its significance. We were taught from childhood to pray before meals and at bedtime. If we forgot, we were sure we would have indigestion and terrible nightmares. When this didn't always happen, we assumed prayer didn't matter. It was just something we did so we could be good Christians.

Obviously, our concept of prayer had to change from that of meaningless ritual to meaningful communication. Prayer *is* talking to God, speaking with a Confidant. Naturally, praying is harder than just babbling to friends; you can see, hear, and touch them, but God is less tangible. The act of praying takes more trust, because you must believe you really are talking with God.

Prayer is more, however, than mere communication. After all, if God knows the number of hairs on our heads, He doesn't need to be informed of our shampoo

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## **If God knows the number of hairs on our heads, He doesn't need to be informed of our shampoo problems.**

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problems. Prayer needs to go beyond "Please, God, don't let me flake today." For prayer to be beneficial, it needs to go from the superficial to the significant.

We're not saying God isn't interested in the insignificant details of our lives. He is. Friendship often grows from trivialities, but to continue growing, there must be deeper connections. C. S. Lewis says, "It is in the process of being worshiped that God communicates His presence to men."\* Prayer gives us a chance to explore God's character and actions. Our conversations need to be vital so our friendship with Him can progress.

As we grow closer to God, we become more like Him and more caring toward others. Often we show our concern by praying. Again, insincere prayers, such as "Help him even if he is a schmuck" are of no real use. God is willing to help *anyone*. If we concentrate on others, if we are genuinely concerned for them, it will show in our attitudes. We won't have time for our bloated egos. So prayer opens us to God and to others. It also praises God, acknowledges His hand on us, and lets us enjoy His presence more fully.

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\* C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (London: Wyman & Sons, Ltd., 1958), p. 93.

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*By Darlene Stearns and Robbyn Chiles, English students at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# A Frightening Prayer Life

## LOGOS

Jer. 3:12-4:2; 14:1-9, 19-22; 17:5-8; 29:11-14; 32:16-25

### Prayerful Misunderstanding

While I was pastoring my first church, an academy student suffered a terrible car accident, leaving him paralyzed from the neck down. Everyone was sickened by the news. We agreed to have an anointing service. Seventy-five or 80 people must have been there. I've never heard more fervent petitions. After the pastor closed the service with a final prayer, he unstrapped the braces from the young man's legs, took his hand, and asked him to get up from his wheelchair and walk. With tears in his eyes the young man said, "I want to so badly, but I can't. I guess it didn't work."

This experience realigned my ideas about prayer. Whose unrighteousness prevented God from healing the boy?

### Feeling Uncomfortable About God (Jer. 3:12-25; 32:16-25)

In these passages, Jeremiah tells us a variety of things about God and prayer. These verses may make us feel uncomfortable because we don't necessarily think of God in Jeremiah's terms. Jeremiah 3:12, 13 suggests that God will be angry with us when we disobey; His anger will last until we acknowledge our guilt and stop disobeying. After we repent through prayer, God will bless us and give us peace that will last as long as we continue obeying (verse 18). The concept of God's being angry with His people, and punishing them when they are disobedient, disturbs me. This attitude was still around by Jesus' day. Whenever tragedy struck, the question was asked, "What did these people do to make God angry with them?" (see John 9:1-5).

Maintaining that God punishes us immediately when we sin and rewards us temporally when we act righteously can lead to an interesting and sometimes frightening prayer life.

When we expect our good behavior to coerce God into being kind to us or our bad behavior to drive God to cause something terrible to happen to us, we become like Israel after their captivity in Babylon. They kept the law to stay out of trouble, to keep God from becoming angry with them. They feared the Lord but didn't love Him. This attitude resulted in a dry legalism that prevailed in Jesus' day.

### Hope Amid Faithlessness (Jer. 14:7-9, 19-22)

I believe the Bible provides another model, giving us a more palatable picture of God and motivating us toward a healthier prayer life. Note that Jeremiah never seems to lose hope in God's mercy (verse 22b). Jesus told His listeners during the Sermon on the Mount that God "causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous" (Matt. 5:45, NIV). Ecclesiastes teaches us that we can't predict how we will be temporally blessed or cursed by God based on our righteousness or unrighteousness. Stories Jesus told, such as that of the prodigal son, paint a picture of a God who does not become angry when we stray, but waits patiently and lovingly—almost expectantly—for our return. The story of Abraham as found in Genesis is a wonderful example of human *faithlessness* countered by God's *faithfulness* (compare Rom. 4:19, 20 with Gen. 17:15-17).

### **The Real Deal (Jer. 29:11-14)**

If we understand that we cannot bargain with God through our behavior and grasp that He is always faithful to us, even in the midst of our faithlessness, how will our prayer life be affected? God plans a good life for all of us. He wants us to seek Him and waits for us to do so.

This picture of God frees us from fear and manipulation, helping us to pray and worship in spirit and in truth. We will no longer try to coerce or orchestrate God's actions toward us by our behavior. We can talk with Him as a friend and lover, and not as a volatile being who loves us only when we're good and who is angry and banishes us when we are bad.

We will begin to feel more comfortable confessing our sins and receiving forgiveness. When we know God is going to stick by us, even when we fall in a big way, we will approach Him because He loves us (Rom. 2:4b), not because He is angry with us.

When we petition God with our wants, needs, and concerns, we can do so realizing that God cannot be compelled into answering us one way or another because of our perfection or imperfection. We will know that He will do His will,

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### **God is not Santa Claus. Nor is He a Scrooge.**

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regardless of our performance. This takes the weight of our petitions off our shoulders and places them where they belong—on His.

This understanding of God also prompts us to be honest when we pray. Honesty is more easily expressed in an atmosphere of love and acceptance than in a milieu of anger and indignation.

There are no magic spells, no incantations, no hoops we can jump through that can somehow move God to do what we ask Him to do. God is not Santa Claus. Nor is He a Scrooge. He sent Jesus to earth to show us how secure we are as God's people. "And you also were included in Christ when you heard the word of truth, the gospel of your salvation. Having believed, you were marked in him with a seal, the promised Holy Spirit, who is a deposit guaranteeing our inheritance until the redemption of those who are God's possession—to the praise of his glory" (Eph. 1:13, 14).

### **REACT**

1. How can your picture of God affect your relationship with Him?
2. Explain the use of the word *anger* as it is used to describe God in Scripture.

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*By Mark Witas, campus chaplain of Canadian Union College and Parkview Adventist Academy, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# Opening the Heart

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 7:7**

Communication is vital to many aspects of life. We learn at a very young age to communicate through imitation. We then find that by asking we can have our needs fulfilled. These needs encompass physical, emotional, and spiritual aspects of our lives.

Prayer is a similar process: as children, we imitate the prayers of our parents; we later begin to communicate with God in our own original way. We learn to ask. "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you" (Matt. 7:7, NIV).

Jeremiah knew how to depend on God as a friend. "Naturally of a timid and shrinking disposition, Jeremiah longed for the peace and quiet of a life of retirement."<sup>1</sup> Instead, he persevered, drawing on his heavenly Father for strength.

"'The Lord is with me as a mighty terrible One,' he declared in faith; 'therefore my persecutors shall stumble, and they shall not prevail: they shall be greatly

## When we learn to depend on God as Jeremiah did, we can do anything without fear.

ashamed; for they shall not prosper: their everlasting confusion shall never be forgotten.' 'Sing unto the Lord, praise ye the Lord: for he hath delivered the soul of the poor from the hand of evildoers.'"<sup>2</sup>

When we learn to depend on God as Jeremiah did, we can do anything without fear. He had complete faith in God. He says, "Ah Lord God! behold, thou hast made the heaven and the earth by thy great power and stretched out arm, and there is nothing too hard for thee" (Jer. 32:17, KJV). Because of Jeremiah's trust in God, he was able to depend on Him for strength during his mission.

We also need to depend on Him, but can we have meaningful communication with God if we don't know Him as a friend? "Prayer is the opening of the heart to God as to a friend. Not that it is necessary, in order to make known to God what we are, but in order to enable us to receive Him. Prayer does not bring God down to us, but brings us up to Him."<sup>3</sup>

If we want to be friends with God, it is necessary for us to communicate with Him. The onus is on us because God knows us completely. "O Lord you have searched me and you know me" (Ps. 139:1, NIV). Prayer is just part of our search to know God. "Prayer is the breath of the soul."<sup>4</sup>

1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 419, 420.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 420.

3. *Steps to Christ*, Youth Edition, p. 93.

4. *Messages to Young People*, p. 249.

*By Carolynne Milmine, a sophomore at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

## “I Make the Sun Rise”

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: James 5:15**

Do not forget, Lord,  
it is I who make the sun rise.  
I am your servant,  
but, with the dignity of my calling,  
I need some glitter and ostentation.  
Noblesse oblige. . . .  
I am your servant,  
Only . . . do not forget, Lord,  
I make the sun rise.\*

This rooster’s prayer sounds a bit familiar, doesn’t it? Many of us tell God how great and almighty He is, while, in the same breath, we say, “But You couldn’t have done it without me.”

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### Prayer is one way we can reach the dearest Friend anyone could have.

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We need to remember two things when we pray—honesty and trust. We should be honest in prayer, telling God what is really on our minds and not just what we think He wants to hear. Job was a man who told God honestly what he thought about the losses he suffered, even though it wasn’t always praise. This honesty encourages communication.

Some people wonder what trust has to do with prayer. We have to believe and have confidence that God wants the very best for us. He will not keep us from a close relationship with Him. Unless we are convinced that God is on our side, we won’t reach out to Him for help.

Prayer is one way we can reach the dearest Friend anyone could have. Through it, we can develop and become more like God.

### REACT

1. Explain the connection between trust and prayer.
2. In what specific ways am I like the rooster in the poem above?
3. Why is it often tempting to tell God in prayer what we think He wants to hear?
4. What *does* God want to hear in prayer?

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\* Carmen Bernos de Gaszold, *Prayers From the Ark* (London: MacMillan & Co. Ltd., 1963), p. 15.

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By Darlene Stearns, an education student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.

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# Distress Flares

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 7:7**

Some people seem to look upon prayer as a kind of distress flare—forgotten for years at a time until suddenly they are in trouble. Likewise, many of us forget prayer during the time when things seem to be going well. Then, in an emergency, we want God to be on hand, immediately prepared to answer our cries of distress.

There was once a godless seaman who was fishing with godless companions when a storm threatened to sink their boat. His companions begged him to offer a prayer, but he refused, saying it was years since he had prayed.

Upon the insistence of his friends, the seaman finally offered up this prayer: “Oh, Lord, I haven’t asked You for anything in a long time. God, if You deliver us from this storm and bring us safe to land again, I promise that I won’t bother You again for a long time.”

Prayer needs to be a continuous channel of communication with God. Just as distress flares need to be maintained regularly, communication channels with God need to be kept clear.

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## Prayer doesn’t change God; it does change us.

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In looking at the verses of Jeremiah we are studying this week, we see that to keep our communication open with God, we need to do several things:

**1. Be sorry for turning away from God and be ready for change (Jer. 3:12-15; 14:7-9).** Jeremiah called for the people of Israel to repent of their ways and to return to God. Upon returning to God, they needed to be ready to follow His leading.

**2. Seek God with our whole being (Jer. 29:12-14).** Even when the Israelites did not listen to Jeremiah, he didn’t stop trying to convince them they needed to return to God. Jeremiah himself was constantly communicating with God.

**3. Be forgiving of others and pray for them (Jer. 32:16-25).** God wanted to forgive the Israelites for straying from Him. Jeremiah, on behalf of the Israelites, petitioned God regularly.

**4. Trust in God’s leading.** When we find we are in captivity and nothing is going right—as the Israelites did in Jeremiah’s time—God is still in control.

Prayer doesn’t change God; it does change us and conditions us to unite more effectively with Him. It doesn’t persuade Him to do, at our request, what He would otherwise be reluctant to do or what His infinite wisdom sees is not best. It does place us in a frame of mind in which God can work in us and for us. It brings us into partnership with Him, so He can work out His infinite purpose in and through us.

## REACT

How are my personal communication channels with God? Do they need repair or maintenance?

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*By Craig G. Newitt, assistant academy dean and a senior theology student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

## “Now I Lay Me . . .”

### OPINION

**Key Text: Luke 11:9**

“Now I lay me down to sleep . . .” Ho hum, mumble, mumble, snore. Why do we pray? How can we believe our words change what God does? Consider the following situation.

Brian is traveling to work this morning across town. His neighbor, Cyndi, is also driving about the same distance. The roads are treacherous after last night’s ice storm. Brian, a good Christian, prays for traveling mercies as he drives. Cyndi, with little exposure to religion, does not talk to the Almighty.

Will God protect Brian more than Cyndi? Is Cyndi’s ignorance a reason for less protection? We realize it doesn’t make sense for a God of love to protect any of His creatures less than any other. So we come to the conclusion that prayer *doesn’t* make a difference.

But what about that text we learned as children: “Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you” (Luke 11:9, NIV).

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### **It doesn’t make sense for a God of love to protect any of His creatures less than any other.**

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And what about all those prayers that *have* been answered? We found the lost car keys; we miraculously avoided a head-on collision with a semi; we wrote an A+ essay despite a multitude of distractions.

God does answer prayer all the time. Although we may fail to notice, God still is giving us things we ask for, even when we forget to verbalize; the Supreme Being is helping us find what we are looking for, although we fail to search in all the corners. God does the most for everyone that is possible.

But do our supplications change God? No. They change us. With each prayer, we are allowing ourselves to become different for God. And as we change, our prayers are answered and our eternal life is given traveling mercies.

Does prayer work? Definitely yes! What God desires is our relationship, and prayer works by fostering a connection between heaven and earth.

What would the Bible be without the prayers of Jeremiah, without the Psalms? The Word would still exist, and we could gain much, but a crucial part of that relationship between God and us, would not be expressed. I know I want to have the fullest relationship with God that I can. That includes prayer.

### **REACT**

1. What happens when two sincere Christians pray for things that are opposite of each other?
2. What is the full meaning of the expression “God answers prayer”?

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*By David Chapman, a senior English major at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta, Canada.*

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# EXTRAORDINARY PICTURES



**“Hear ye, and give ear; be not proud: for the Lord hath spoken” (Jer. 13:15).**



# Pulling in Opposite Directions

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Jer. 8:4-12

### Scene 1

"You need to turn at the next light," he said quietly.

"It's not this one. It's the next." I know this town.

"Trust me. It's this one."

"Listen," I said, "I know all the roads and lights. I know that we can't turn at the next light. There's no left turn there—see?"

"But that's the street we need," he insisted.

"No, it's not. We're still one block away. I wish you'd listen to me sometimes."

"I do listen. You could listen to me, too, you know. We need to turn here."

"No, we don't. Hey, I'm driving, OK? At least don't distract me. Thank you, but I know the way, so just let me drive, OK?"

## **"Hey, I'm driving, OK? At least don't distract me."**

### Scene 2

Two teams, divided equally, each pulling on opposite ends of the same rope, trying to pull the other team over an imaginary line.

### Scene 3

Child to mother: "But I want to do it myself." Mother groans.

Mother to child (different occasion): "You need to learn to do things by yourself now." Child cries.

None of the preceding scenes seems remarkable. Perhaps the setting changes—a classroom, a boardroom, an office—in a clash with someone. But what sometimes seems most unremarkable in our lives often prevents us from reaching for and understanding that which is astounding. Our assured knowledge, our drive to pull others to our side, our fierce independence cultivated early, seem to us only what is normal and expected. No wonder we look at Jeremiah's words with incredulity.

Because they did not listen to God, the messenger said, Israel will suffer disaster. Because they will not submit, they will be punished. We spend our lives trying not to submit, striving for independence and self-assurance. "Rugged individualism" is one phrase. Yet when we apply the same get-ahead principles to our spiritual life, we find a Jeremiah: bear the yoke, submit, let God direct.

The commonplace scenes above show the norm. Struggle for power, for dominance, for control. These are the pictures we are raised with and build our lives around. But enter Jeremiah. Ah, Jeremiah. Now, as then, he dismisses our norms with a strident message. Just what does his picture of the fulfilled life look like anyway?

*By Morna Golke-Bahnsen, English teacher at Auburn Adventist Academy, Auburn, Washington.*

# Authority Then and Now

## LOGOS

**Jer. 8:4-12; 13:1-11; 19:1-15; 27:1-15; 35:1-19**

People during the time of Jeremiah had trouble with conflicting messages from different authorities. There were as many prophets as opinions. Each king had his own ideas about what he ought to do. The priests and other men of influence were wielding power for their own ends. It all sounds a little like our situation today. We, too, hear dissenting positions from those in authority. We, too, feel the oppression of leaders who are more concerned with the politics of the office, of the church, or of the country rather than with getting on with the mission—with the expedient rather than with obeying the leadership of God. What can we learn from the messages in this book to help us cope with the profusion of authorities existent today?

God had Jeremiah use some powerful illustrations to convey his message effectively. The illustrations include: a family, the Rechabites; a yoke on Jeremiah's neck; a shattered earthen vessel; a linen girdle left to rot; and poetry rich in similes—all trying to get through to the people and convince them to obey. They preferred rituals to heart religion. Though they thought their sacrifices and observances could save them, God said, "I am bringing on this city and on all its blood-spattered altars every disaster with which I have threatened it, for its people have remained obstinate and refused to listen to me" (19:15, NEB).

"The inhabitants of Judah were prone to believe that a strict observance of the divinely appointed services of the temple would preserve them from a just punishment for their wicked course."\* And, like many of the rest of the Bible's authors, Jeremiah decried the unjust treatment of the poor: "Mend your ways and your doings, deal fairly with one another, do not oppress the alien, the orphan, and the widow" (7:5, 6).

Judah, its rulers, and its people for the most part refused to listen to Jeremiah's message from God. They were misled by false prophets. Then Jeremiah illustrated Judah's best course of action by wearing a yoke and counseling rebellion (chapter 27). They were guided in the wrong direction by their rulers, who cut up and burned God's instructions rather than follow them. Judah's reaction contrasted with the Rechabite family's obedience to the commands of their ancestor. While this family's regard for the authority of their father extended to all aspects of their lives, keeping them from building houses or possessing land and from drinking wine, the people of Judah continually refused to obey the covenant between God and themselves.

God's response to the compliance of the Rechabites shows how He wanted to treat the rest of Israel. He promised that their family line should always stand. Just so, He also wished the best for Judah. His intentions were "that they should become my people to win a name for me, and praise and glory" (13:11). Because of the nation's continued disregard of God's commands, He gave them up to the surrounding powers. "Because they did not listen when I spoke to them, nor answer when I called them, I will bring upon Judah and upon all the inhabitants of Jerusalem the disaster with which I threatened them" (35:17). He brought terrible punishment on them, so terrible that it could never be undone, just as the earthen

vessel in chapter 19 could never be reassembled. They were exiled to Babylon, their city and nation were destroyed, and many of them were killed. Most of this could have been avoided had they listened and obeyed. "If you will submit to the yoke of the king of Babylon and serve him and his people, then you shall save your lives" (27:12).

What is in store for us should we fail to listen to God's message? What will God's response be to our present obedience or lack thereof to His demands? As in Jeremiah's time the message is clear. Anyone familiar with the descriptions in

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## **During the time of Jeremiah, there were as many prophets as opinions.**

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Revelation will remember the depiction of the final plagues and other events. Certainly they are enough to arouse a desire to avoid them.

### **REACT**

1. How are God's expectations the same today as in Jeremiah's time? How are they different?
2. To what extent does God expect us to listen to authorities today?
3. How are the authorities today similar to or different from those of Jeremiah's day?
4. What is the proper relationship between spiritual and secular authorities?

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\* *Prophets and Kings*, p. 416.

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*By Brent Buhler, a teacher of English as a second language at Seoul Seventh-day Adventist Language Institute, Seoul, Korea.*

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# First the Blade . . .

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Mark 4:28**

“The material world is under God’s control. The laws of nature are obeyed by nature. Everything speaks and acts the will of the Creator. Cloud and sunshine, dew and rain, wind and storm, all are under the supervision of God, and yield implicit obedience to His command. It is in obedience to the law of God that the spire of grain bursts through the ground, ‘first the blade, then the ear, after that the full corn in the ear.’ Mark 4:28. These the Lord develops in their proper season because they do not resist His working. And can it be that man, made in the image of God, endowed with reason and speech, shall alone be unappreciative of His gifts and disobedient to His will?”<sup>1</sup>

“The same power that upholds nature, is working also in man. The same great laws that guide alike the star and the atom, control human life. The laws that govern

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### **“The same great laws that guide alike the star and the atom, control human life.”**

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the heart’s action, regulating the flow of the current of life to the body, are the laws of the mighty Intelligence that has the jurisdiction of the soul. From Him all life proceeds. . . . To transgress His law, physical, mental, or moral, is to place one’s self out of harmony with the universe, to introduce discord, anarchy, ruin.”<sup>2</sup>

“When man is reconciled to God, the things of nature speak to him in words of heavenly wisdom, bearing testimony to the eternal truth of God’s word. As Christ tells us the meaning of the things in nature, the science of true religion flashes forth, explaining the relation of the law of God to the natural and the spiritual world.”<sup>3</sup>

“God loves His creatures with a love that is both tender and strong. He has established the laws of nature, but His laws are not arbitrary exactions. Every ‘Thou shalt not,’ whether in physical or moral law, contains or implies a promise. If it is obeyed, blessings will attend our steps; if it is disobeyed, the result is danger and unhappiness. The laws of God are designed to bring His people closer to Himself.”<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

1. What has nature told me personally about God?
2. Explain in your own words what it means to be “out of harmony with the universe.”

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1. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 81, 82.

2. *Education*, pp. 99, 100.

3. *Counsels to Parents, Teachers, and Students*, p. 189.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 445.

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By Bethany Willison, a senior at Auburn Adventist Academy, Auburn, Washington.

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# His Rest for My Sorrow

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Jer. 9:23, 24**

*Authority, law, and submission* are negative words. They are “the logical expression of a human existence which lives no longer in the love of God but only in the law.”<sup>1</sup> In Eden, man separated himself from the love of God and thereby irretrievably lost the unity of being and destiny that he had enjoyed. “The fundamental feeling of the existence separated from God is: profound sorrow and unrest.”<sup>2</sup> To speak of “should do” in this setting is to place on oneself a sense of obligation to a course of action that in myself I know is unachievable.

Until I know this sorrow and until the separation has been healed within me, my best submission, my most careful obedience, is mocked by the emptiness of my heart. Until Someone bridges that untraversable gulf between me and God—for me—my mind remains agitated by the despair of tasks not done.

The “earth-work” that Jesus accomplishes in me teaches me the sorrow and bridges the separation. With the rift healed, I know within myself—not again, for I never knew it before, though I longed always to know it—but I know what He

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## The “earth-work” that Jesus accomplishes in me teaches me the sorrow and bridges the separation.

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always destined me to know and be: His, and truly, myself.

“I am a self, I as this particular person, cannot be exchanged for any other, simply and solely

because God, the Self-personal, knows me, this person as this person,  
 because He ‘called me by my name’ when He created me,  
 because He loves me, not as an example of a species, but as this particular human being, from all eternity, and destines me, not humanity as a whole, for an eternal goal, namely, for a personal end, for communion with Himself, the Creator,  
 because He values me unconditionally and will never exchange me for any other,  
 because He never confuses me with any other, nor depreciates me at the cost of someone else,  
 because He gives me this supremely personal life in His supremely personal Word of election.”<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

1. Explain what today’s author means by to “know this sorrow.”
2. Explain what is meant by the idea that “I know what . . . [God] always destined me to know and be.”

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1. Emil Brunner, *Man in Revolt* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press), p. 230.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 234.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 283.

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By R. Ivan Zbaraschuk, a practicing neurologist in Tacoma, Washington.

# Hear Without Fear

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Jer. 13:15**

Anyone who works as a substitute teacher understands one thing: The students will try to get the class off track for the temporary teacher. I knew this, so when one student in Bible class raised his hand to ask a question, I would not waste time. I was ready. Only I wasn't.

"Why does the Bible say, 'Fear God'? I thought God was loving. Why should we have to fear Him?"

How does one reconcile the idea of loving God with messages of high-handed authority? Does God have to remind us not to be proud? Does He have to remind us we are fallible humans? Life is difficult enough by itself without wondering whether God is upset. However, humans sometimes think in terms of a harsh, demanding God. Consider these well-known phrases: "That child needs the fear of

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## How does one reconcile the idea of loving God with messages of high-handed authority?

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God," or "That will put the fear of the Lord in him." This way of thinking suggests people need to fear God to have a proper relationship with Him.

One should remember two things:

First, those who seek God have nothing to fear from His anger. God has no wish to crush the will of His people. In John 8:1-11, Jesus deals with a woman caught committing adultery. Jesus is kind and gentle with her, although He does not ignore her sin. He tells her to leave her life of sin (verse 11). This story provides comfort for those who, for whatever reason, fear God and His wrath. God is not in the business of scaring His children.

Second, some people do not respect truth, honor, or love. They feel no need to listen to the Holy Spirit. God speaks with authority in an attempt to reach those who refuse to listen. In Matthew 23:33 Jesus refers to the Pharisees as poisonous snakes. Jesus was unable to minister to the Pharisees because they refused to listen honestly.

When God says, "Hear and pay attention, do not be arrogant, for the Lord has spoken" (Jer. 13:15, NIV), we will listen. We are not afraid because there is no need for fear.

## REACT

1. Does my picture of God reflect harshness and anger?
2. You encounter someone who perceives God as harsh and angry. What would you say to him to change his perception?

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*By Lester Pflugrad, Jr., campus-ministries director at Auburn Adventist Academy, Auburn, Washington.*

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# Pride as Suicide

## OPINION

**Key Text:** Jer. 13:9, 17

Growing up a missionary kid in the Far East, I was surrounded by people who didn't have God in their lives. I wondered what it would be like to exist as they did—until I realized I had been doing just that. Looking back, I can't see where I had made that choice. During those times of great "freedom" in my life, I found out what it is like to be without God. Perhaps you have experienced something similar in your life. Stress builds up, and you don't have time to spend with God or, perhaps, your love is merely redirected toward a more tangible, "special" person instead of God.

Israel got to the point that spirituality, as opposed to religiosity, died. Spirituality is the relationship; religiosity is the act. The act of worship is not a relationship with God. The Israelites often forgot this. Yet their lives were full of religion. They worshiped Baal, or themselves, as many of us do. Pride, in my opinion, is worship of self. If we worship ourselves, we do not need a god, because we are our own god. When we are a god, we are perfect and therefore do not need a Saviour. In Jeremiah 13 God talks of destroying Judah's pride: "In the same way I will ruin the pride of

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## We often let God's gifts come in the way of our love for Him.

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Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem" (verse 9, NIV). Jerusalem had a great deal to be proud of: it was the religious center of the Hebrew world, it had great temples and palaces, and great men came out of its streets and homes. Yet the people of Jerusalem let pride overshadow their need for a true relationship with God.

We often let God's gifts come in the way of our love for Him. If we write well, we credit ourselves and claim all the praise. If we sing, we credit our genes or our upbringing. God granted Jerusalem great gifts, but the people of Judah forgot who gave the gifts to them, and they became proud.

I believe that conscientious Christians struggle to maintain their umbilical cord attached to God, our source of life. Israel and Judah had severed their connection to God by refusing to listen to His emissaries. Israel believed they were spiritually self-sufficient and thought they didn't need God. In scorning God's love and guidance, they cut the power cable to their life-support system.

We often forget who provides us with everything we are. Instead of priding ourselves in our gifts, we need to begin cultivating a relationship with the great Giver Himself, Jehovah.

## REACT

1. What, if anything, is wrong with a little pride?
2. How do I use my gifts from God?

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*By Andrew R. Becraft, a senior at Auburn Adventist Academy, Auburn, Washington.*

# ONE MORE TIME!



**“Behold, as the clay is in the potter’s hand, so are ye in mine hand, O house of Israel” (Jer. 18:6).**



# Learn From Others' Mistakes

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Jer. 29:11**

Try this: Put fingers of both hands together, but curl the tips of the middle fingers toward the palm so that their second joints are touching. Try to pull ring fingers apart. No luck?

OK, try this: See whether you can write a different word with each hand at the same time. Still no luck?

Well, then, I guess it's safe to say that you have experienced failure—which is one of the key issues in this week's lesson.

Failure is a byproduct of success. You can't have one without the other. And yet we shouldn't let the possibility of failure discourage us from trying to succeed—especially when it comes to our spiritual growth and relationship with God.

Take Jeremiah, for example. He experienced failure and learned some important

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## **For some reason, in our humanity, we seem to learn the most from our failures.**

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lessons because of it. The children of Israel experienced failure repeatedly, which has provided us with many examples of what *not* to do.

I appreciate God's sharing these examples, because it allows me to live by my motto: "Learn from others' mistakes." Incidentally, it has been this motto that has kept me from destroying my life with such things as drugs and heavy debt.

I believe God also desires us to learn from others' mistakes. As the key text points out, God's plans are for us to succeed. But for some reason, in our humanity, we seem to learn the most from our failures.

Therefore, this week's lesson will share some ideas on why failure is necessary and how failure can enhance our spiritual growth.

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*By Janice Lang-Banks, who works for the General Conference as risk manager for the Southwestern Union, Mansfield, Texas.*

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## God's Plan(s) for You

### LOGOS

**Jer. 18:1-12; 24:1-10**

#### God Works With What He Has (Jer. 18:1-6)

*"For it is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13, NIV).*

How much like our Lord to use a visual aid to get a point across. Jeremiah was sent to the local pottery shop for an object lesson. Perhaps the potter was creating a drinking cup, but the clay refused to be molded correctly. Instead of discarding the clay, the potter re-created it into, perhaps, a washbasin.

Jeremiah understood that this represented God's plan for Israel. Although His people had not remained true to their high calling, God had a plan to reshape them through exile and to make something useful and wonderful as a result.

God's original plan was not to place His chosen people in captivity any more than the potter meant to form a washbasin instead of a drinking cup. Oftentimes we fail to follow God's leading, and thus we place ourselves in circumstances we were never meant to be in. Yet God is capable of accomplishing His purpose for us if we will let Him, in spite of the wrong choices we often make. It may not be His "Plan A," but He will work in us, no matter how trying a situation we place ourselves in.

*How does God react when we make a wrong choice? Am I following God's plan for my life or sending it back for reshaping?*

#### God's Plans Are Sometimes Flexible (Jer. 18:7-10)

When we picture God in the Old Testament, we often think of a stern, swift-to-punish God. To be sure, some stories in the Bible may trouble us, but the prophets were nonetheless able to recognize a God of love in a world of trouble. Look again, and you will see a God who could have given up on people but didn't. It was try, try, try again to reach people. Sometimes a new approach was necessary, but He didn't give up!

You remember the story of Jonah, the man who ran from God, but do you remember *why* he ran? It wasn't that he was afraid of a God who was too unyielding; he was fearful of a God who was too compassionate. After the Lord decided to spare Nineveh, Jonah complained, "I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (Jon. 4:2, 3). When was the last time you heard *that* complaint?

God was willing to show compassion to His people if they would turn to Him and repent. But the people of Judah were too stubborn, and God found it necessary to alter His original plan. It would take strong medicine to heal His people.

*How can God change His mind? Have I ever been disappointed to see wicked people go unpunished? Have I ever thought God was too merciful? Have there been times in my life when God could have thrown in the towel but didn't?*

#### The Consequences of Choosing Against God (Jer. 18:11, 12; 24:8-10)

When we recognize the degree to which God is willing to mold us into His

likeness, we may understand a little better how He must feel when a person refuses to let Him have any part in his or her life. God warned Jeremiah that the people of Judah would not be very receptive to his preaching. "They will reply, 'It's no use. We will continue with our own plans; each of us will follow the stubbornness of his evil heart'" (18:12).

God compared some of the people to rotten figs—inedible and destined to be thrown away. It is a sad commentary on the history of God's chosen people that so many refused to repent of their sins that God could not restore them any more than a rotten fig could be made edible again.

It was not an easy thing for God to give up those who rejected Him. "How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" (Hos. 11:8). It is equally

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## **Jonah was fearful of a God who was too compassionate.**

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difficult for God to give up on us today. We can be sure He will use every means possible to reach us, even trials and tribulation.

*Has God had to resort to trials to get through to me? Is it possible for a person to become so bad that he or she cannot be salvaged?*

### **God Sees Potential in Us (Jer. 24:1-7)**

The Israelites as a people tended to follow the spiritual example set by their king. Wicked kings fostered widespread iniquity in the nation, while even good kings often fell short of total reform. By the time of Jeremiah, the moral fiber of the nation was at an all-time low.

Despite their apparent lack of desire or ability to follow Him, God nevertheless saw potential beneath their weight of sin. Like a parent of a wayward child, God speaks of His people in surprisingly compassionate terms. "Like these good figs, I regard as good the exiles from Judah" (verse 5). God was not looking at what His people *were*, but rather at what they could *become*. In a similar way God looks at each of us and sees the fulfillment of His plan for our ultimate happiness, even if we have strayed off course. "They will be my people, and I will be their God, for they will return to me with all their heart" (verse 7).

*How should we relate to people whose actions we disapprove of? How should we respond to a God who sees in us such good?*

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*By Jon Dickerson, a math and science teacher at Burton Adventist Academy, Arlington, Texas.*

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# God's Molding in Our Lives

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 Pet. 4:12, 13**

*"Beloved, think it not strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened unto you: But rejoice, inasmuch as ye are partakers of Christ's sufferings; that, when his glory shall be revealed, ye may be glad also with exceeding joy" (1 Pet. 4:12, 13).*

Committed Christians, submitted to God's will, often find themselves confronted by difficulties as never before. We pray for a Christlike character, yet seem to be placed in situations that draw out our sinful natures. We question, like Israel, "If God is truly leading us, why do all these things come upon us?"

"It is because God is leading them that these things come upon them. Trials and obstacles are the Lord's chosen methods of discipline and His appointed conditions of success. He who reads the hearts of men knows their characters better than they themselves know them. He sees that some have powers and susceptibilities which, rightly directed, might be used in the advancement of His work. In His providence He brings these persons into different positions and varied circumstances that they may discover in their own character the defects which have been concealed from their own knowledge. He gives them opportunity to correct these defects, and to fit themselves for His service. Often He permits the fires of affliction to assail them that they may be purified."<sup>1</sup>

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## **"Trials and obstacles are the Lord's chosen methods of discipline."**

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Because the Lord sees in us something worthwhile that He wants to develop, He spends the time refining us. Peter thought he was ready to be a disciple of Christ, but he did not realize his own danger. Self-confidence misled him. It was only after the denial of his Saviour that Peter realized the need for a new heart—a changed life only through consistently focusing on Christ. "As the clay is in the hands of the potter, so are we to be in His hands. We are not to try to do the work of the potter. Our part is to yield ourselves to be molded by the Master-worker."<sup>2</sup>

## **REACT**

1. What difficulties in my life is God using to shape my character to glorify Him, and how am I responding to them?
2. Am I able to ask God to reveal the refinements that I need in my life?
3. What is the role of suffering in a Christian's life?

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1. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 471.

2. *Ibid*, p. 472.

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*By Judy R. Wilson, director of clinical hyperbaric research at the Texas College of Osteopathic Medicine, Fort Worth, Texas.*

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# Victory Through Adversity

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Ezek. 11:14-21**

Can a sovereign God take our failures and turn them into victory? God, through Jeremiah, declares that just as the potter reworked flawed clay into a proper vessel, so God would continue to mold Judah until the nation conformed to His will.

Perhaps the most famous of Jeremiah's teachings, chapter 18, dates to about 605 B.C., prior to the captivity of Jehoiachin. Jeremiah was sent to the potter's house, which was most likely located south of Jerusalem on the slopes of the Valley of Inon, where clay and water were plentiful. The potter's wheel was a familiar sight and consisted of an upper and lower disc made of stone or wood attached by an axle. The potter's feet turned the lower disc while the clay was worked on the upper disc.

God used the potter to illustrate His sovereignty and grace in dealing with humanity. His sovereignty, however, should not be confused with arbitrariness. This parable teaches that God's sovereign plan can be thwarted by man if he refuses to repent and obey. But His patience is illustrated by the potter's willingness to accept the clay as it is and begin again.

In 597 B.C. Nebuchadnezzar took a group of hostages, including Jehoiachin and

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## **God's sovereign plan can be thwarted by man if he refuses to repent and obey.**

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Ezekiel, to Babylon. Those taken were primarily skilled artisans and construction workers, who were needed to build Nebuchadnezzar's magnificent city.

The Jews left in Judah began to look down on those taken into captivity. They felt God's blessing was obviously on those left in the land of promise, while the hostages were of inferior faith. Ezekiel claimed that just the opposite was the case (11:14-21). He said the exiles were superior in faith to those left behind with the blessings of the temple. Jeremiah echoed that conclusion in the vision of the baskets of figs in chapter 24. Those left behind were to be scattered, while the exiles were to return with a faith purified by trial. What appeared in 597 B.C. to be a failure, God would turn into victory. Through the discipline of the exile, God was able to prepare a people who would obediently fulfill His purposes.

## **REACT**

1. How can a person come to welcome trials as the touch of the Potter's hand in his or her life?
2. Explain why you agree or disagree that God's sovereign plan can be thwarted by man if he refuses to repent and obey.
3. What biblical evidence would you cite to someone who feels his own sinfulness has brought trials to his life?

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*By Michael Tucker, senior chaplain at Huguley Memorial Medical Center, Fort Worth, Texas.*

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# Talking Yourself Out of Failure

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Deut. 31:6, 8**

Why don't we compare ourselves to someone we consider a failure? If all the models in advertising were overweight and "average," we would all feel better about ourselves.

The writings of Ellen G. White suggest that Christ allows failure as a means of instruction. "God trains [some people] by bringing to them disappointment and apparent failure."\* It is a fact of life we must deal with, and here are a few suggestions:

**1. When we avoid failure, we are avoiding humanity.** Robert McAfee Brown calls failures "therapeutic errors," one of the ways we learn to live life more

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**If all the models in advertising were overweight and "average," we would all feel better about ourselves.**

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fully. A scientist designs experiments that often fail. Yet in failing they may reveal more than would success. The fear of failure keeps humanity achieving more.

**2. Acknowledge our failure.** We must reflect on the failure without being paralyzed by it. Sharing our failure with a friend and seeking an objective view will help us determine whether our failure is real or perceived.

**3. Deal with it.** We should never dwell on the failure. We have identified our failure; now we should take steps not to fail again. Someone has said, "We don't plan to fail; we fail to plan." We can plan through prayer, thinking things through by talking it out with a friend.

**4. Never lose our vision.** Vision is the reason a scientist begins an experiment; he wants to prove something. A cure for cancer, better food, whatever the motivation is, keep it. To some, even Christ seemed to fail. Not everyone with whom He came in contact repented or will be in heaven. Yet Christ knew that He would conquer death and prove sin is a road to unhappiness. He had the vision to see beyond death! Praise God. Only Christ can truly restore us from failure; search for restoration there.

## REACT

Why do we allow society to dictate who is successful and who is not?

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\* SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 4, p. 1160.

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By Robert Vargas, a graduate in corporate communications at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

# The Behavior List

## OPINION

### Key Text: Matt. 5:48

Baseball is an odd game. The most successful offensive players spend most of their time failing. A batting average of .300 is regarded as a noteworthy feat. Any player skillful enough to bat a .300 average would probably be rewarded with millions of dollars. Yet a .300 batting average means that the batter is failing 70 percent of the time. Would you go to a doctor who failed to cure 70 percent of his patients or a lawyer who lost 70 percent of her cases? Success and failure can be difficult to define.

What do you think would be an acceptable spiritual batting average to God? Would He accept an average of .300, .500, or even higher? Jesus removed all doubt about what is expected: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48, NIV). God expects us to be successful all of the time.

The question remains, however, In what way does God want us to be successful Christians? If it is in the area of behavioral obedience, we as Adventists are poten-

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## God expects us to be successful all of the time.

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tial all-stars. For I know of no other more gluten-filled, modestly dressed, non-dancing, Sabbath-keeping, tithe-paying Christians (although the Amish do provide stiff competition). We as a denomination have elevated good behavior to an art form.

Unfortunately, "successful" behavior doesn't appear to be what God really wants. If observable behavioral perfection were the ultimate goal, Jesus and the Pharisees would have been better friends.

If not merely behavior, then what defines spiritual success? The answer lies in this week's key text, Jeremiah 18:6. God doesn't ask for behavioral perfection, but perfection in our willingness to submit to His will. As the potter molds the clay, God wants His people to be willing to be molded by Him for His divine purpose. God wants a people who will continually choose to place their lives into His hands. Submission is the key issue in the plan of salvation. Our willingness to submit to God will be the issue by which we will be judged.

Perhaps our goal as Adventist Christians should be to become known for our willingness to submit to God, rather than our unwillingness to eat pork.

## REACT

1. What is the difference between behavioral success and spiritual success?
2. How can one evaluate "Christian success"?
3. In your own words, define *success*.

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By David P. Banks, a psychiatric social worker for All Saints Hospital in Fort Worth, Texas.

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# NO CHECKLIST SABBATH KEEPING



**“Remember the sabbath day, to keep it holy. Six days shalt thou labour, and do all thy work: but the seventh day is the sabbath of the Lord thy God” (Exod. 20:8-10).**



# Deficit-Model Sabbath Keeping

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 58:13, 14

All my life I'd kept the Sabbath right, and by now I could do it with little effort. I practiced deficit-model Sabbath keeping, focusing on what I couldn't do rather than what I could do. Tacked inside my head was the same little checklist I'd carried around since childhood:

1. No secular songs. If one pops into your head, quickly replace it with a hymn.
2. No secular literature. (I later amended this to allow flipping through magazines as long as I only looked at the pictures.)
3. No talk about nonreligious stuff like current events or television shows (though I soon discovered I could consecrate practically any topic by tossing in a mention of God).
4. Definitely no TV, movies, shopping, sports.

One Friday three friends and I slipped off campus for the weekend. We planned what to write on our dormitory passes, which classes to skip, how to hold up under

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## **I soon discovered I could consecrate practically any topic by tossing in a mention of God.**

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the inevitable interrogation from the deans, even how to sneak four people into a hotel room for the price of two. What we didn't plan, though, was our Sabbath. I was remotely uneasy with the idea of an unstructured day with no church to go to. But I figured I'd be safe as long as I could stick to my "No" list, which I managed to my satisfaction until Anna and I landed up in front of Woolworths. We'd decided on a walk downtown that morning, and now she remembered she had to pick up something. "Come on, it'll only take a second," she coaxed, breezing through the doors. Hating myself for being so spineless, I followed her in and wandered the aisles for several minutes. *It's OK; I'm just in Woolworths; I'm not actually going to buy anything* (that would be *really* breaking the Sabbath). But this time I couldn't fool myself. Telling Anna I'd meet her at the hotel later, I hurriedly left the store and walked some distance until I found a Catholic church. "God," I prayed, "what a lousy day! I'm just not getting it, am I? Help me to understand what this day is all about." There, for the first time, I really thought about Sabbath. I'd known all too well what it was *not*, but did I have an inkling as to what it was?

Several years have passed, and I still don't have all the answers, though I think I've found one: in giving me the Sabbath, God is telling me things—about Himself, about where we stand in relation to each other, about all He wants to see me become. What I need to learn is how to listen.

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*By Kaye McGregor, an educational-administration major at Teachers' College, Columbia University, New York City, New York.*

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# Respect, Honor, and Joy!

## LOGOS

Isa. 58:13, 14

On January 20, 1993, William Jefferson Clinton became the 42nd president of the United States of America. I watched on TV for history's sake, with Julian, my 32-month-old son, as the new leader signed into law a number of executive orders. Wow! That's power!

We hear a lot of talk about symbols these days. The careers of politicians rise or wane, depending on how well or how poorly symbols are employed in photo opportunities, talk shows, or soundbites.

During Creation week the Chief Executive of the universe ended seven days of establishing a new world by ordering the Sabbath rest into effect. Declared holy by God, who made all things for the good of His creation, it was to be a sign between God and His people (Ezek. 20:12, 20). "It was a memorial of the work of creation, and thus a sign of God's power and His love."<sup>1</sup>

Jeremiah shared a message of reform and revival (see 17:19-27) with the people of God, which he often did during "the last 40 years of Judah's existence as a kingdom."<sup>2</sup> The people had turned their backs on God. In particular they were desecrating God's holy day, forsaking the symbol of their relationship. The people's casual connection with the Sabbath resulted in captivity, oppression, and even slavery at the hands of a number of nations.

Jeremiah was supposed to stand at the gate of the people to tell them about God's displeasure with their Sabbath keeping. This proclamation was to be made from all the other gates in Jerusalem, as well. To be sure, God intended that His people would hear of His disapproval and repent from their evil ways.

The loads being carried on the Sabbath, as found in Jeremiah 17:21, 22, "may have included the grain, wine, fruits, fish, and other articles of trade that were brought into the city from the country by those coming to the temple to worship. Also included were the wares of the city, which were sold on the holy day of rest. Thus the picture presented is that of a loose Sabbath observance, a practice most distasteful to God."<sup>3</sup>

In keeping with the theme of Sabbath sacredness, Isaiah submits two wonderful verses for our consideration: "If you keep your feet from breaking the Sabbath and from doing as you please on my holy day, if you call the Sabbath a delight and the Lord's holy day honorable, and if you honor it by not going your own way and not doing as you please or speaking idle words, then you will find your joy in the Lord, and I will cause you to ride on the heights of the land and to feast on the inheritance of your father Jacob. The mouth of the Lord has spoken" (58:13, 14, NIV).

At least three significant points occur in these two verses dealing with the sacredness of the Sabbath rest: respect, honor, and joy.

**1. Respect.** To keep God's Sabbath day holy, one must believe that God exists, that He is the Creator of heaven and earth, and that He is worthy of our allegiance, for no other reason than that He is Creator. Ascribing sacredness to the Sabbath acknowledges our belief in God's sacredness and our acceptance of His dominion over the universe. Disregarding the sacredness of the Sabbath, then, clearly indicates our lack of respect for God and our lack of awareness of His presence.

2. **Honor.** When we respect God and accept the sacredness of the Sabbath rest, we honor Him by communing with Him and spending that day in activities that draw us to God instead of to mundane things. Because He is a holy God and has declared His special day holy, we must accomplish holy endeavors during this time. For “it is on the Sabbath that we can especially experience God’s presence among us. Without the Sabbath all would be labor and sweat without end. Every day would be alike, devoted to secular pursuits. . . . [The arrival of the Sabbath, however] provides time to commune with God through worship, prayer, song, the study of and meditation on the Word, and through sharing the gospel with others.”<sup>4</sup>

3. **Joy.** “Those who make the Sabbath what God intended it to be, enter into a close fellowship with Him that others cannot know.”<sup>5</sup> Isaiah suggests that one will experience true joy in the Lord. To be sure, nothing can equal the joy felt when one is at peace with God—not the superficial joy that comes from mere ritualistic

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## **I watched on TV for history’s sake as the new leader signed into law a number of executive orders.**

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Sabbath observance, but a joy that comes from having an intimate relationship with the Divine.

Bill Clinton’s election as president of the United States has given him power for four years to sign many bills into law. These laws, however, can disappear with the changing of the guard. Since God is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the symbol or sign between Him and His people will forever be the same: the Sabbath-day rest, observed in a solemn and sacred way.

### **REACT**

1. How are we in danger of becoming like the people of Jeremiah’s day?
2. Why should we be careful about the sacredness of the Sabbath?
3. How would I personally define what is appropriate Sabbath behavior?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 281.

2. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 346.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 424.

4. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe. . .*, p. 256.

5. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 307.

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*By Willie Oliver, youth and family-life director of the Greater New York Conference, Manhasset, New York.*

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# The Best and the Blessed

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Isa. 58:13, 14

“The Sabbath was hallowed at the creation. As ordained for man, it had its origin when ‘the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.’ Job 38:7. . . . ‘God saw everything that He had made, and, behold, it was very good’; and He rested in the joy of His completed work. Gen. 1:31.”<sup>1</sup>

“Great blessings are enfolded in the observance of the Sabbath, and God desires that the Sabbath day shall be to us a day of joy. . . . God looked with satisfaction upon the work of His hands. . . . The Sabbath shall direct our minds to Him as the true and living God, and that through knowing Him we may have life and peace.”<sup>2</sup>

“All who love God should do what they can to make the Sabbath a delight, holy and honorable. They cannot do this by seeking their own pleasure in sinful, forbidden amusements. Yet they can do much to exalt the Sabbath in their families and make it the most interesting day of the week.”<sup>3</sup>

“When the Lord bade Israel hallow His Sabbaths, He said, ‘They shall be a sign between me and you, that ye may know that I am Jehovah your God.’ Isa. 40:18-

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## “Great blessings are enfolded in the observance of the Sabbath.”

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29. . . . The Sabbath was not for Israel merely, but for the world. It had been made known to man in Eden, and, like the other precepts of the Decalogue, it is an imperishable obligation. . . . No other institution which was committed to the Jews tended so fully to distinguish them from surrounding nations as did the Sabbath. God designed that its observance should designate them as His worshippers.”<sup>4</sup>

“As the Sabbath was the sign that distinguished Israel when they came out of Egypt to enter the earthly Canaan, so it is the sign that now distinguishes God’s people as they come out from the world to enter the heavenly rest. . . . It distinguishes between His loyal subjects and transgressors.”<sup>5</sup>

## REACT

Is the Sabbath day one of celebration and delight or one of frustration and hindrance? Explain your answer.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 281.
2. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, p. 349.
3. *Ibid.*, vol. 2, p. 584.
4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 283.
5. *Testimonies*, vol. 6, pp. 349, 350.

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*By Ventryce Thomas, nursing administrator at the University Hospital and Medical Center, New York City, New York.*

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## Sabbath by Any Other Name . . .

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** Matt. 11:28

God rested on, blessed, and sanctified the seventh day (Gen. 2:3). He further admonishes us to remember to keep the seventh day holy (Exod. 20:8). Has He changed?

Some may cite Abraham's exhortations on behalf of Sodom or Jonah's arguments with respect to Nineveh to support the proposition of a changeable God. That God is merciful, however, does not argue against the immutability of His character, which is manifest in His law (Mal. 3:6; Matt. 5:18, 19).

God's Sabbath law neither decrees a Jewish holiday nor represents an outdated custom (John 14:15). It represents the outpouring love of our Father, who provides for our needs (Mark 2:27). The Sabbath covenant implicitly promises familial and societal well-being. The provision included the children, the servants (labor), and the cattle (capital equipment). Both family and business prosper under God's construct. Productivity is maintained at a level whereby pursuit of worldly happiness is secured within six working days. Why should anyone reject such a plan?

Although apostasy has plagued God's children throughout history, the cure remains the same: return unto Him, and He will be our God (Mal. 3:7; Isa. 30:15;

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### Some may cite Jonah's arguments to support the proposition of a changeable God.

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2 Chron. 7:14). Substituting an alternate worship style will never satisfy the requirements of a holy God (Isa. 58:13, 14). Sunday worship, though convenient, substitutes humanity's law for God's while undermining God's emphasis on obedience (Matt. 4:4; 5:18, 19; John 14:15).

The Sabbath maintains, however, its sanctifying mark for those who choose to live in accordance with God's holy principles (Isa. 58:13, 14). Although others claim the Sabbath has been abolished, millions of Sabbath keepers throughout the world refuse to conform to the traditions of this world (Rom. 12:2). While Jesus is still calling, let us yield to His Spirit and enter into His rest. Then we can sing, on the occasion of His coming, a harmonious song of liberty.

### REACT

1. To whom do I give power to shape my spiritual destiny?
2. Upon what authority do I worship?

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*By Donna Lewis, a defense attorney in New York City, New York.*

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# Anatomy of Sabbath Rest

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Ex. 20:8-11

God deliberately created the Sabbath. He enshrined it in the fourth commandment. Jesus, co-Creator, showed and taught how to keep the Sabbath.

**1. Service to God.** Jesus regularly went to synagogue on the Sabbath (Luke 4:16). Worship, the ultimate service, means to acknowledge, adore, extol, celebrate the Almighty. It is to approach, to offer self and other gifts, to prostrate before Jehovah. Worship is to confront, to talk *to* God, and not only *about* Him. Isaiah, in chapter 6, and John, in Revelation 4, reported that heavenly worshipers keep it reverent, sweet, simple, and direct as they praise.

**2. Service to self.** *Rest:* Sabbath means rest. No work. No mundane mental preoccupations. No problem solving. No professional networking. No planning for the future. Sabbath rest is freedom from bother, competition, ambition, striving, anxiety (Isa. 58:13, 14). Make the Sabbath a mini-vacation.

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**“The Sabbath, of all days, is the most appropriate for healing.”**

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*Live well:* Jesus defended His disciples for obtaining a meal on the Sabbath. He saw it as plain good sense (Matt. 12:1-8). Make the Sabbath meal the best and make the place where it is eaten the most pleasing. Slow the pace of life to savor the blessing of company, place, and food.

*Meditate:* Use the gift of carefree Sabbath time to contemplate Scripture, your own life experience, and God’s creation. Find a cozy corner, go to the seashore, a cave, a garden, that friendly hill—lose yourself in the wonder of it all.

**3. Service to others.** *Relate:* Relate to some person(s) as you are serving God. “To celebrate the Sabbath means to reach out and share the blessings of the day with others.”<sup>1</sup>

*Heal:* Jesus healed minds on Sabbath (Mark 1:21-28). Bodies too (Mark 3:4, 5). Use holy time to feed, liberate, shelter, nurture, teach, befriend, and cheer. Find the community centers, parks, prisons, group homes, detention centers, shelters, hospitals, hospices, the streets, and *do* love. As Paul K. Jewett said, “The Sabbath, of all days, is the most appropriate for healing.”<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

Would tending to the wounded environment be an appropriate Sabbath activity? Explain your answer.

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1. Samuele Bacchiocchi, *Divine Rest for Human Restlessness* (Rome: The Pontifical Gregorian University Press, 1980), p. 201.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 151.

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By Peter Thompson, a psychotherapist in Long Island, New York.

# Sabbath Matters

## OPINION

### Key Text: Mark 2:27

Children in cradle roll sing: “Sabbath is a happy day, happy day, happy day. Sabbath is a happy day; I love every Sabbath.” Is Sabbath a joyous time for us, or is it a day with a long list of “thou shalt nots”?

At some point in my childhood I began to dread Sabbaths. There were so many things we couldn’t do, and the best TV programs were on Friday evenings, especially at Christmastime. I almost always missed *Rudolph the Red-Nose Reindeer!* As I entered into young adulthood, I often tried to justify my Sabbath activities: “Bike-riding is OK if we ride through the woods and appreciate nature; canoeing is OK if we tell Bible stories.” I am stretching it, but I am sure we can probably all add our own justifications to the list.

As I began to explore what it meant to be a Christian, the Sabbath weighed heavily on my mind. It occurred to me what our text for today meant. The Sabbath is mine! It is my gift from God, a sign between God and me (Ezek. 20:12), an agreement based on His love for me (Deut. 7:7, 8). However, I must have a personal relationship with Christ. The Sabbath means nothing unless I know Christ personally and make a commitment to trust, honor, and obey Him.

Study of student development includes a theory called marginality and mattering.<sup>1</sup> According to this theory, the success of students depends on the degree to

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## God made the Sabbath for us—we matter to Him.

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which they feel they “matter.” Mattering refers to their belief, justified or not, that they are noticed, appreciated, and cared for by someone else. Students who feel ignored and/or unaccepted will be less likely to succeed.

God made the Sabbath for us—we matter to Him, He cares for us, and He appreciates us. We don’t ever have to feel marginal in His love for us. God wants the Sabbath to be a delightful experience for us—a spiritual feast, a foretaste of heaven.<sup>2</sup> When we see the Sabbath in this light, we realize God designed the Sabbath to prevent our spiritual discouragement.

I recently considered changing my children’s Friday-evening bubble bath, which they have right before sundown worship, to another night to accommodate children’s choir rehearsal. I was adamantly told by my six-year-old daughter, Jessica, that this would not work, because that signaled to her that Sabbath was on its way, and she loves Sabbaths. So do I, Jesus—and the Sabbath is a happy day!

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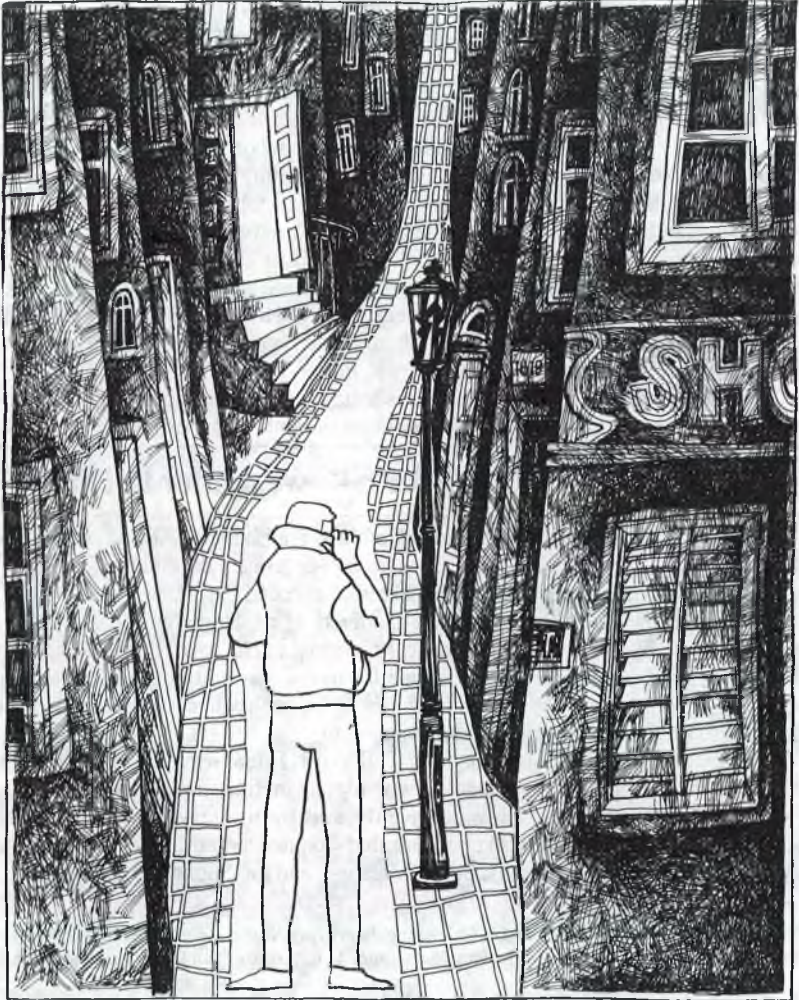
1. N. Schlossberg, A. Lynch, and A. Chickering, *Improving Higher Education Environment for Adults: Response Programs and Services From Entry to Departure* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass, 1989).

2. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 264.

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By Elaine P. Oliver, a student-affairs officer at Columbia University, New York City, New York.

# GOD'S DISCIPLINE COMMITTEE



**“And ye shall seek me, and find me, when ye shall search for me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).**



# Inside a Discipline Committee

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Jer. 4:27, 28**

I've often wondered whether God's heavenly discipline committees are anything like the one on which I participated at an academy. We staff members dreaded dealing with discipline problems. No matter what we decided, someone always thought we were too strict, and someone else thought we were too lenient.

We looked carefully at the students' home lives, previous offenses, and current situation with two purposes in mind: to keep problems out of our school and to help students overcome their problems. The varied disciplinary actions we took all had those simple goals. Let's look at a few of them.

Jason came from a broken home. His non-Christian mother worked nights. When he was caught with drugs at school, the faculty recommended an evening drug-treatment program and found a counselor to help him. He stayed in school.

Kevin had a solid Christian home, had been caught with drugs twice before, refused to do his schoolwork, and was now caught selling drugs at school. The

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## **We staff members dreaded dealing with discipline problems.**

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faculty recommended he enter a full-time drug rehabilitation center—for his own good and for the good of the school.

Joni, who kept goofing off, skipping classes, and refusing to study, was assigned to a regular after-school study hall for a month. She hated it, but her grades and class attendance improved.

Rita and two other girls were assigned to janitor duty for their parts in a graffiti party. Rita pouted, refused to work, called home for help, and her mother withdrew her from our school. The discipline worked for two of the girls, but we lost the third, even though one of the faculty offered to help Rita scrub the bathroom floor.

It must be something like that in heaven when the discipline committee meets—God, Jesus, the Holy Spirit, and the angels, all grappling with the sin problem of a person, a family, a tribe, or a nation. How can they discipline to redeem this person or group?

The great controversy is about the final elimination of sin—and you're caught in the middle of the war. There's no such thing as neutrality. God will do whatever it takes to win you to His side—if you'll cooperate with Him.

God wants us in heaven. The funny thing is that, although we want to be there, we aren't always willing to accept His unconditional love or His discipline. As we study this week's lesson, let's keep in mind that God's discipline is given in love and always has a purpose and a promise. And when His own Son, Jesus, offers to help us scrub the floor, let's not walk out on Him.

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*By Fern Gibson Babcock, assistant professor in the education/psychology department, Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# The Three P's of Judgment

## LOGOS

Jer. 4:19-31; 25:1-38; 46:1-6

One day some foreigners were galloping across the Mesopotamian desert, unaware they were headed straight toward quicksand that could swallow up a horse and rider. Suddenly an Arab, noting their oncoming doom, threw himself before them on the white sands, begging them to stop. The men jerked their horses to a halt inches before they would have plunged into the quicksand. God, just like the Arab, sometimes judges us and sees we are heading directly into danger. Often He punishes us just so we can get back on track. But for each *punishment* there is a *purpose*, as well as a *promise* of hope.

### Punishment

*"This whole country will become a desolate wasteland, and these nations will serve the king of Babylon seventy years" (25:11, NIV).*

Nearly six centuries before Jesus' birth, the children of Israel had nearly exhausted God's patience. So many times they did the same thing; though He gave them victory over their enemies, wealth enough to make other nations envious, and success in all their activities, the Jews still wanted to gallop into the quicksand of idolatry and heathenism. So God sent Babylon to get His special nation back on the right track.

After eighteen months of siege, Jerusalem was little more than a collection of shacks. Outside the gates the Babylonian army pillaged the countryside, and where once were fertile fields, only ashes remained. God judged His people and found that, unless they were stopped now, they would get farther away from the plan He had in store for them—receiving the Messiah. Seventy years in a foreign land would give them time to think about living better lives.

### Purpose

Does God's punishment have purpose, or does He simply become angry with us? Solomon says God disciplines us because He loves us (Prov. 3:11, 12). And because He loves us, He wants what is best for us. His punishment guides us toward His plan for making our lives the best they can be.

When I was a child, what I hated the worst was getting my mouth washed out with soap. Ivory may smell good on your hands, but when it gets in your mouth, it is horrible! Every time I'd tell somebody off, out would come the bottle of Ivory—with a squirt right into my mouth.

My parents could tell I was heading in the wrong direction when I'd tell people every vile thought in my mind. Eventually, because of the punishment, their purpose was fulfilled—to prepare me as much as possible to be a successful, well-adapted human being. Had I been a little more perceptive as a child, I might have seen the real reason I *needed* the punishment. If I hadn't stopped the nasty habit of giving others lip, I may have someday ended up getting into a fight when someone didn't take kindly to hearing things like that about his mother. Maybe my parents saved my life with the soap-bottle discipline. Bad-mouthing was the quicksand I was galloping toward, and my parents stopped me before I made the fateful plunge.

Even still, at the time, I was ignorant enough to think they were just retaliating for what I'd done.

We all occasionally get off the beaten track and head in the wrong direction. It is then the Lord disciplines us. He is the Almighty Parent—always knowing what is the best track for us to be following. And the good news is, the punishment doesn't come because God is angry with us, but because He wants us to have the best possible life. David says those whom the Lord disciplines are actually blessed; God is on our side (Ps. 94:12)!

God's purpose is to tell us, "Hey, you're heading in the wrong direction. You'll be happier if you don't do that." Instead of viewing it as a rotten experience and feeling we're having to pay for what we've done, we should be happy God is trying to keep us from getting into a worse situation.

### **Promise**

In every punishment God gives a promise too. Read Jeremiah 25:11. God doesn't just say the people will serve the king of Babylon. Instead, He puts an

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## **Maybe my parents saved my life with the soap-bottle discipline.**

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ending date on the punishment. God will never drag punishment out longer than it needs to be. Although He was angry with the Israelites at the time, He said that after serving their sentence they would be able to return home to Jerusalem.

God punishes us to get us back to the life plan He knows will make us happiest. If the Israelites could have learned their lesson by just losing one battle, then they would probably have never been hauled off to Babylon. This punishment came after repeated warning and less severe punishments. God knew He needed a whole new generation to cleanse the sin from His special nation. Seventy years later, most people had forgotten about the wicked habits they had valued back in their homeland. During the exile God was with His people and awaited the time when He would again bless them with prosperity.

When God finds us wandering off track, He wants to get us back where we belong as soon as possible. Like good parents, He chastises us so we will know we're doing things wrong. But He promises never to let the punishment drag on endlessly. God's judgment is limited, but His mercy is forever.

### **REACT**

1. When was the last time God punished me? How did my life become better because of that punishment?
2. How can you know when you are being punished by God?

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*By Kerry Haggkvist, sophomore marketing student at Southern College of Seventh-day Adventists, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# Father Knows Best

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 Pet. 4:12, 13, 16, 19**

Ever since the beginning of sin, humanity has experienced and suffered many trials. We have always justified suffering to be something only “bad” people *deserve* to encounter. But when you’re a devout Christian or a “good” person, and you happen to come upon a “stroke of bad luck,” where the whole world seems to be against you, then . . . “THAT’S NOT FAIR!”

The fact is, we are *all* sinners, and God is not the bad guy; rather, He allows trials in order to reveal our sin and to bring us closer to Him. “God pities men struggling in the blindness of perversity: He seeks to enlighten the darkened understanding by sending reproofs and threatenings designed to cause the most exalted to feel their ignorance and to deplore their errors. He endeavors to help the self-complacent to become dissatisfied with their vain attainments and to seek for spiritual blessing through a close connection with heaven.”<sup>1</sup>

“God’s plan is not to . . . please and flatter sinners; He . . . [does not] lull the unsanctified into carnal security. Instead, He lays heavy burdens upon the con-

## God allows trials in order to reveal our sin and to bring us closer to Him.

science of the wrongdoer, and pierces his soul with sharp arrows of conviction. Ministering angels present to him the fearful judgments of God, to deepen the sense of need, and to prompt the agonizing cry, ‘What must I do to be saved?’ ”<sup>2</sup>

Through trials and tribulations God seeks to draw us nearer to Him. His deepest desire is for us to be purified from our sinfulness, to obtain complete and *true* happiness, and ultimately to be saved. That can happen only through the testing of “Holy fire” followed by the cool, replenishing water of peace.

“ ‘Do not make light of the Lord’s discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those He *loves*. . . .’ Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined . . . , then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. . . . Our fathers disciplined us . . . as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Heb. 12:5-11, NIV).

1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 435.

2. *Ibid.*

By Maria Rodriguez, a graduate music-education major and religion minor from Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.

# Doing “Hard Time”

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Jer. 29:12, 13**

If a son didn't respond to discipline in ancient Jewish times, the parents were to take him to the elders, who would take him to the town gate and stone him to death (Deut. 21:18-21). Sounds as though they took their discipline fairly seriously.

Today we don't stone our children for not heeding us, though I must admit it does have a certain appeal at times. Eventually, if a child becomes too rebellious, he could wind up in juvenile court. If he doesn't respond to this scare, and continues to go bad, he winds up doing some time in county lockup or even does some “hard time” in the state penitentiary. If he persists in harassing society, he could be sentenced to life in prison or even to the death sentence for a serious crime.

God was frustrated with Israel. For centuries He had patiently tried to turn them back to Himself. Various prophets and problems failed to turn them around. He had just sent Babylon to invade Jerusalem, and King Jehoiachin, his family, royal court, and ten thousand captives had been deported. This had been the second deportation, and you'd think Israel would have begun to wonder whether they were doing something wrong. They continued their evil ways. Israel finally needed some serious corrective measures.

In 586 B.C. the Babylonians broke through the walls and poured into Jerusalem mad as hornets. They were not happy with Jerusalem, since the Jews had joined the

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## Today we don't stone our children for not heeding us.

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five other local nations in rebellion against Babylon. Though Jeremiah had warned Judah not to join, they had rebelliously disregarded his sound advice. Israel needed some hard time to think about their state of affairs and to adopt a new attitude. The remaining Jews in Jerusalem joined the already deported exiles in Babylon, and the exile commenced.

“You've gone too far,” God scolded Israel. His aim was corrective rather than simply punitive, though. God softens the blow with a promise for the future: “Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (29:12, 13, NIV).

The promise for today is that though we may have gone astray and though God may have needed to turn up the heat a little, He is there waiting for us with open arms (Luke 15). Job said, “Happy is the man whom God reproves” (Job 5:17, RSV). Turn back to God. Search with all your heart, and you will find Him.

## REACT

What are the implications for child rearing in God's punishment of those He loves?

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*By Curtis Forrester, a junior religion major and president of the student ministerial association at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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## Peace Under Adversity

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: 1 Pet. 4:12, 13, 16, 19**

When Adam and Eve sinned, God cursed the ground for our sake (Gen. 3:17). James tells us we should rejoice in our trials, and we are blessed if we endure temptations. We all have to face trials in one form or another, and through them, God shows us the way to salvation. It is found in and through Jesus. He is the *way* to salvation, the *truth* we can depend on, and the *light* that leads us through trying times. How can we recognize the lessons God seeks to show us?

**1. Recognize and accept our need for Jesus.** Time and again the children of Israel would stray from God. Trusting in their own strength, they would fall onto hard times. Yet through these trials God sought to reveal to Israel their need for Him. When they realized and accepted their need, when they humbled themselves, God was able to rescue them and bless them. What about us? Do we continuously recognize our need for God? Do we find it hard to accept this need? Have we become so self-reliant and comfortable that we forget we need God for our very existence?

**2. Listen.** “Be still, and know that I am God” (Ps. 46:10). Jesus recognized His need for His Father in heaven. Despite His busy schedule, Jesus made time to get

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### **As long as we live in a world corrupted by sin, we will face trials and hardships.**

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away to listen to God and to receive wisdom, guidance, and strength. Listening to God includes searching the Scriptures and time spent in prayer. “Wherefore, my beloved brethren, let every man be swift to hear, slow to speak” (James 1:19). When was the last time you slipped away to listen to God and to search for guidance and strength?

**3. Find someone with whom to share your faith, questions, and frustrations.** It is important we find someone, or a group, to whom we can go with the sole purpose of searching for, and discussing our experience with, God—to laugh, cry, hope, and pray together. “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Through this kind of sharing, God can and will provide you with strength and guidance, not to mention the strong, meaningful, and lasting friendships that will develop.

As long as we live in a world corrupted by sin, we will face trials and hardships, as well as joy and peace. God is able to teach, guide, and strengthen us through all experiences unto salvation. Let us determine to recognize our need and accept God’s tender love and strong arm to guide us. Let us listen to His wise counsel, and let us share our experience in the Lord with others.

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*By John Sager, a graduate of Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee, with a religion major and a history minor.*

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# God's Raised Voice

## OPINION

**Key Text: Rev. 3:19**

Growing up as a child was a blast. My parents, my sister, and I really had some good times together. We would go to the park and have a picnic or go for a ride in the country. Those family bonding times bring back really good memories. During those times the love my parents had for me was evident.

Then there were other times when my parents' love for me was not so evident. There were many times when my parents told me to stop doing something that would harm me. At the time I just couldn't see what the big idea was. This so-called dangerous thing that I was doing was fun to me. And why on earth would my parents want to keep me from something that I enjoyed doing if they really loved me? When I thought this way, I would usually continue to do what my parents told me not to. During those times, my parents would have to raise their voices to get my attention.

Sometimes God has to raise His voice to get our attention. In our microwave world we get so caught up in the hurry of life that we fail to hear God's still, small

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## **Sometimes God has to raise His voice to get our attention.**

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voice. When we exclude God from our daily plans and activities, most definitely destruction is waiting in our path. During those times God has to raise His voice of warning. Sometimes He does this through friends, enemies, or total strangers. Other times He uses events to force us to stop, question, and listen.

Many times in my own life I have mistaken this raised voice for an unloving, selfish God. During extremely difficult times in my life, I have asked God, "What did I do to deserve these bad times?" I have even asked at one time or another, "Where is God in all of this?" Yet after I cry out for help, I usually stop and listen. At that moment He has my attention.

When my parents raised their voices at me, their love for me at the time was not evident. Yet, as I look back, I realize that they raised their voices only to keep me from danger, whether in the present or somewhere down the road. I believe when it is all said and done, we will be able to look over our lives and realize that when God raised His voice to get our attention, He was only saving us from total destruction.

## **REACT**

1. When we understand God's consistent love, how will it affect our reaction to hard times?
2. What other parenting have you observed that would relate to the way God treats His children?

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*By Gary Collins, a senior majoring in religion, at Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS



**“He that hath my word, let him speak my word faithfully. What is the chaff to the wheat? saith the Lord. Is not my word like as a fire? saith the Lord; and like a hammer that breaketh the rock in pieces?” (Jer. 23:28, 29).**



## “Never Touched the Stuff!”

### INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Jer. 23:28, 29**

It is 10:30 p.m., and I'm looking forward to my shift's ending; all I need to do is finish up my charting and empty my foley catheters, and I'll be home by midnight. At 10:40 p.m. the charge nurse smiles at me and says, “How are you doing?”

“Great,” I reply. Another successful day at work—no codes today, no falls, and I even had time for supper.

“Well, since you are doing so well, I have a gift for you from the emergency room. A 32-year-old patient with chest pain—and rule out myocardial infarction.”

“Thanks, pal. I had plans to be in bed by midnight tonight. So much for those plans.” I received the report from the emergency-room nurse shortly after the patient arrived in the unit. What I saw lying in front of me did not correlate with what I had to report. The patient reeked of alcohol, and his eyes were bloodshot. Tongue lolling, he spoke too eagerly. Further assessment revealed elevated liver enzymes and a high blood-alcohol level.

**“Yes, I drink lots of water, nurse.”**

**“How about alcohol?” I asked.**

“Sir, do you have any chest pain?” I asked.

“Yes, I do, nurse,” he replied. “However, the pain is much better now.”

“Sir, I need to ask you a few more questions. Do you smoke?”

“No, I don't, nurse.”

“Do you drink?”

“Yes, I drink lots of water, nurse.”

“How about alcohol?” I asked.

“No, nurse, I don't drink.”

“Are you saying you didn't drink today?”

“No, nurse, I never drink,” he replied.

Why did I spend four years in college, training to recognize signs and symptoms, only to have this man lie there and totally deny he ever touched the stuff? The evidence was there, and the truth prevailed. I could have ignored the obvious signs and symptoms. I could have brushed it off as “chaff,” but was that helping him? Of the two, wheat and chaff, only wheat can flourish. This man needed my help. In the end I would be held accountable for my assessments and judgments. God expects us to study His Word, to have the knowledge of Him and His truth. The fire of His words tests the quality of each man's work (1 Cor. 3:13). The hammer of His Word determines in the end what is truth. We, His disciples, will be held accountable for our thoughts and attitudes (Heb. 4:12).

*By Eunice Wavomba, nurse recruiter for Hinsdale Hospital, Hinsdale, Illinois.*

# Facing Extinction

## LOGOS

Jer. 12:16-18

The southern species of the American bald eagle faces extinction. The official 1988 survey found only 509 remaining pairs. Eagles lay annually only one clutch of two eggs, averaging a success rate of one young bird per year.

In a successful attempt to help nature repopulate the species, scientists remove eggs from the nests of eagle-rich Florida, hatch and mature the birds, and return them to the wilds of other areas. If the eggs are removed early in the nesting season, the parents lay another clutch of eggs.

Like the southern bald eagle, impenitent Judah faced extinction.

Bad leadership is ultimately the cause attributed to the Babylonian exile. The nation had disintegrated. Their rejection of God's pleas through His prophets had left a legacy of hopelessness. Under the inspiration of God, Jeremiah sends to the exiles words of hope and counsels regarding leadership.

### What Will God Do?

There was hope. God promises to gather the remnant from all of the countries to which they have been scattered (23:3). There will no longer be a reason for being afraid, nor will any be missing (verse 4). God is going to deal with the ineffective leadership; He is going to appoint leaders who will have a tender regard for God's people.

So significant will this act be that future Hebrews who lived after the return would put it alongside the Exodus as evidence of God's mighty acts (verses 7, 8).

There is more. In contrast to their recent history of ineffective kings, the coming of a real King is announced (verses 5, 6). He will be a legitimate descendant of David. Righteousness and justice will again prevail. When Jesus laid down His life for His people, He left a legacy of bold leadership in the disciples and apostles. Israel's and Judah's leadership had harmed the sheep; but the shepherds would feed the sheep.

### Moral Inventory of Leadership

It is shocking to his system. Jeremiah is heartbroken by God's words. His own profession is under scrutiny. Nevertheless, he must communicate the message.

Prophetic leadership was supposed to result in a furthering of righteousness. Depravity, however, had been the result (verses 10, 11). They were adulterers in a metaphorical sense, professing loyalty to God, but practicing disloyalty. Their lifestyle furthered the cause of evil, rather than arresting it. They had become part of the problem, not part of the solution. They had caused an epidemic (verse 15). The sacred was gone.

### Peace! Peace!

Jeremiah's message then turns into an appeal for the people not to heed the false prophets. They produce empty hopes. Their vision and words are not God-inspired, but self-induced (verse 16). The message of the prophets was "Peace, all's well. No evil will come your way."

God's Word, had those false prophets spoken it, would have been a message of judgment rather than well-being. In the face of imminent danger, the generation needed a moral challenge; instead, they were anesthetized with false reality.

Who and what we listen to is vital. What we listen to we become. The true leader is one who first stands in God's presence so he can see and hear God's Word. Then he speaks God's Word so those who hear might turn from their evil ways (verse 22).

How does a leader come to confuse God's Word with his own word? What causes a leader to promote peace and well-being in the face of surrounding depravity? Perhaps the answer is political and economic. His own security and well-being often become a high priority.

Perhaps the answer lies in the dulling of a leader's senses. It is natural to compare. "Yes, some of our people are sinful, but compare them to the pagans. We are not all that bad!"

"Error is never harmless. It never sanctifies, but always brings confusion and dissension. It is always dangerous. The enemy has great power over minds that are not thoroughly fortified by prayer and established in Bible truth."\*

Any prophetic utterance that speaks only of a peaceful future without reference to divine judgment is false. Sadly, an emphasis on the love and grace of God devoid

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## **Apostasy in leadership is always devastating to the church, even if it occurs in only one or a few.**

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of a moral challenge for repentance is simply a repeat of the history of the false prophets of Jeremiah's day.

There is great power in God's Word. Jeremiah uses the similes of fire and a forge hammer to describe its power (verse 29). God's instruction is simple: faithfully speak His words (verse 28), which have been obtained by being in His presence, and God's words themselves will do the rest because of their power.

Apostasy in leadership is always devastating to the church, even if it occurs in only one or a few. The total moral collapse of Judah's leadership was largely responsible for the ruin of the nation. Warnings of present and future delusions urge the followers of Christ to maintain such a close union with Him that His righteousness and wisdom will keep us from falling, or being led, into error and apostasy.

### **REACT**

1. Since all will be judged individually, why does God hold the leadership of His people accountable?
2. What should a church member do in response to what he considers to be apostate leadership?

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\* *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 292.

# Use It or Lose It

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Luke 9:1, 2, 6**

Without activity there is atrophy. Studies on the effect of prolonged bedrest have shown that six weeks of bedrest caused a twofold increase in urinary calcium excretion in normal young men. Only standing activities slowed loss of calcium in these subjects, and only active exercise prevented loss of muscle strength.

To prevent spiritual atrophy, Ellen White adjures us to “go forward in Christ’s name, advocating the truths committed to us.”<sup>1</sup> In today’s text Christ sent His disciples to preach the gospel, but that was only the beginning. No one should be ashamed of Him and His words (verse 26). “To every one who becomes a partaker of His grace, the Lord appoints a work for others. Individually we are to stand in our lot and place, saying, ‘Here am I; send me.’ Isaiah 6:8. Upon the minister of the word, the missionary nurse, the Christian physician, the individual Christian, whether he be merchant or farmer, professional man or mechanic—the responsi-

**“It is not the plan of God to have some eased and others burdened.”**

bility rests upon all. It is our work to reveal to men the gospel of their salvation. Every enterprise in which we engage should be a means to this end.”<sup>2</sup>

Most are more at ease with a passive role, but the message remains: “It is not the plan of God to have some eased and others burdened. . . . Each must feel that he is responsible for his own case, and for the influence he exerts over others. If these maintain their Christian walk, Jesus will be in them the hope of glory, and they will love to speak forth His praise that they may be refreshed. The cause of their Master will be near and dear to them. It will be their study to advance His cause and to honor it by holy living. Said the angel: ‘Every talent God will require with usury.’ Every Christian must go on from strength to strength, and employ all his powers in the cause of God.”<sup>3</sup>

“Those who take up their appointed work will not only be a blessing to others, but they will themselves be blessed. The consciousness of duty well done will have a reflex influence upon their own souls.”<sup>4</sup>

## REACT

1. How can I actively proclaim the gospel in word or deed?
2. How have I been blessed as I have shared with others in need?

1. *Acts of the Apostles*, p. 69.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 148.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 179.

4. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 148.

*By Lance Van Arsdell, a physical therapist at Silver Cross Hospital in Joliet, Illinois.*

## Spiritual Household Chores

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Jer. 29:4**

The school year had just ended, and the eagerly awaited summer vacation had arrived. My sister and I would have the whole house to ourselves! But as Mom began to lay down the law in the form of chores and responsibilities, the summer vacation assumed a new meaning—laundry, vacuuming, washing dishes, and, of course, looking out for my sister. My dreams of “fun in the sun” fizzled with the thought that I would be responsible if something went wrong.

As spiritual leaders, some may feel like a child with a new household chore. Embarking on new responsibilities can be scary yet exciting. It provides a sense of dignity and a general feeling of “being someone.” Unfortunately, like children, we tend to slack off now and then—the dog goes hungry, or the lawn looks like weeds.

Everyone who receives the gospel also inherits the responsibility to proclaim it. God has commissioned each of us to be a spiritual leader on some level. Above all,

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### **At times God must allow the ignorant and innocent to suffer alongside the guilty.**

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this is each person’s greatest duty and even more so for those in positions of corporate spiritual leadership.

Though each of us will be judged according to how we have maintained our personal relationship with the Father, we will also be held accountable for the actions of those whom we have influenced. God will hold every person accountable for what he or she knows to be right; but if our brother’s ignorance results from our misdeeds or lack of action, then it is not his fault; it is ours.

Jeremiah informs Israel that God has allowed them to be taken into captivity to get their attention (verse 4). They had been led into sin by leaders who knew better. At times God must allow the ignorant and innocent to suffer alongside the guilty. Israel was to be a demonstration of the fact that God does exist and that serving only Him brings true prosperity. They were to be a testimony in the form of a nation. God was simply doing what was necessary to keep His faithful people from becoming extinct. Wouldn’t it be easier to maintain our relationship with Christ and remain a positive influence on others than to struggle with circumstances of spiritual neglect?

### **REACT**

1. Where does one draw the line in answering the question “Am I my brother’s keeper”?
2. In what ways can we, as a church today, avoid the apostasy experienced centuries ago?

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*By Danon Forde, a research laboratory technician at Rush Presbyterian/St. Luke’s Medical Center, Chicago, Illinois.*

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# I Know the Plans I Have for You

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Jer. 29:11-14

As the eldest of four children in a single-parent home, I worried a lot as a child. To combat my worrywart nature, I always made plans for every situation—plan A, plan B, plan C, and so on. As I became older, life became more complex, making it difficult for me to plan for every circumstance. The result was stressful.

Recently, during a morning devotion, I came across a wonderful promise written in a letter that the prophet Jeremiah sent from Jerusalem to the people whom Nebuchadnezzar had carried into exile from Jerusalem to Babylon. “ ‘For I know the plans I have for you,’ declares the Lord, ‘plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future. Then you will call upon me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you. You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,’ declares the Lord, ‘and will bring you back . . . to the place from which I carried you into exile’ ” (Jer. 29:11-14, NIV).

God makes it so clear! Plans have been made for us, plans to give us a meaningful, bright, and hopeful future! What else can we ask for? There’s the clincher:

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## **I always made plans for every situation—plan A, plan B, plan C, and so on.**

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we must ask for these plans to be unveiled to us. How can we claim this passage for our very own?

**1. Give up control.** We must be willing to give the reins over to God. He wants to lift the burden from us if we only allow Him to do so.

**2. Ask.** The promise is ours to claim.

**3. Seek Him** with all our hearts. Prayer is a wonderful method of communication that we have with God. We must utilize it daily. God has promised to listen to our every plea. Pray that we may listen and know what His plans are for our lives.

**4. Accept it all in faith** and trust that His plans are the best for our lives.

Sue Richards, a Christian devotional writer, wrote this prayer:

“Thank you, Father, for having plans for my life. Not just when things are going great, but especially for having plans when life calls for a change, and you are there showing me the path you have chosen for me. Amen.”\*

## **REACT**

1. To what extent, if any, should a person plan his or her future?
2. What role does faith play, if any, in a person’s life plans?

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\* Sue Richards, *The Women’s Devotional Bible*, New International Version (The Zondervan Publishing House, Grand Rapids, Michigan, 1990), p. 835.

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*By Ivy Posada, manager of administration and human resources, Council for Adult and Experiential Learning (CAEL), Chicago, Illinois.*

# What Is the Oracle of the Lord?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Jer. 23:33-40**

The lesson this week has focused on the errors of leadership. In concluding this lesson I would like to draw attention to the receiver of the leaders' actions, the people. The lesson began by observing the effect of the leaders' actions upon the people. Yet the people themselves bear the ultimate responsibility for their actions (Ezek. 18:4). Certainly the priests and prophets deceived the people, but the people willingly sought their advice and knew it conflicted with Jeremiah's prophecies. What is perplexing is, Why would they seek the advice of priests and prophets at all when they have given up listening to Jeremiah?

Consider the plot against Jeremiah (18:18; see also 11:18-23). The fault the people find with Jeremiah is that he will not conform his picture of God to their own view. Perhaps this shows they had such little confidence in their own views that they felt compelled to silence Jeremiah. They believed they were safe because they still had the temple, a physical reminder of God's covenant (7:3, 4, 21).

"When these people, or a prophet or a priest, ask you, 'What is the oracle of the Lord?' say to them, 'What oracle? I will forsake you, declares the Lord.' If a prophet

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## **Religion becomes useless if you use it only to hear what you want to hear.**

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or a priest or anyone else claims, 'This is the oracle of the Lord,' I will punish that man and his household. This is what each of you keeps on saying to his friend or relative: 'What is the Lord's answer?' or 'What has the Lord spoken?' But you must not mention 'the oracle of the Lord' again, because every man's own word becomes his oracle and so you distort the words of the living God, the Lord Almighty, our God" (23:33-36).

Why did these people remain loyal to a form of religion but give up on its underlying precepts? It appears that they used religion to validate their actions. The apostle Paul wrote, "For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear" (2 Tim. 4:3).

Religion becomes useless if you use it only to hear what you want to hear. Religion is the most useful when it is not used to confirm that which you already do, but instead it is used to "reform your ways and your actions" (Jer. 7:3).

## **REACT**

1. Why do we try to validate or justify our own actions?
2. Today's portion of the lesson has intertwined the Lord's words with the writer's. Is this justifiable, or is this what the writer has argued against?

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*By Alan Montgomery, a graduate student at the University of Chicago, Chicago, Illinois.*

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# “I SHALL RETURN”



**“The Lord hath appeared of old unto me, saying, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee” (Jer. 31:3).**



# MacArthur's Promise

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: John 14:1-3**

Corregidor, Philippines, March 11, 1942. For months the garrison at Corregidor under the command of General Douglas MacArthur has waged a delaying action against the Japanese army. Although the stand is still not at an end, the fall of Corregidor is inevitable. MacArthur has been ordered to carry on the Pacific campaign from Australia. In the dark of night MacArthur and his escape party assemble on the dock where PT boats await to carry them to safety. All those present know defeat is unavoidable. They know that those who remain behind have nothing to look forward to but capture, torture, and imprisonment.

General Jonathan Wainwright will command the remaining forces in their last heroic-but-futile stand. Wainwright and MacArthur salute; then MacArthur grasps Wainwright's hand. "Hold out until I come for you," he says. "I shall return." With tears in his eyes, Wainwright accepts his command. The scene remains etched unforgettably in the memories of those who were there.

MacArthur's promise—"I shall return"—lighted a flame throughout the Philippines. MacArthur's words "were on every man's lips, they were painted on the

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## **With tears in his eyes, Wainwright accepts his command.**

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walls, scrolled on the beaches, whispered in children's prayers. They became the symbol around which a nation gathered in indomitable will and at whose altar it finally achieved victory and freedom."\*

The Japanese occupation of the Philippines was brutal and merciless. Many thousands died, and many more suffered endless days in prison camps. For those left behind, their faith in General MacArthur's promise was a source of strength, sustaining them throughout many dark days. Their courage in captivity was rewarded on October 20, 1944, when General MacArthur set foot on the shores of Leyte in the Philippines. He had returned as promised.

Like MacArthur, Christ has promised to return and to liberate us from our oppressor's grasp. The words of Jeremiah in chapters 30 to 33 give us hope for the return of Jesus Christ and the courage to face the turbulent times ahead, just as they gave hope to the Jews when their future looked bleak and their deportation and exile were about to take place. As defenders of Corregidor took comfort in MacArthur's promise to return, so can we take refuge in Christ's promise of a second coming. On that bright day, those who have believed in His promise will be happy indeed.

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\* Major General Charles A. Willoughby, *MacArthur: 1941-1951* (New York: McGraw-Hill Book Co., Inc., 1954), p. 65.

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*By Mark Smith, a senior law student at the University of Nebraska College of Law, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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## Faith Crises

### LOGOS

#### Jer. 31:1-6

Jeremiah 31:1-6 is a section of Hebrew poetry reciting the promises of God to restore His people. It is a poetic portrait of the love of God that goes far beyond what we may dare to hope. It is a picture of a God who sees beyond the present. These verses depict the journey from a faith crisis to a people who again are worshipping in Zion.

The first point in this section and in its larger context in the book of Jeremiah is that God loves with more grace than His people have anticipated in the past. His love is everlasting. It is an active, powerful love, a love that when understood and considered is one that draws people to Him. God's love is an expression of His very nature. His love didn't stop even when Israel was in a faith crisis and worshipping Baal and Molech. This everlasting love is the kind of love portrayed by Jesus during His three and a half years of ministry. The Gospel writers describe many of Jesus' encounters with people and how His unconditional love changed their lives, i.e., Zacchaeus, the 10 lepers, the woman at the well, etc.

The second major point is that God looks beyond the present to the future: "I will build you up again and you will be rebuilt, O Virgin Israel" (verse 4, NIV). Israel went through a faith crisis. Teachers (false prophets) had undermined their faith system and encouraged them to search elsewhere for hope, meaning, and answers to life's questions. As they tried to live by this false theology/philosophy, it only led to despair and spiritual bankruptcy. When Israel went into captivity, they had turned their back on God and had burned incense and offered drink offerings to Baal. They were so far away from their covenant faith that they were also offering their sons and daughters as human sacrifices to Molech. Israel was anything but virgin, yet God saw beyond their chaos. He saw possibilities because He was going to be involved personally in their future. Although God does not bypass human will, He does work mightily on behalf of those who are willing to let Him.

There are some interesting parallels between the crisis of faith in Israel and that of many students in Adventist and state universities and colleges. Recent research in faith development and development psychology has demonstrated the sequence of development in a young adult's belief system. On a graph it looks like:

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Authority-bound dualistic	Unqualified relativism	Commitment in relativism	Convictional commitment
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Until young people are old enough for college/university, their faith is not usually an "owned" faith. More often than not, it is their parents' faith. The technical term for this is dualistic authority-based faith.

When young adults leave home, they often move into the stage of relativism. They are bombarded with many new and exciting ideas. This is especially true in a state college or university where the philosophical presuppositions of the curriculum are so different from what Adventists are used to. Young adults are led to believe that what is right for one group of people (i.e., the Judeo-Christian value system) is not necessarily good for another group in another place and/or time in

history. Unqualified relativism is strongly felt, and during this stage, young adults often experiment with drugs, sex, pornography, etc. Students are really into partying and doing their own thing. After a couple of years of this kind of lifestyle, they begin to realize that some choices bring better results than others; experience has taught them many lessons. Some choices are of higher value. This ushers young adults into the stage of commitment to relativism.

In a year or two, their college years will be over, and they realize they have to become serious, graduate, and get a job. They have been learning that not all things can be explained and are realizing that at any time what they know may change with additional information.

The next stage, called convictional commitment, often doesn't come until later in life. It's an intuitive knowledge from which adults make commitments. This is best illustrated in an interview with Carl Jung, the famous therapist. It was in front of a large audience of university students, mostly undergraduates. Dr. Jung was asked, "Do you believe in God?"

He replied, "No," and the audience laughed. The assumption was, of course, that

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### **"I don't have to believe in God; I know God."**

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Carl Jung was far too sophisticated to believe in God. However, Jung continued his response, "I don't have to believe in God; I know God." This time no one laughed.

When students begin their journey into their faith crisis as Israel did years ago, God does not abandon them. He knows it is only a stage and that where they are now is not where they will be a few years from now. God loves through these stages with an everlasting love. He sees the future possibilities; He wants to be involved in our lives. When people respond to Him and begin to journey back to Him, He says, "I will build you up again."

### **REACT**

1. At what stage am I in my faith development?
2. Do I feel God calling me now at this stage in my life?
3. What dangers are inherently a part of the stage of relativism?
4. What do you think Carl Jung meant by saying, "I don't have to believe in God; I know God"?

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*By Jerry Connell, young-adult ministry director, College View Seventh-day Adventist Church, and chaplain at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.*

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# Victory Out of Defeat

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Jer. 30:11**

“Humbled in the sight of the nations, those who once had been recognized as favored of Heaven above all other peoples of the earth were to learn in exile the lesson of obedience so necessary for their future happiness. Until they had learned this lesson, God could not do for them all that He desired to do.”<sup>1</sup>

Ellen White went on to say that God wanted Israel to learn some important lessons from this very bitter, painful experience they were going through. Then she reminds us, “Those who had been the object of His tender love were not forever set aside; before all the nations of the earth He would demonstrate His plan to bring victory out of apparent defeat, to save rather than to destroy.”<sup>2</sup>

Ellen White’s insight into God’s purposes is very encouraging for young adults in the 1990s. When we go through painful times in life, sometimes it is because of

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### **If we learn lessons from our pain, we will always come out of the experiences more fully equipped.**

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our disobedience; at other times it is because of undealt-with, unresolved issues in the lives of our parents. Disobedience always has its price. The important lesson for us is that we learn from these painful times. I find it very encouraging that God can take these bad times that look like defeat and actually turn them into victory.

This is exactly what God wants to do with us. If we learn lessons from our pain, we will always come out of the experiences more fully equipped. Sometimes God uses painful times to bring balance into our lives or to help us learn some valuable lessons.

## **REACT**

1. What experiences have I gone through that have taught me some important lessons?
2. What lessons have I learned from these experiences?
3. Why is the “lesson of obedience so necessary for our future happiness”?
4. Can you think of any reasons for painful times other than disobedience or unresolved issues in our parents’ lives?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 475.

2. *Ibid.*

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*By Jerry Connell, young-adult ministry director, College View Seventh-day Adventist Church, and chaplain at the University of Nebraska at Lincoln.*

# Israel and Adventism

## EVIDENCE

### Key Text: Jer. 31:3

Several years ago I sat in the office of a pastor friend of mine. It would be six months before he would retire from the ministry. He had been a very effective pastor. He had preached for 35 years about the soon second coming of Jesus. I said to him, "All through your ministry you have preached very strongly of the soon coming of Christ. Now that you are six months away from retirement, how are you dealing with the fact that Jesus has not come yet?"

His eyes began to water, and the tears flowed down his cheeks. His voice cracked as he said, "I never thought I would ever reach this point in my life. I really believed

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**"I really believed Jesus would come before now. Because of this I never prepared emotionally for retirement."**

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Jesus would come before now. Because of this I never prepared financially for retirement, and I am not prepared emotionally either."

As Israel went into captivity, many, especially the older generation, knew they would not be going back to the Promised Land in their lifetime. They knew the exile to Babylon was for 70 years. Out of love for His people and His concern for their welfare, God had said, "Build houses and settle down; plant gardens. . . . Marry and have sons and daughters. . . . Seek the peace and prosperity of the city to which I have carried you. . . . Pray to the Lord for it, because if it prospers, you too will prosper" (Jer. 29:5-7, NIV).

God had given Israel these instructions, and at the same time He appealed to them to turn their externalized religion into heart religion (verse 13). Before the captivity in Babylon, God had warned His people to turn away from adultery, murder, stealing, perjury, and worshipping Baal (7:9). As they waited, God's appeal to them was not the fulfillment of a prophecy. It was an appeal which they would relate to only if they would seek Him with all their heart.

## REACT

1. In relating to the soon coming of Christ, how do you interpret God's command to settle down, get married, have children, and seek prosperity?
2. What keeps me from committing adultery, stealing, or worshipping false gods?
3. If I knew Jesus was not coming in my lifetime, how would it affect my lifestyle?
4. What is the evidence in my life that I have sought the Lord with all my heart and really accepted His love and kindness?

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*By Jerry Connell, young-adult ministry director, College View Seventh-day Adventist Church, and chaplain at University of Nebraska at Lincoln.*

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# What's the Big Attraction?

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Jer. 29:12-14

As we've been studying the book of Jeremiah this quarter, we have seen how God kept pleading with the children of Israel to return to Him. Even though He had to destroy the wickedness among them, He wanted very much to call them His own. But what's the big attraction? God is fair, merciful, and forgiving. But what is it about God's character that draws us to pursue a true friendship with Him? Let's look at several character traits of God that may help us see Him as being a close friend.

One characteristic I see in God is that He is *passionate*. Webster's dictionary defines *passionate* as having or showing strong feelings. I see passion in God's words when He tells His children how He feels about their actions. He says, "My grief is beyond healing, my heart is sick within me" (8:18, RSV). Look at Jeremiah 31:20. In this text God is also expressing passion for His children.

Being *romantic* is another characteristic I see in God. Webster's dictionary defines *romantic* as pertaining to a love affair or to being fanciful or imaginative.

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## One characteristic I see in God is that He is passionate.

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We recently studied God's love affair with us in the lessons from Song of Songs. I see romance as using feeling instead of logic (29:11-14; 30:3, 17). I don't think God was logical when He gave His people a future, hope, land, and health, and healed their wounds after they rejected Him. His love for them and for us is beyond logic. Love is not logical anyway; ask anyone who is or has been married.

A final character trait of God I see in the book of Jeremiah is His *childlikeness*. I have never seen anyone more trusting and more committed to relationships than children. The Lord says, "I have loved you with an everlasting love, therefore I have continued my faithfulness to you" (31:3).

These are some of the same characteristics we look for in pursuing human relationships. Can they be the same for God? These pictures of His character are what cause me to seek an intimate friendship with Him. If I seek Him with all my heart, He will be found, and He will hear me (29:12-14). This is the big attraction: His continued love and faithfulness to me.

## REACT

1. Am I attracted to Jesus by these pictures?
2. Does looking at His character from these perspectives stimulate me to pursue Him?
3. Would I be attracted to God more if I knew Him as being playful, humorous, jealous, or lovable? As philosophical, intellectual, or scientific?

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By Kelli Holderbaum McWilliams, a dental student at the University of Nebraska Medical Center, Lincoln, Nebraska.

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## Precious Promises

### OPINION

**Key Text: 2 Tim. 4:7, 8**

Precious promises: initially it seems a suitable bromide, comforting to suburbanites in their plush pews. A young, well-connected pastor wrote: "I'm so sure of God's guiding hand that I hope I shall always be kept in that certainty. . . . My past life is brimful of God's goodness, and my sins are covered by the forgiving love of Christ crucified."\* Did he lay down his pen to take up a golf club? No! Dietrich Bonhoeffer wrote from a Nazi prison, where he was hanged. What did the promises do for him?

Or look at the people described in Hebrews 11:35-38, and notice the greatest example of all—Jesus Christ. Their trust in God led these souls to torture and a gruesome death.

If these promises are solely to assure us God will eventually save us from harm, then we are the victims of a cruel hoax. If they are a divine insurance policy, then

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### **For every Peter saved from execution, there is a Stephen killed for his faith.**

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they are ineffective. For every Peter saved from execution, there is a Stephen killed for his faith. We have no guarantee we will not end our days painfully. Neither Jeremiah nor most of his first readers lived to see the end of the Babylonian exile.

Either God is demonically toying with us, or promises have some other purpose. If we believe in a benevolent God, the latter must be true. Promises are not in the Bible principally as an insurance policy, but as tools with which we build confidence, not in events, but in the person of God. If we use the promises in this way, they are marvelously effective. Christ firmly anchors us as we face the pain and disappointments of life, without regard to our share of suffering. The thought of some future reward does not sustain us; the power of the living God does.

The distinction between promises as an insurance policy and as a tool is critical. When we use the former, the list of saints dying alone, despised, in pain, and far from rescue will disillusion us. If we use the latter, then we may find inspiration in the confidence with which these men and women of God met their fates. Bonhoeffer's words become understandable, living faith, and not pious platitudes. In the end we may say with Paul, "I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day" (2 Tim. 4:7, 8, NIV).

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\* Dietrich Bonhoeffer, *Letters and Papers From Prison* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1972).

# BRINGING US BACK



**“Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men” (Lam. 3:32, 33, NIV).**



# Unfailing Love

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture:** Lam. 3:32, 33

Take a walk with me to the Garden of Eden and listen to the voice of God saying to Adam and Eve, “You are free to eat from any tree in the garden; but you must not eat from the tree of the knowledge of good and evil, for when you eat of it you will surely die” (Gen. 2:16, 17, NIV).

Now look at Eve as she wanders away from her husband, enters into a dialogue with Satan, and there is tricked into eating the fruit. She eats it, then gives it to her husband, and he eats also. Right then, they both become sinful.

They are ashamed of themselves now. Realizing they are naked, they try to hide from God. Sin blinds their eyes, benumbs their brains, and for a moment they forget that the almighty God sees everywhere.

Get a quick glimpse at the merciful, gracious, compassionate God with His unfailing love, as He walks around the garden calling, “Adam, Adam, where are you?”

Although humanity brought grief, shame, and insult upon God, then tried to hide from Him, He still, in His unfailing love, sought them out, clothed them, and

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## **For a moment they forget that the almighty God sees everywhere.**

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provided a way of escape from eternal death. “You did not choose me, but I chose you” (John 15:16).

Have you done an inventory of your life lately to see how many times God had to bow His head in shame because of the things you say, do, or the places you go? Do you realize that, because God loves us, many times He has to bring affliction upon us to set us back on the old path?

Jeremiah says, “Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men” (Lam. 3:32, 33). The unfailing love of God is great, but don’t take it for granted. God will destroy the wicked in the end.

This week’s lesson is about the siege of Jerusalem. God brought affliction upon the children of Israel through Babylonian invasion to remind them He cared for them and He wanted them to be saved. Isn’t God’s unfailing love great?

# God's Word in Judah's World and Ours

## LOGOS

### Jer. 21; 34; 37-39

The golden thread tracing throughout Jeremiah's account of the siege of Jerusalem is "the word of the Lord" (*dabar Yahweh* in the Hebrew text). Some 25 times this expression, or some variation of it (like "Thus saith the Lord" or "The voice of the Lord"), occurs in chapters 21, 34, 37 to 39.

Initially, at the beginning of time, the word of God was spoken as a *creative* force in Genesis chapter 1. Four thousand years later, Peter identifies God's word as a *re-creative* force, producing new, converted lives for the kingdom of God. "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God" (1 Pet. 1:23, NIV). To Judah during the last 40 years of her existence and under kings Josiah, Jehoahaz, Jehoiakim, Jehoiahin, and Zedekiah, the word of God comes as a *corrective* force.

### Chapters 21 and 34

Not in chronological sequence with the following chapters, chapter 21 belongs to the reign of Zedekiah, Judah's last king, and serves as a condemnation of her rulers. Reflecting the expectation of his parents and the plan of God, the name of the central figure is Zedekiah, which means "The Lord [or Yahweh] is my righteousness." Though a weak and vacillating ruler, Zedekiah knew the source of divine aid, but called upon God mainly in times of trouble—in short, a "crisis relationship" that relaxed in fair weather. Another figure, Nebuchadnezzar, bore a name that means "O Nabu [a god], protect my son." As king of heathenistic Babylon, which was an enemy of Judah, Yahweh's chosen nation, Nebuchadnezzar sets the stage for a symbolic showdown between Nabu and Yahweh. Who will win the confrontation? No contest in this particular battle, for the "word of the Lord" has already declared the fate of His unrepentant people: "I will hand over Zedekiah king of Judah, his officials and the people in this city who survive the plague, sword and famine, to Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon" (21:7). Usually their defender, God must allow His people to experience the trial of plague, sword, and famine (mentioned some 15 times in Jeremiah) in order that they, with Him, might win the larger war of victory over sin in the great controversy between good and evil.

The first occurrence of the triad mentioned above is in Jeremiah 14:12. Its occurrence twice here in chapter 21, together with that of "no mercy or pity or compassion" (verse 7), heightens the literary effect of the passage.

Chapter 34 reiterates much of chapter 21 but adds a denunciation of Judah for her breaking faith with Yahweh by reenslaving freed Hebrews.

### Chapters 37-39

Though risky—even dangerous—it may sometimes be for the bearer of God's will, nevertheless, God sends His protection. Once again the *dabar Yahweh* came to Jeremiah (37:6), but the message was not satisfying to King Zedekiah even after he asked the prophet, "Is there any word from the Lord?" (verse 17). In fact, the word from God verifying the victory of Babylon over God's people led one Irijah

to suspect Jeremiah of treason and, therefore, he arrested, beat, and imprisoned the prophet (verses 13-17).

But they who honor God's expressed word, God Himself honors. Ebed-Melech, a Cushite, whose name means "king's servant," gave evidence of his trust in God's word by showing kindnesses to Jeremiah while others were doubting and deriding. As a result God rewarded him (38:11-13; 39:15-18). Jerusalem indeed fell, according to the decree of the *dabar Yahweh*, the "word of the Lord," but not without God's special favor being accorded to Ebed-Melech, who had faith in His overall providence. "But I will rescue you on that day, declares the Lord; you . . . will

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## **Zedekiah knew the source of divine aid but called upon God mainly in times of trouble.**

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not be handed over to those you fear. I will save you; you will escape with your life, because you trust in me, declares the Lord" (verses 17, 18).

### **Judah's World and Ours**

The "word of the Lord" throughout the book of Jeremiah and the entire Old Testament prefigures "the Word of God" (*logos tou Theou* in the Greek text) in the New Testament, and God's Word written and incarnate—and especially the latter (John 1:1, 14; Rev. 19:13). Jesus Christ, as the best expression of the word of God, gave us the supreme example of how God's plan should be operative in our experience. We have seen the results of ignoring His plan in the experience of Judah's world. How will it be in ours?

### **REACT**

1. In your own words trace the different meanings of the expression "the word of God."
2. How does one know when one's suffering is supposed to be corrective?
3. How does the term *crisis relationship* often relate to God's relationship with humanity?
4. How can a Christian be assured of recognizing the "word of God" when it is communicated to him?

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

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# A Special Delivery

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Jer. 38:6, 10**

When all around you life is in despair,  
 And you wonder if anyone really cares.  
 Like Jeremiah the prophet you have been let down  
 Into a dark, cold, pit  
 Of miry clay.  
 Peer pressure has gotten the best of you.  
 Family and friends cannot substitute  
 The loneliness you feel,  
 As you helplessly sink down into discouragement—

Ellen White says, “You must not sink down discouraged. The fainthearted will be made strong; the desponding will be made to hope. God has a tender care for His people. His ear is open unto their cry.”<sup>1</sup>

“In all ages God’s appointed witnesses have exposed themselves to reproach and persecution for the truth’s sake. Joseph was maligned and persecuted because

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**“God has a tender care for His people. His ear is open unto their cry.”**

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he preserved his virtue and integrity. David, the chosen messenger of God, was hunted like a beast of prey by his enemies. Daniel was cast into a den of lions because he was true to his allegiance to heaven. Job was deprived of his worldly possessions, and so afflicted in body that he was abhorred by his relatives and friends; yet he maintained his integrity. . . .

“These examples of human steadfastness bear witness to the faithfulness of God’s promises—His abiding presence and sustaining grace.”<sup>2</sup>

To keep from being discouraged, “The Christian should often review his past life and recall with gratitude the precious deliverance that God has wrought for him, supporting him in trial, opening ways before him when all seemed dark and forbidding, refreshing him when ready to faint.”<sup>3</sup>

## REACT

What circumstances has the Lord delivered me from?

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1. *Reflecting Christ*, p. 351.
  2. *Ibid.*, p. 357.
  3. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 187.

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By Angenetta Hill, an education major and secretary at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

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# Courage to Do Right

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Jer. 38:2**

Jeremiah's ministry spanned 40 years, during the last years of the kingdom of Judah and the early part of the Babylon captivity—40 years of conflict, political breakup, and maneuver for supremacy among the great powers surrounding Palestine. With Judah rushing to doom because she had disobeyed God's law, a most difficult task falls to Jeremiah. If he tells the truth, he must do two things: criticize the government and advise keeping faith with Babylon. It will open him to the charge of treason. Jeremiah was the only enlightened patriot in Jerusalem. Kings and empires might go, but a great idea lives on. If Babylon did not rule, someone else would.

Blindly they were selling their souls for a tawdry materiality. It was an unacceptable doctrine. For a man to advise his country to submit to a foreigner was too much. No wonder they threw him down a well (verse 6).

Jeremiah was almost put to death. Why? Because he said it was useless to resist. The Jews were not strong enough to win, and they were so wicked that God no longer would help them. The secret of Jeremiah's courage, of course, lay in the nature of his work. God had said, "You will go where I tell you to go and say what

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## **Kings and empires might go, but a great idea lives on.**

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I tell you to say" (see 1:6-8). Personal danger was nothing to him. Delivery of God's message was everything. It was not Jeremiah but Jehovah who said the city would fall, and it fell in July 586 B.C.

Anyone could have delivered Jeremiah's message had it been a popular one. Anyone would gladly have been God's voice if he knew the people would have applauded. It took a Jeremiah to carry an unpopular message to the people. It took a Jeremiah to believe that God's truth was more important than others' opinions. Are you like him?

The campus hero may be the leader of the debate team or the student-movement president, but there is more courage in a frail girl who quietly defends her Christian standards in the face of ridicule from students and teachers.

## **REACT**

1. Am I daring enough to insist on honesty in the classroom or the workplace, even at the risk of losing popularity?
2. Do I have the courage to lead out in the war against hunger, racial inequality, illiteracy, and the destruction of the environment?

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*By Sherman Haywood Cox, chaplain, religion teacher, and director of campus ministries and world missions at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# The Wrong Direction

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: 1 Sam. 15:22**

Obedience to God's will is not essential to the continuance of everyday living. We can choose to disregard what God says and do our own thing. The result of our actions will not land us where God's plan would have, but there will be a landing.

When we ask God His plan for our lives, we should be willing to heed His advice, because He always knows what is best for us. Zedekiah sought the advice of God via Jeremiah. When he heard the warning, he decided to go the other direction and not surrender to the Babylonians. Zedekiah felt he could not retrace his steps and correct his direction. Of course he was wrong.

Here are some decisive steps that can lead us in the right or wrong direction.

**1. Immediate obedience.** As we study the Word, we see God has chosen people, nature, animals, and things to demonstrate His will. The greatest blessing received is when we immediately say, "Yes, Lord, I will . . ." When we stop to look where we might end up or consider how much we don't like the instruction, our own thinking will lead to destruction, be it now or later.

**2. Fear and pride.** Zedekiah was fearful of being delivered into the hands of the enemy and of being mocked by them. Even when God promised him that he

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## Obedience to God's will is not essential to the continuance of everyday living.

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would be safe, Zedekiah felt it would be humiliating to say, "I accept the word of the Lord, as spoken through the prophet Jeremiah." When we allow others to influence our decisions because of what they think of us or might say about us, we have in essence said, "Lord, Your way is not comfortable for me; I think I'll do it my way [and fail]." The Bible says that pride goeth before a fall, and it was the combination of Zedekiah's pride and peer pressure that eventually caused him to lose everything.

**3. Acceptance.** When we have made a decision on the direction we plan to go, we have not yet accepted God's will for our lives. It is only after we have begun the journey that we can move on toward the prize. There are many who accept the seventh-day Sabbath as the true day, yet they have to start the journey by keeping the day holy.

The road of right direction is paved with unforeseen choices to make. When we make a deliberate choice that God's will is our will, the right road will be much easier to follow.

## REACT

Have I made decisions knowing they were not the Lord's will for me?

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*By Ivy Starks, a senior majoring in communication at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# What Is Strength?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Hab. 3:19**

A mighty nation is to invade Judah. What is needed is strength. Judah's princes want the king to fight the nation. One lone prophet of God says, "Give up, it is hopeless. God is not on our side." The king has a decision to make. The future of the nation is in jeopardy.

Zedekiah, king of Judah, had this decision. Being the king, he wanted to strengthen his political power. All leaders, to keep leadership, must exhibit strength. This story shows at least two versions of strength.

The princes wanted to stand up to the power of Babylon. The false prophets tried to show that God would not allow Judah to fall. This could not be true strength. God told them to submit. Sometimes it is time to stand up like Elijah and call fire from heaven. Sometimes it is time to submit meekly to the guards taking you away, as Jesus did. Following the plan of the false prophets would assure destruction. Zedekiah seemed to know this, but he was fearful of the princes.

Jeremiah speaks the word of God clearly. He might have tried to give religious backing to the princes, but he could not. He had true strength, the only thing that

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### **Zedekiah did not want to be strong; he wanted to look strong.**

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could save Judah, strength based on obedience to the word of God. True strength is not necessarily looking strong by fighting militarily; it is being strong by standing for the truth. John was strong on Patmos, but he did not look strong. The Christian martyrs were strong burning at the stake, but they did not look strong. Jeremiah clearly articulated the way to salvation; this was strength through obedience.

Zedekiah did not want to be strong; he wanted to look strong. This caused his downfall and the downfall of a nation. He tried to sneak words to and from Jeremiah while actually conforming to the wishes of the princes. He was not a leader. He was a placator. By trying to look strong, he showed himself weaker and weaker. God punished Zedekiah by allowing his sons to be killed and his eyes to be plucked out. Jeremiah, on the other hand, was taken care of by order of the king of Babylon. The difference between the two was their understanding of strength.

Let us, with Jeremiah, stand up for truth. We can have the true strength. Let us become strong by obedience to the word of God.

## **REACT**

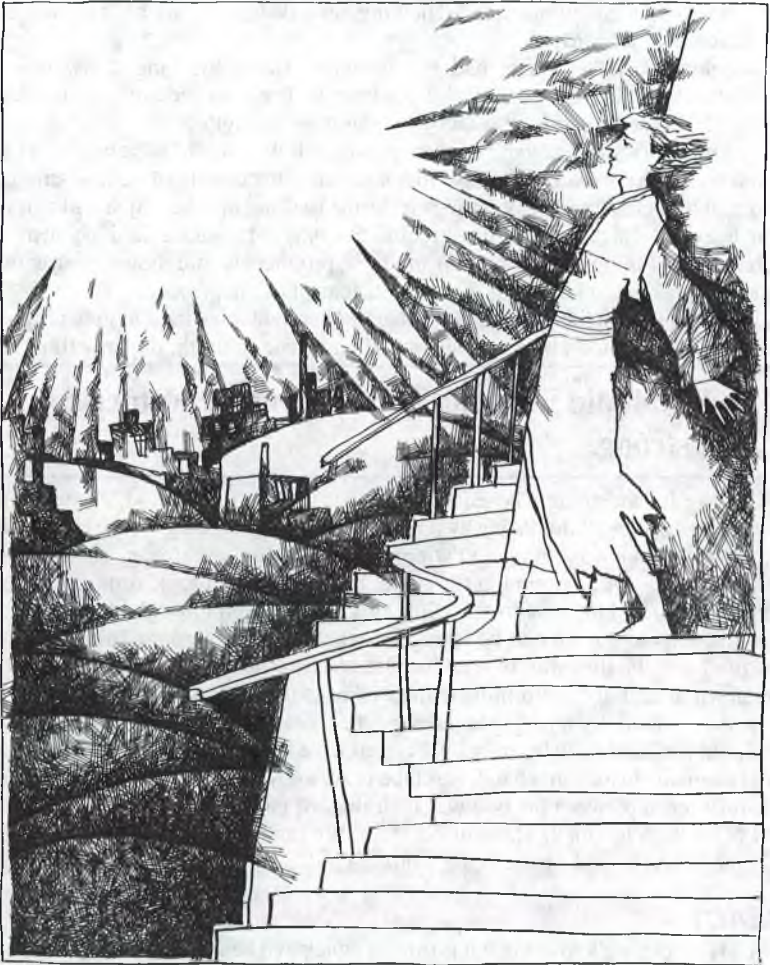
1. How can we know when it is time to attack evil head on and when to submit to evil's power?
2. Why didn't Zedekiah's placating work?

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*By Sherman Cox, Jr., a graduate student in computer science at the University of Alabama at Huntsville.*

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# WHY AREN'T THEY LISTENING?



**“It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning: great is thy faithfulness” (Lam. 3:22, 23).**



# The Coming Storm

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Lam. 3:21, 22**

No one heard the pounding and screaming of the man outside the window. The music was too loud. "There's a storm coming!" he cried. "All will be killed unless you listen. Depend on me, and you will be saved." But still no one heard. The party became louder as the man ran from window to window, pounding and screaming to be heard, but nobody paid any attention. And yet he didn't give up. He stood there, out in the cold, dark, rainy night, and pleaded with the people to listen. He refused to give up.

The book of Lamentations is a picture of Jesus pleading, through His prophet Jeremiah, for us to listen and be aware of the impending crisis. And yet nobody hears. The same picture of Jesus knocking on our heart's door, wanting to come in and rescue our lives, can be found in Revelation 3:20. Why does it seem we don't listen?

As I read the paper and watch the news on TV, I am constantly reminded that a storm really is coming, and the only way we will be ready for that storm is to open

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## **The party became louder as the man ran from window to window, pounding and screaming to be heard.**

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the door and listen to what Christ is saying. My heart aches with Jeremiah's as I look around and see all the lonely, wandering people who are lost in this world. And when I realize that all they need to do is be quiet and listen, I ask myself, *Why aren't they listening?*

And still there is hope. "Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed" (Lam. 3:21, 22, NIV).

*His compassion never ends.* This is the message of Lamentations through the tears that fall from Jeremiah's eyes. And even through the tears that fall from God's eyes when He sees the sins of His people, His compassion *never* ends. Read chapter 2 and realize that God hates sin passionately, but that He loves the sinner even more passionately. As you read the book of Lamentations, feel the heartache that we cause God when we refuse to listen to Him or when we turn Him away from our door, and yet feel the everlasting mercy that He has promised us. Realize that even though our sins are great, His mercy is even greater, greater than any storm in our lives, greater than the sins of the whole world, so great that His mercy will never end.

A storm is coming! Are you listening?

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By Jeff Wood, a Task Force worker, Rocky Mountain Conference, Denver, Colorado.

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# When Crying Is Not Enough

## LOGOS

### Lam. 5:20

Lamentations is a book that can be readily appreciated by anyone who has cried himself to sleep. If you have ever sobbed uncontrollably until your eyes burned or have felt the internal anguish of your innermost soul being peeled from the inside out; if you have ever wakened and realized that all else in life had been blocked out temporarily and have been seized up for fear of what you may have missed during the emotional wash—you have experienced Lamentations. Or if you have ever been too hurt actually to get the tears started, and have lain very still, hoping no one else could hear them falling; if you have ever longed for comfort and at the same time hoped those closest to you would not discover your problem, because having to explain your dilemma would only reinforce the loneliness—you have experienced Lamentations. Jeremiah's experience speaks to those who have not only cried themselves to sleep, but have found that crying was not enough.

Some people tell experiences of crying in hopeless despair until they took responsibility for their part of the mess they were in, thus enabling them to face the problem more rationally and to feel better. Others tell how they cried until they remembered God was with them, admitted their helplessness, cast their cares upon the Lord, quit struggling so hard, and felt better. But I also know people who cried themselves to sleep, woke up feeling a little better physically because they had gotten some rest; and yet felt mentally, emotionally, and spiritually horrible because their problems were still with them. This last group of people are the ones who have experienced Jeremiah's Lamentations.

The prophet weeps bitterly in chapter 1 as he recounts all the tragedies that have come upon God's people. "How lonely sits the city that once was full of people!" (verse 1, NRSV). "She weeps bitterly in the night, . . . she has no one to comfort her" (verse 2). Even "the roads to Zion mourn" (verse 4). "Her foes have become the masters, her enemies prosper" (verse 5). The situation was so bad that "she took no thought of her future" (verse 9). Jerusalem even "called to . . . [her] lovers but they deceived [her]" (verse 19).

In chapter 2 Jeremiah is able to think clearly enough to point out that God is simply allowing the natural consequences of Judah's choices to take their course (verses 1-13). Then he correctly points to the false prophets of Zion, who have led the people astray, and gives them credit for the nation's predicament (verses 14-19).

Chapter 3 begins the lament again, but quickly turns to the mercy and salvation of God. "The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases, his mercies never come to an end" (verse 22). "For the Lord will not reject forever" (verse 31). "Although he causes grief, he will have compassion according to the abundance of his steadfast love" (verse 32). Jeremiah concludes chapter 3 by exhorting the people to turn to God's forgiveness and appealing to God to avenge Judah's enemies.

Through chapters 4 and 5 Jeremiah repeats again the effects of the siege on Jerusalem, the uselessness of the false prophets, and the absence of external help, and acknowledges the sinful and evil condition of the people. At the end of chapter 5, the very end of the book, Jeremiah is still asking "Why have you forgotten us

completely? Why have you forsaken us these many days? Restore us to yourself, O Lord, . . . unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure” (verses 20-22).

Jeremiah’s life ended before Jerusalem was rebuilt and before the problems described in Lamentations were solved. Thus, his writing is a model for those who sob their hearts out, identify the problem, take responsibility for their part in it, realize the solution, hold on to God’s presence, fall asleep in exhaustion, and yet wake to find that the problem is still there.

It is wonderful to hear stories of times when people just felt better after crying

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## **Ever longed for comfort and at the same time hoped those closest to you would not discover your problem?**

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themselves to sleep, but for those who wake up and still feel lousy, here is the book of Lamentations.

### **REACT**

1. From your reading of this book, what practical suggestions would Jeremiah seem to make to a person when they wake up from a good cry and still have their problems confronting them?

2. What is God’s role in answering our lamentations on life?

3. What is our role in answering others’ lamentations on life?

4. A fellow employee is dying of lung cancer, probably attributable to smoking. What do you, as a Christian, say to comfort him?

5. Your nine-year-old nephew has lost a beloved pet and is blaming God for taking it away from him. What do you say to comfort him?

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*By Steven Hadley, pastor of the Denver South SDA Church, Denver, Colorado.*

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# Meaning in the Madness

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Lam. 3:32, 33**

“The sorrow of the prophet over the utter perversity of those who should have been the spiritual light of the world, his sorrow over the fate of Zion and of the people carried captive to Babylon, is revealed in the lamentations he has left on record as a memorial of the folly of turning from the counsels of Jehovah to human wisdom. Amid the ruin wrought, Jeremiah could still declare, ‘It is of the Lord’s mercies that we are not consumed’; and his constant prayer was, ‘Let us search and try our ways, and turn again to the Lord.’ Lamentations 3:22, 40. . . . The prophet’s absolute faith in God’s eternal purpose to bring order out of confusion, and to demonstrate to the nations of earth and to the entire universe His attributes of justice and love, now led him to plead confidently in behalf of those who might turn from evil to righteousness.

“But now Zion was utterly destroyed; the people of God were in their captivity. Overwhelmed with grief, the prophet exclaimed: ‘How doth the city sit solitary,

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**“The trials of life are God’s workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character.”**

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that was full of people! how is she become as a widow! she that was great among the nations, and princess among the provinces, how is she become tributary!’ [Lamentations 1:1].”<sup>1</sup>

“‘Blessed are they that mourn: for they shall be comforted.’ Matthew 5:4. . . .

“The Saviour’s words have a message of comfort to those also who are suffering affliction or bereavement. Our sorrows do not spring out of the ground. God ‘doth not afflict willingly nor grieve the children of men.’ Lamentations 3:33. When He permits trials and afflictions, it is ‘for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.’ Hebrews 12:10. . . . How many there are who would never have known Jesus had not sorrow led them to seek comfort in Him!

“The trials of life are God’s workmen, to remove the impurities and roughness from our character. . . . Upon no useless material does the Master bestow such careful, thorough work. Only His precious stones are polished after the similitude of a palace.”<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. Why is it important to find meaning in times of loss?
2. What are some lessons I have learned during times of adversity?

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1. *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 461, 462.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 9, 10.

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By Delmer A. Johnson, associate pastor of the Denver South SDA Church, Denver, Colorado.

## Beside the Grieving

### EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Lam. 2:10-14**

God's temple lay in ruins. Zion was desolate. Priests and prophets had been slain in the sanctuary; women raped; princes executed, then disgraced. Young and old, men and women, lay silent in the dust of the streets. Children had begged for bread and cried because of thirst. Finally, even compassionate mothers had desperately turned to cannibalism. We cannot grasp the horror and desperation of those days.

Those who survived had witnessed—had felt the force—of these things. Their friends, their family members, their leaders, were exiled, dead, and missing. Their grief was profound. Their mourning bitter. Their sadness seemed overwhelming. Their tears endless. Their emotions raw. They were without comfort.

Where was the meaning? The Lord seemed like their enemy. Tragedy and chaos surrounded them.

God's prophet put words to their grief. Their experience was his. He wrote what

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### **Finally, even compassionate mothers had desperately turned to cannibalism.**

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they felt. Later, Jeremiah would stay with his people in their grief, even when they made what he considered the wrong decision.

How can we be helpful at times of loss? Our presence shows we care when words cannot. Tears, a gentle touch, protesting injustice—all convey empathy. Allowing our grieving friend to put words to her pain, helping her do so—it's good to have an accepting friend by our side. That was the function of these laments—to allow a people to express their grief.

Jerusalem was chaotic. Lamentations, by contrast, is the most structured book in the Bible. Passionate feelings are expressed with careful thought. It was as though the prophet brought order amid confusion. Four chapters are acrostics. Each contains 22 verses, beginning with successive letters of the Hebrew alphabet. Chapter 3, the central chapter, contains 66 verses organized in 22 triplets—the first three verses beginning with Aleph, the next three with Beth, and so forth.

The book's theological heart is the center of chapter 3. These verses focus on the goodness, faithfulness, and love of God toward those who survived the destruction. For them, the prophet had a message of hope. Not only was he with them in their grief, from A to Z, but in faith he looked to a brighter day.

### **REACT**

1. How have others been most helpful to me at times of loss?
2. How do I feel in the presence of a grieving person?

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*By Delmer A. Johnson, associate pastor of the Denver South SDA Church, Denver, Colorado.*

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# The Original Worst-Case Scenario

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Lam. 3:22, 23

Lamentations provides a unique window for us to view what separation and utter rejection from God look like. It's real life at its worst, the original worst-case scenario—full-scale crisis, yet not without warning. What is it that brought men like Jeremiah and Job to speak of God's compassion in the midst of terrifying slaughter, wholesale devastation, and what was described as God's fierce wrath?

Crisis is woven throughout the fabric of life, and like the Jewish remnant, we can either choose to ignore its future inevitability or look at the carefully composed laments for their wisdom. What was God's use of this time period for His people? What was their response? Perhaps we can ask ourselves these same two questions in preparation for, or in the midst of, crisis.

### God's Use

Look at what God may be trying to teach us about Himself. He alone can save. His ways are not our ways. His purposes are His own. These truths are rooted in the

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**Job could have said to Jeremiah, "I know exactly what you're going through."**

---

fact that His judgments are true and righteous. Might He be bringing us to conclude, as did Job, "How great is God—beyond our understanding!" (36:26, NIV).

### Our Response

Look at what God may be trying to teach us about ourselves. Is it a test of, or a new dimension of, faith? A God-ordained faith and not our idolatrous faith? Maybe a deeper level of trust, causing us to fall on the strength of Christ? It could include waiting and listening. Job says we can hear the voice of God in the midst of affliction. We may need to take the time to examine ourselves and with painful honesty ask, "Is there ignored sin?" How about our focus—is it time to reassess priorities?

It seems the smoldering coals of crisis ignore wisdom. This wisdom confesses, "I know that my Redeemer lives" (19:25); "My intercessor is my friend" (16:20); and "Great is your faithfulness" (Lam. 3:23). It could be that we know very little of misery and mercy. It could be the beginning of wisdom. How are you responding?

## REACT

1. How has God used exile in my spiritual experience as an act of mercy?
2. How can such a vivid portrayal of destruction concurrently inspire trust in God?

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*By Beth Schneidewind, spiritual-nature coordinator, a lay staff position at Denver South SDA Church, Denver, Colorado.*

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# The Only Certainty

## OPINION

**Key Text: Lam. 5:19**

Today we live in a world in which the only certainty is change.

The once-great Soviet Union has been reduced to a huddled group of countries that can no longer govern or even feed themselves. The nuclear weapons that once made Russia the second most powerful nation on earth are now being offered to the highest bidder.

Sarajevo, the once-model city and host of the 1988 Olympics, is now the model of destruction, torn by war much the same as Jerusalem in the days of Jeremiah.

As we look around for something to believe in, something that will be the same a year from now as it is today, we are left with the hollow feeling that the only certainty is change.

We have a certainty: "Thou, O Lord, remainest for ever; thy throne from generation to generation" (5:19). This is the Lord who created the earth, who died to redeem this earth from sin, and who will return to claim this earth as His own. As

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## The Bible has shown us the future, and the future must end.

---

surely as the Bible can show us the past, it can also show us the future. It has shown us the future, and the future must end.

Why is this certainty in the Lord of such vital importance to each of us? If our future is tied to this world, and this world passes away, we pass away with it. If our certainty is tied to the Lord, who "remainest for ever," then we also remain forever.

How do we know that these things will come to pass? Lamentations 2:17: "The Lord hath done that which he had devised; he hath fulfilled his word that he had commanded in the days of old." The Lord has spoken. It will come to pass. The only question is, Will we hear?

"Great is thy faithfulness." Of this we can be certain. Jeremiah knew where his certainty lay. Think about where you are placing yours.

## REACT

1. In what ways is God changeable and what ways unchangeable?
2. Why is it important to humanity to find something that is unchangeable?
3. Your neighbor—an agnostic—remarks to you, "Looks as though the world's finally going to destroy itself!" What is the first thing you would say?

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*By Darrell F. Schuler, a dentist in Aurora, Colorado.*

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## Next Quarter's Lessons

# Philippians and Colossians

If you have not yet received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 1994, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### **Lesson 1: How Will Christ Finish What He Began?**

*Scripture:* Phil. 1:6

*Theme:* Paul introduces his letter to the Philippians by focusing on the spiritual goal that Christ upholds before the Christian who is awaiting His second advent. The goal is attainable because Christ supplies the power to reach it.

### **Lesson 2: Jesus, Our Friend**

*Scripture:* Phil. 1:21

*Theme:* Paul's success as an ambassador for Christ, despite his imprisonment in Rome, illustrates the fact that Christ will sustain His servants whose lives are worthy of the gospel and whose witness is faithful despite suffering.

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by Marianne Morris

*Sins of the Father* is the shocking true story of a predatory child molester and the people in his family and church who wouldn't believe it.

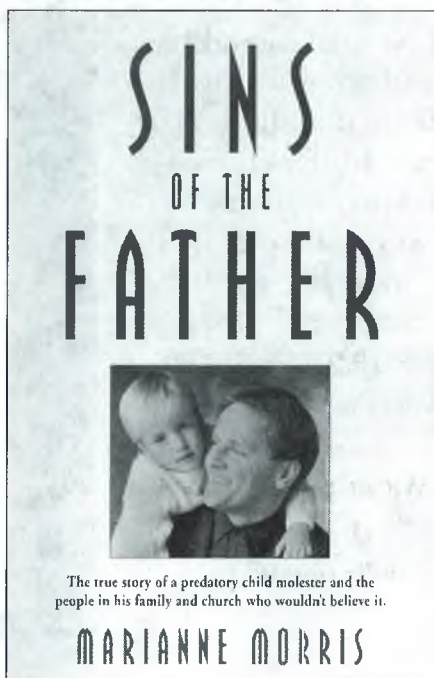
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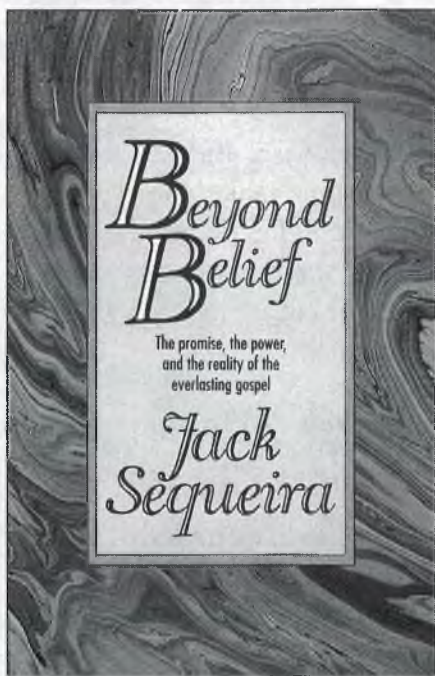
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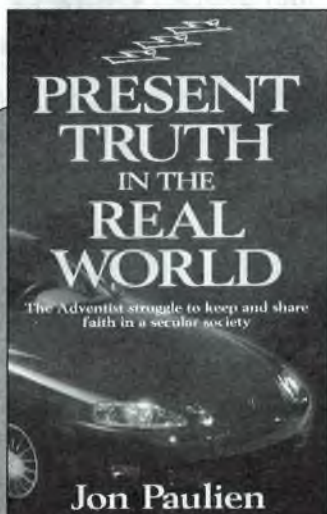
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# Crucial issues facing Christians today

# *Wrestling With Reality*

by Martin Weber

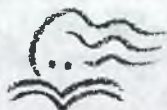
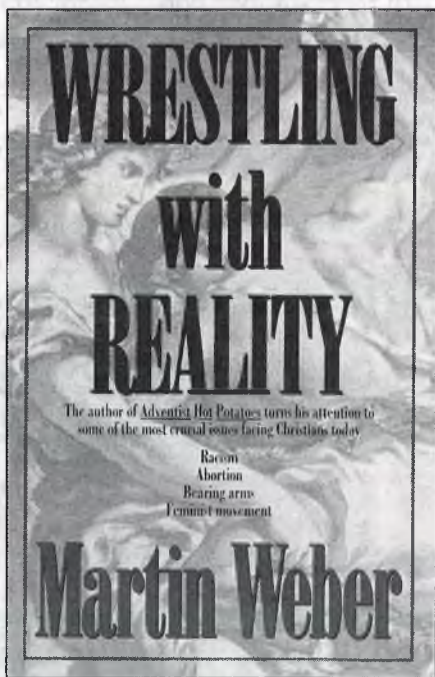
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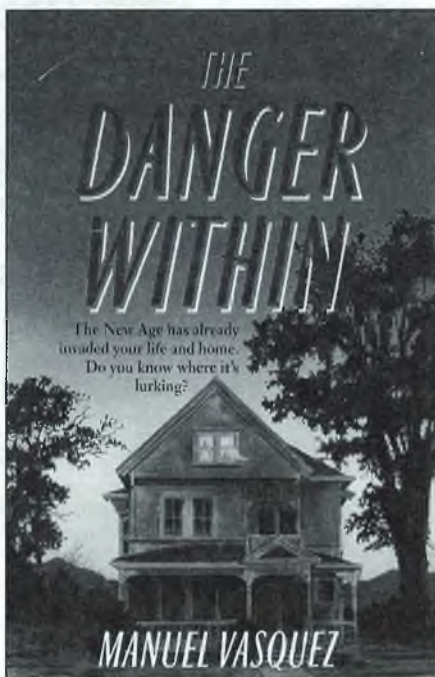
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# Yes, you can change!

# Never Good Enough

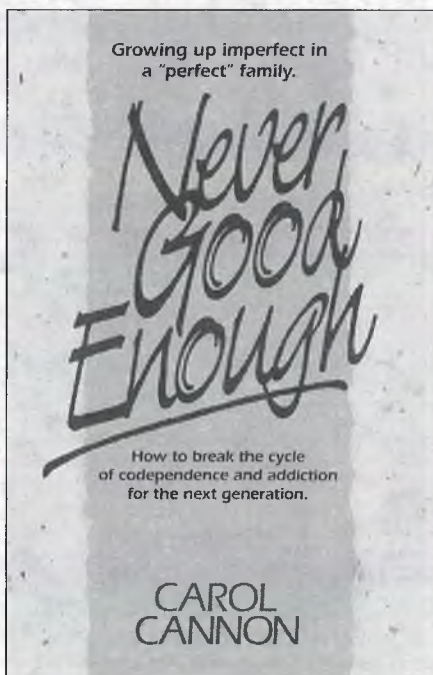
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Who cares what God says anymore?

# God Says, but I Think

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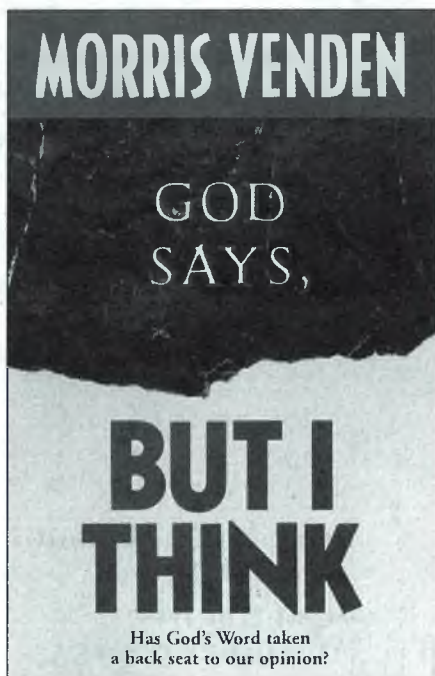
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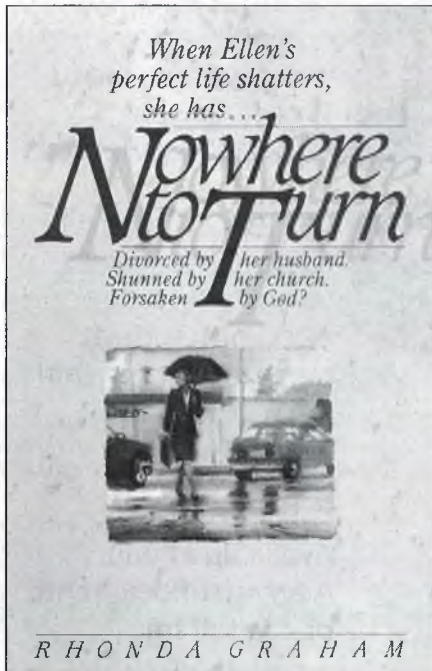
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Why is this happening to me, God?

# Nowhere to Turn

by Rhonda Graham

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