

JULY-SEPTEMBER 1997

CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

**The
Parables:
Truth in
Small
Packages**



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THE PARABLES: TRUTH IN SMALL PACKAGES

JULY - SEPTEMBER 1997

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Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

The following pages represent the creative energy of a truly international group of Adventist young adults. The map above indicates the locations of the writing groups that have participated in *CQ*'s writing program for this quarter.

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson quarterly, more than 300 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 individually to the subject under study.

Worldwide circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000. It is published in the English, Spanish, Portuguese, Italian, and Finnish languages.

Ever think about writing a Sabbath School Quarterly?

Why not! Each year 300 young adults from around the world participate in the *Collegiate Quarterly* writing program. CQ gives Seventh-day Adventist young people aged 18 to 35 a unique opportunity to grow spiritually, to share the benefits of their Bible study, to exchange ideas, and to contribute to the mission of the church.

You are the most important ingredient in our CQ formula because you can be the answer to our greatest need—the need for caring, committed contributing authors. If you think you'd like to participate in the writing of a lesson—and get paid for it—write us today:

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CQ
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Illustrator



This quarter's artist, Lori Hahn, lives in Hastings, Michigan. She attends Andrews University, where she is a senior majoring in elementary-education. She says she enjoys life in general, those big, yellow smiley faces, and Chinese food. Some of her best experiences include counseling at Camp Au Sable, Grayling, Michigan; traveling to Russia with her father; working in the dean's office at Andrews University's Lamson Hall; and teaching kindergarten in Tennessee as a Taskforce worker.

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 300 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 59,000.

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" (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 the Bible passages indicated in the bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.

4. Read the remainder of the 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.

"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.*

LOST-AND-FOUND DEPARTMENT



“The Sovereign Lord says: I myself will search for my sheep and look after them. . . . I will rescue them from all the places where they were scattered on a day of clouds and darkness’” (Ezek. 34:11, 12, NIV).

Introduction to Lost . . .

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ezek. 34:11, 12

A group of high school students and their teacher took a wrong turn while hiking in the Rocky Mountains. Lost! For 24 hours in extreme weather conditions, there was no doubt in any of their minds that they were indeed lost and that their survival depended on being rescued before they froze to death. A winter blizzard hindered rescue operations for a time. When an army helicopter finally spotted them and lifted them to safety (at a cost exceeding \$20,000), do you think that there was rejoicing at base camp regardless of the cost? You bet!

A wagon train left Reno, Nevada, in 1847, en route to the Sacramento Valley. The Donner party knew exactly where they were going. They were on the right trail, but bad weather overtook them—and they were lost, with most of the group perishing.

A small party of blueberry pickers, thinking that they knew exactly where they were going, wandered around in circles picking blueberries in the White Shell Forest. They were enjoying the pleasant afternoon while their blueberry picking

How do we know that we are not becoming lost while we're picking blueberries?

led them farther and farther away from where they meant to be. The group did not realize that they were lost until nightfall came and there was no sight of their cabin.

Lost: One group knew it, one group was on the right trail but ended up lost anyway, and one group felt certain they were on track, but never reached their destination.

No one wants to be lost, but on what do you base your assessment of where you are? How do we know that we are not becoming lost while we're picking blueberries?

Whether we stray deliberately, unintentionally, or are victims of circumstance, does it make any difference to our consequence or to the rescuer? What are the criteria of our being lost? Does being rescued depend upon our realization that we are lost?

By Randy Cameron, a commercial real-estate manager; and Marilyn Cameron, a music education student at the University of Calgary, Alberta.

Are They Worth the Effort?

LOGOS

Luke 15

If you have ever lost something that was very precious to you and have been in anguish until you found it, you will be able to identify with the theme of the three parables Jesus told in Luke 15.

When we lose something we consider of little value, we usually do not waste much time looking for it, realizing we can easily replace it. The amount of effort we invest is related to the value we place upon the lost object.

It is clear in Luke 15:1, 2 that there was a vast difference between Jesus and the religious leaders of the church as to how they valued certain types of people.

Eating with someone was considered an act of acceptance. Jesus was eating and fellowshiping with “tax collectors” and “sinners,” and this angered the pious Pharisees and “teachers of the law,” for it was opposite of what they would have done.

The tax collectors were their own countrymen who would stoop so low as to act as pawns for the hated Romans by collecting those despicable taxes. They were considered the lowest of the low, for not only were they pawns of the Romans, but they often lined their own pockets by collecting more than required at the expense of their own people.

The term *sinners* referred to all people who showed no interest in and even disdain for the Pharisees’ pious, legalistic brand of religion. We can begin to see why these pious leaders were so upset when Jesus, this great preacher and healer, spoke and even ate with a group of people whom they considered of no value and whom they purposely ignored and despised.

This was the only time in Jesus’ teaching when He told three parables to emphasize the important point He wanted to make. Jesus was so deeply disturbed by the attitude of the religious leaders about who matters to God and how they viewed these people that He wanted to be sure they got the message clearly.

The Parables

The common thread in the three parables—the lost sheep, the lost coin, and the lost son—is that something of great value was lost or missing. Jesus was attempting to hammer the point home to these pious leaders that lost people matter to God and, therefore, should matter to them. He makes the message even stronger when He emphasizes the point in each parable that there is a great celebration of joy when the lost are found.

Unique and important truths are found in each parable that Jesus wanted understood.

Regarding the parable of the lost sheep, every shepherd knows that when a sheep is lost, it knows it is lost and becomes frantic but is usually unable to find its way back to the flock. The shepherd must go and look for it, or it will die.

Having worked with sheep in Colorado while in university, I know this to be true. Sheep are ignorant when it comes to finding their way alone.

Similarly, there are people in the world who have a sense of being lost but who have no idea what to do about it and will probably not find their way to God unless someone looks for them.

In Luke 15:7, the comment regarding the 99 righteous persons who do not need to repent is a statement of irony to the Pharisees, who saw themselves as righteous and in no need of repentance. Knowing their deluded state of thinking, Jesus is saying it should be obvious to them that these sinners they despise should be the ones to receive the love and attention Jesus was showing them, since He had come to save sinners.

In the lost-coin parable, the coin is lost but does not know it. Only the woman knows it, and, therefore, it is up to her to find the coin. There are people who must be shown their lost condition because they are blindly unaware of it.

To the Pharisees Jesus is making the point that they above all people, as religious leaders, should recognize lost people and be making the effort to win them to God instead of despising them.

In the parable of the lost son, the son knew he was in a lost condition, knew the way back, but felt he could not and would not be accepted by his father when he returned. Too many people have a warped understanding of God's unconditional love and acceptance and are, therefore, reluctant to return to Him.

The common thread in the three parables is that something of great value was lost or missing.

Jesus was making the following two main points in this parable:

- The younger son represented the tax collectors and sinners with whom Jesus was fellowshiping. They needed to realize they could come to Jesus just as they were, and He would love, accept, and forgive them.

- The older son represented the Pharisees, who appeared jealous and upset that Jesus was focusing attention on these unfortunate people rather than on them. The older son's attitude was like that of the religious leaders.

In all three parables, Jesus emphasizes the point that lost people matter to God and should, therefore, matter to us who know God.

If you were to find yourself in the lost condition represented by one of the three parables, isn't it comforting to know that God will do everything possible to find you because you matter that much to Him?

REACT

1. In what way is the attitude of the "Pharisees and readers of the law" seen in churches today?

2. What do you suppose were the thoughts of the "tax collectors and sinners" as Jesus finished the three parables?

3. Which parable do you relate to the most? Why?

By Clayton Stanwick, pastor of the Mountain View Seventh-day Adventist Church, Calgary, Alberta.

Church Is for Sinners

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 15:1, 2

In *Christ's Object Lessons*, pages 185-211, and the *Testimonies for the Church*, volume 2, pages 20-22, Ellen White makes some interesting points about the parables of the lost coin, the lost sheep, and the lost son. Each relates to a different state of being lost and illustrates how we should relate it to our everyday lives.

The lost sheep knows that it is lost but doesn't know how to find its way back to the fold. The shepherd secures the other 99 in the fold and sets out to find the one that is lost. He searches diligently and eventually rescues it and brings it back to the fold. He doesn't just lead the sheep back to the fold; he places the smelly beast on his back and carries the source of his stress home. We may expect that the shepherd would be grumbling the whole way back, but instead he calls out to his friends to celebrate with him on the return of his lost sheep.

The shepherd doesn't wait at the fold for the sheep to return then grudgingly open the fold and let the wandering offender back into the fold. He seeks out the lost sheep. How do we react to lost sheep? Do we seek them out? How do we respond when they come back to church?

"Very many have an exacting spirit. They require them to come to just such

He places the smelly beast on his back and carries the source of his stress home.

and such terms before they will reach to them the helping hand. Thus they hold them off at arms' length. They have not learned that they have a special duty to go and search for these lost sheep. They must not wait till these come to them."

The same principles apply to the lost coin and the prodigal son. The coin does not realize that it is lost, but it is still considered of such value that it is sought out and saved. The prodigal son returns to his father expecting to be a slave, but the father has placed a high value on his errant son as well. He is fully restored through love and grace. There is celebration in the house.

A hospital is a place for the sick; the healthy need not be there. The church is for sinners, and the saints should be out trying to bring the sinners to this spiritual hospital. Judgment is the responsibility of God. All we can do is help look for the lost.

REACT

1. How do church members sometimes act like the older brother in the parable?
2. What can the individual do to offset such reactions?
3. Should righteous, pious living be a Christian's goal? Explain your answer.

**Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 20, 21.

By Darcy Allen, a predestinist student at Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

The Prodigal Sons: God Loves Black Sheep

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 15:28

No, there is no typographical error in the title. There were two prodigals.

None of us identifies with the son who leaves home. And we are always ready to condemn or criticize those who behave like the son who left home.

Journalists love to dig into the past of our leaders and publish their sins in full color with vivid detail. How would you like it if you found every aspect of your past dug up and exposed in your local newspaper? This is a question every person needs to ask before accusing another. How easily we condemn or criticize.

Watch as your girlfriend grows coarse and cheap. As your husband becomes an alcoholic and is fired from his job. As your sister turns to prostitution to pay for her cocaine habit. As your father murders a police officer. Suddenly you get an idea of how God must suffer when one of His children goes wrong.

We do not see one another the way God sees us. We tend to put people on the garbage pile. God never does that. Every individual is of great value to God.

This parable of the prodigal son is not just about humanity; it is also about God. It was given in response to an attack on the character of Christ. It gives us a picture of who God really is, a God who never gives up on any of us.

Regardless of their characteristics, both sons were prodigals.

David says in Psalm 119:176: "I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commandments" (NIV). If we recognize our problem and ask God to seek and guide us, it does not matter whether we are brother number one or brother number two. God loves black sheep.

How would you describe the brother who stayed at home? Narrow, unsympathetic, bigoted, critical? What about ourselves? Do we think of ourselves as righteous, when we are far from being approved by God? We may be discourteous, abrupt, harsh, jealous, pious, and self-righteous. Or we may be irresponsible, selfish, tempted, shortsighted, rebellious, disobedient, rash, stubborn, shamelessly immoral, wastefully extravagant, and recklessly prodigal. Regardless of their characteristics, both sons were prodigals, not so different after all.

Give me a humble and contrite heart, O Lord, that I may see my own need and forever turn to You, rejoicing with You when others return, as well.

REACT

1. How would you write the rest of the story? Would it have a happy or sad ending?
2. Do the two sons recognize they are not different? Explain your answer.
3. How does each son relate to the characteristics of remorse and humility?

By Barbara Chipeur, a dentist, and Bubbles Meharry, a dental consultant, Calgary, Alberta.

Let's Party!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 15:22-24

When I think of Jesus' three parables about lostness, I am struck by a common theme that must be very important, since Jesus repeated it in three similar ways.

- In the story of the lost sheep, He said, "Would you not go find it?" First, we have the opportunity to actively seek others and to share the gift of God's love with them. But Jesus does not stop here. When the lost sheep is found, it is time to rejoice and celebrate.

- In the parable of the lost coin, once again friends are invited over, and rejoicing takes place.

- Finally, there is the story of the returning wayward son. The focus at the end of the story is on the celebration the father prepared for the son with music, dance, and a feast. The father had forgiven the son and announced a celebration even before being asked for forgiveness. He also told the older son, "We had to celebrate and be glad, because this brother of yours . . . was lost and is found" (Luke 15:32, NIV).

As I think of my own walk with God and how wonderful it is that He is saving me, it's easy to lose sight of the fact that it is such a wonderful gift. It is also easy to lose a sense of responsibility to share my joy with others.

Everyone deserves the right to hear about the love of God.

Everyone deserves the right to hear about the love of God. We must be careful not to prejudge people and to think they are not interested in spiritual questions. If we are so happy in what we have found, will they refuse to find themselves a part of the same joy?

God looks actively for us, searching us out, and says we should do the same. He teaches us to celebrate with people who return or are found. Finally, He wants us to resist ever assuming that someone is not ready to hear about God. All deserve the chance to decide for themselves.

REACT

1. Explain specifically what celebration entails in the Bible.
2. In what specific ways can we today celebrate the lost being found?
3. What do you think our responsibility is with respect to others' finding God?

By Kevin Andersen, a dentist, and his wife, LeeAnn, a dental hygienist, Calgary, Alberta.

“Look! All These Years . . .”

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 15:29

“I’ve been slaving for you and never disobeyed your orders” (Luke 15:29, NIV). Sound familiar? Have you ever uttered similar words, or have they ever crossed your mind?

Rules. Order. Tradition. Be proper. Be good. These boundaries have a way of governing your flow of life. Many people become confused without them while others thrive with few, if any, boundaries. Life is really quite simple: follow the rules, receive the rewards. But what happens when you don’t follow the rules yet receive the rewards, or you follow the rules and don’t receive any rewards? Suddenly, we have disturbances in the flow of life.

This point of conflict seems evident in families, at work, in the church family, and sometimes even among friends. The older brother in Luke 15 felt this same conflict too. He worked hard for his father, did all that he was told, and stayed by his father’s side. Yet he never received a party so grand as the one given for his wandering brother. His younger brother didn’t deserve it. It was just plain unfair.

There are people who go to work every day, never get sick, are punctual, socialize very little, keep their noses to the grindstone, and maintain good productivity. Then there are others who don’t quite meet the standards of the ideal worker,

Showing my “quick-draw” wit is challenging and humorous.

yet, because of their personality and aggressiveness, they are accepted as good workers. In the event of a promotion, if the less-than-ideal worker gets the job, tension builds within the ideal worker. Again, it’s not fair.

Putting together an effective worship service takes attention to detail, advance planning, creativity, and skill. When the service makes a powerful impact on the congregation, often the visible people are praised while organizers in the background are left unnoticed. It’s not fair.

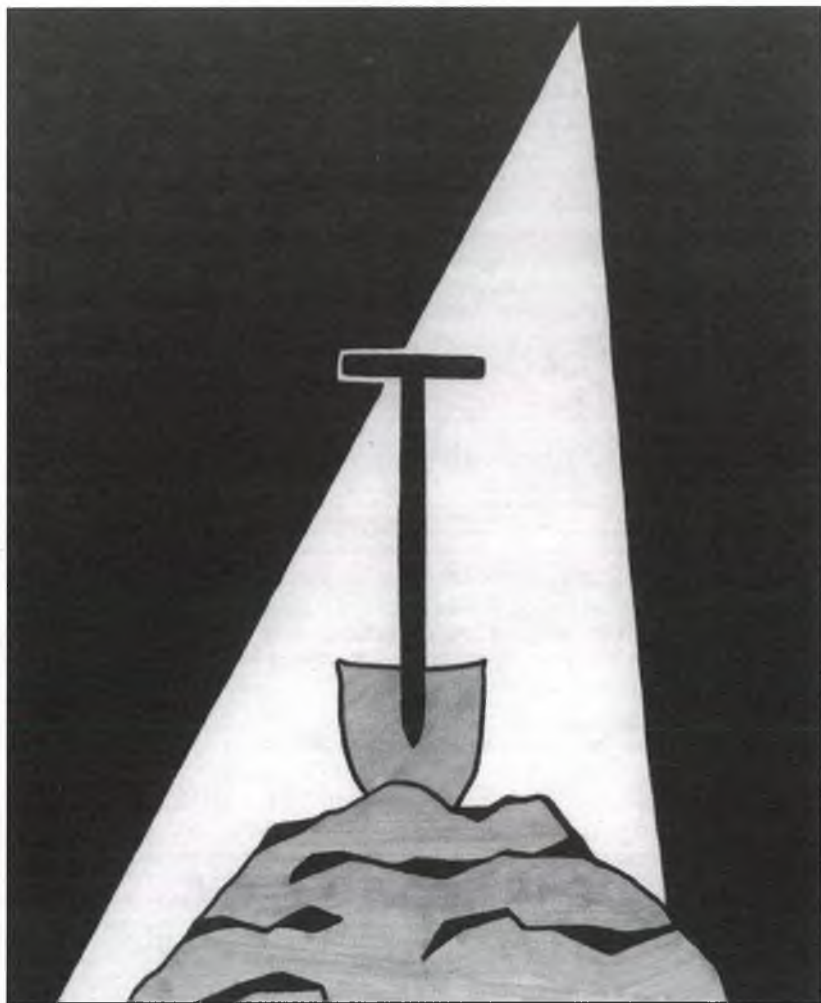
Have any of your friends shared with another person some personal or private information belonging to you just to gain that person’s favor? I’ve done it in the form of ribbing and jest. Showing my “quick-draw” wit is challenging and humorous. But it becomes no longer funny when someone’s feelings are hurt. It’s not as though I am trying to hurt anyone; it just happens. Not fair at all.

REACT

1. If you were the older brother in Luke 15, how do you change your attitude to receive your younger brother with happiness and joy?
2. Do you think the older brother had a change of attitude? Explain your answer.
3. Would you still follow all the rules if the reward were no longer predictable?

By Susan Mathew, a refractive-patient educator at the Gimbai Eye Centre, Calgary, Alberta.

THE TREASURE HUNT



**“Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also”
(Luke 12:34).**

Watching for the Light

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Luke 12:34

During my childhood, my brothers and their friends loved to sit at our grandparents' feet and listen to fascinating stories that never failed to excite our imagination. One night Grandma told a story about hidden treasures. As we listened, it occurred to us that our neighbors could be hiding valuables in their backyards, the whereabouts of which might just have been forgotten with passing time. The key to discovering them, according to folk wisdom, consisted in spotting at night a mysterious light exactly above the place where the treasure was supposedly buried.

Two days later the neighbors were alarmed to find numerous strange diggings in their yards. Unfortunately for my brothers and their friends, everyone soon discovered the truth about those holes. It took three days of work under a hot tropical sun to repair all the damage they had caused.

People are still searching for "treasures" in all the wrong places. Many are hoping to find the riches of happiness in the popularized pleasures of the late twentieth century. Then the truth becomes known; no genuine satisfaction is found. In this foolish search they hurt themselves and others.

In this foolish search they hurt themselves and others.

"Today men are eagerly seeking for earthly treasure. Their minds are filled with selfish, ambitious thoughts. For the sake of gaining worldly riches, honor, or power, they place the maxims, traditions, and requirements of men above the requirements of God. From them the treasures of His word are hidden."¹

In God's sight true riches could never be visualized as simple, earthly goods. When we study the Word of God with dedication, led by the Holy Spirit, we can claim many longed-for treasures. "His riches in glory by Christ Jesus" shine fabulously bright: perfect love, purest joy, consoling pardon, and above all else, the most precious jewel: salvation in Jesus Christ.

"The study of the Bible demands our most diligent effort and persevering thought. As the miner digs for the golden treasure in the earth, so earnestly, persistently, must we seek for the treasure of God's word."²

This week, God plans to reveal gleaming treasures to your heart. He invites you to spend more time with Him in prayer and seriously to examine His Word to find in it the treasure of truth. When you have found it, don't let anyone or anything hinder you from acquiring it.

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 106.

2. *Education*, p. 189.

By Mercedes Torres de Williams, secretary to the president of Universidad Adventista de Centro América, Alajuela, Costa Rica.

Where Is Your Treasure?

LOGOS

Matt. 13:44-46; Luke 7:36-50; 12:13-34; 14:25-35

Surely at least once in your life you have dreamed of finding a treasure. I have heard that you may find one at the end of a rainbow. We live in a society that demands spending and offers profits according to our social status. We are bombarded by publicity that tries to offer pleasures and special benefits. And, of course, we need money for all these things. A friend of mine once said: "I know that money can't give me happiness, but it has the virtue of calming down my nerves."

Probably this is why materialism lies at the root of many of the problems of our world today as well as of political and economical philosophies. Materialism reduces the essence of life to obtaining wealth and searching for a life of luxury. Materialism affects our concept of values, because the only things that have value for many people today are material things. The world with its neon lights, sophisticated technology, and wonderful ways of communication does not demand faith. It offers a variety of commodities that we can see and touch.

Symptoms of a Declining World

But ours is a world in decadence. C. E. M. Joad, a British scholar, said that luxury, skepticism, weariness, superstition, and preoccupation with self are unmistakable signs of decline. In a similar study, C. N. Parkinson offered six symptoms of decline: "over centralized government, inordinate growth in taxation, a top-heavy system of administration, promotion of the wrong people, the urge to overspend, and a rise of 'liberal opinion' that is, the popularization of attitudes and policies controlled by sentiment rather than sound moral judgment."¹

The Roman poet Livy wrote that, after a time, greed and self-indulgence led the Romans into dangerous excesses. All of this was set off by absorption with the vice of luxury. "For this is true," says Livy, "that when men had fewer possessions, they were also modest in their desires. Lately riches have brought avarice and abundant pleasures, and the desire to carry luxury and lust to the point of ruin and universal perdition."²

Luke 12:34

"Where your treasure is, there will your heart be also" (verse 34).

This text, which ends a definite sequence of teachings within this chapter, invites the reader to a clearer understanding of the parable of the rich fool. It indicates essentially the same point, that material possessions do not assure security in life.

The fool in the parable is a clever and industrious man who takes his future into account. Then how could he be called a fool? He is a fool because he is much more interested in his own material security than in the security of his soul.

Nothing is mentioned of theft, ill treatment of workers, or any criminal act. He is careful and conservative, he is not unjust; yet, according to the parable, he is a fool. Why? He lives completely for himself; he talks to himself; he plans for himself; he congratulates himself; he is a fool.

The parable calls covetousness foolish. Covetousness was a violation of the law of Moses (Exod. 20:17) and the teachings of the prophets (Micah 2:2). Even so, it seems that it also was a widespread problem in the church (Rom. 1:29; Col. 3:5; Eph. 5:5). And when wealth occupies an outstanding position in the life of a Christian, this may be called idolatry. This tendency can cause people to disregard the needs of others.

Where is your treasure? Of course, money is important. But put the right measure in the spoon. We are material beings, and we have material needs. But we also are spiritual beings with spiritual needs.

Don't forget that certain kinds of riches make earthly possessions unimportant. Our treasure must be in heaven. "Do not love the world or the things in the world. If any one loves the world, love for the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh and the lust of the eyes and the pride of life, is

Materialism reduces the essence of life to obtaining wealth and searching for a life of luxury.

not of the Father but is of the world. And the world passes away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides for ever" (1 John 2:15, 16, RSV).

REACT

1. Define materialism.
2. How can a Christian know whether materialism is a problem in his or her life?
3. How can materialism become a problem for corporate Christianity?

1. Jim Nelson Black, *When Nations Die* (Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers, Inc., 1994), p. xvii.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Knowing the Giver of the Treasure

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 13:44-46

During a Week of Prayer at the Adventist college I attended, something happened to a friend of mine that changed my life. After one of the sermons, the time came for us to look for prayer partners. My group of friends during that particular year were young people like me—PKs (pastors' kids). Of course, my prayer partner was another PK, and we "repeated" our prayers as usual.

But after prayer, my friend asked me, "Do you know Jesus?" By the look on his face, I knew this was serious. Before I could answer, my friend continued, "I have grown up in this church. I have listened to my father and many other pastors preach about Jesus time after time. I have been in Adventist schools all my life. I know all the Bible stories, hundreds of Bible texts by memory, but I don't know Jesus."

Is it possible for someone to know *about* Jesus and yet not know Him?

Ellen White mentions some of the reasons the Jewish nation neglected to see that Christ was the Messiah. Like my friend and me, they knew where the treasure was hidden, they knew how to get to it, but they neglected getting to know the Giver of the treasure.

Is it possible for someone to know *about* Jesus and yet not know Him?

"They [the Jewish nation] had the word of God in their hands; but the traditions which had been handed down from generation to generation, and the human interpretation of the Scriptures, hid from them the truth as it is in Jesus . . . God gave the Jewish people abundant evidence that He was the Messiah; but His teaching called for a decided change in their lives."¹

In the parable of the hidden treasure (Matt. 13:44-46), the hidden treasure is likened to the Holy Scriptures. Salvation through Jesus Christ is the treasure.²

It is not enough to have technical knowledge about the treasure. All this information will be of no value if we don't believe, accept, and come to know the Giver of the treasure, Jesus Christ, as our own personal Saviour. Daily searching for the treasures of truth and salvation in God's Word and constant communion in prayer are the keys for getting to know the Giver of the treasure!

REACT

What things can stop us from getting to know Jesus personally, in spite of the fact that we attend church regularly, study our Bibles, pay tithe, etc.?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 105.
2. *Ibid.*

By Norka Blackman-Richards, an English teacher at the Universidad Adventista de Centro América, Alajuela, Costa Rica.

An Unconventional Response to Love

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 7:36-50

Mary Magdalene entered the crowded room where Jesus was sitting; she fell at His feet and began to wash them with her tears. Later, with her own long hair she not only dried His feet, but kissed them and anointed them with perfume. This was the scene in which Mary chose to express her love to our Creator.

One day while trying to put this event into context, I asked a Hindu friend whether there was a special reason that Hindus wear their hair long. She told me that this was a symbol of one's love for her spouse; which was expressed, prior to intimacy, by washing her husband's feet and drying them with the length of her hair. In Hindu culture this brings sexual arousal.

Simon's attitude seems to show that, as in India today, it was commonplace for women to express their love in this way. He was so appalled by what Mary did that he even went so far as to question Jesus' reputation for accepting what she did (Luke 7:39, NIV). The Bible testifies that Jesus did not reject Mary but rather used the opportunity to uncover the negative thoughts harbored in the hearts of His followers.

Prior to this incident, Jesus had cast demons out of Mary (8:2) and had said to her when she was found in adultery: "Go, and sin no more" (John 8:11, KJV). Mary

She told me that this was a symbol of one's love for her spouse.

Magdalene's act was an expression of deep love because "in his mercy, Jesus had pardoned her sins, He had called forth her beloved brother from the grave, and . . . [her] heart was filled with gratitude." She wanted to express her thankfulness, and the only way she knew how to do so was by washing His feet with her tears and drying them with her hair.

Rather than having a sexual connotation, Mary's act exemplified the unusual ways in which true love and gratitude can be manifest. Instead of rejecting her, Jesus allowed her to express her feelings, even if this meant putting His reputation on the line. Mary had descended to the lowest of human condition, yet God's love was powerful enough to rescue her. Because we are the object of His love, He reaches every one of us no matter our condition or state in life.

REACT

1. Why does God choose to accept expressions of love that may be considered bizarre by society?
2. How does a Christian know what kind of behavior is appropriate in showing one's response to God's love?

**The Desire of Ages, p. 559.*

By Zaida (Loida) Barr, coordinator of the Science Department, Universidad Adventista de Centro América, Alajuela, Costa Rica.

Watch Out!

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 7:36-39

How many of us once in our lives have declared ourselves better than the rest? In this true story found in Luke 7:36-39 we find a city woman, a humble sinner, washing the feet of her Lord with perfume and tears, the best way she knew to show appreciation to Jesus.

On the other hand, the Pharisees, who professed to be clean and without wrinkle, murmured within themselves, "How can Jesus permit this woman to touch Him, for she is a sinner?" Doesn't this sound familiar?

This parable tells how Christians today are living their daily lives. They spend so much time looking at others, finding their faults, and revising their every move that they lose track of their own personal life with God. God wants to lead our lives, but we block every channel by our own selfish motives.

God is willing to help us see a better light! (Matt. 7:3-5). These are well-known verses with such great meaning. Sometimes it is hard to understand our brother's lying, cheating, and stealing when we are filled with gossip, premarital sex, and criticism. Let's not allow our possessive and evil spirit prevent us from obtaining eternal life.

Jesus can help only those who realize they are falling.

Each of us wants to receive the great treasure of salvation in our lives. Let's keep our channels open! Satan wants to destroy every opportunity for us to enter those pearly gates and wear that crown.

It is very easy to be like the Pharisees, but Jesus can help only those who realize they are falling and need His saving love and grace. It was sufficient for that city woman, and it is enough for you and me.

REACT

1. Why is it more common to find the fault in a person and overlook the good?
2. How can focusing our eyes on Jesus make it easier to see the value of our fellow humanity?
3. How can you help a young friend who has been a Christian for many years but feels that something is missing in his spiritual experience? Be specific.
4. What characteristics do you believe a true disciple should possess?

By Joetta Slusher Díaz, a graduate student of secretarial sciences, Universidad Adventista de Centro América, Alajuela, Costa Rica.

Claiming the Treasure

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 12:34

The only way a person can claim possession of something is to possess the rights to do so. Many are the people who have been granted possessions. Such is the case of one of my friends whose father died. My friend had all the rights to claim his father's possessions because a written testament gave him the rights to claim them.

When Christ died on the cross, He redeemed all humanity from the penalty of sin. Through His blood, He also claimed us from the enemy's hand. If we are reconciled to Christ, we are adopted as His children. The special mission of being true disciples was given to all.

During this week we have analyzed the parables from Luke 7, 12, and 14. In these parables we see vividly illustrated what a true disciple will do for his master. Nevertheless, it is sad to say that many of Christ's so-called disciples are full of worldly ambitions, selfishness, and lack of love. They have lost sight of the precious treasure. But Christ has offered to transform their lives daily.

“Christ, the heavenly merchantman seeking goodly pearls, saw in lost humanity the pearl of [great] price. In man, defiled and ruined by sin, He saw the possi-

Many of Christ's so-called disciples have lost sight of the precious treasure.

bilities of redemption. Hearts that have been the battleground of the conflict with Satan, and that have been rescued by the power of love, are more precious to the Redeemer than are those who have never fallen.”¹

Christ's love and mercy are so abundant that He gives to every penitent sinner an opportunity to become a true disciple. Some of the traits of a true disciple are

- Willingness to renounce self with the help of the Holy Spirit.
- Cherishing the cost of following Christ day after day.

• Willingness to share earthly possessions and the spiritual treasures a person has discovered by being in contact with Jesus Christ.

At times I am afraid, for when I make a conscious check of my life, I realize that it is not complying with all the requirements of a true disciple. But I have found good news:

“Do not listen to the enemy's suggestion to stay away from Christ until you have made yourself better; until you are good enough to come to God. . . . Tell the enemy that the blood of Jesus Christ cleanses from all sin.”²

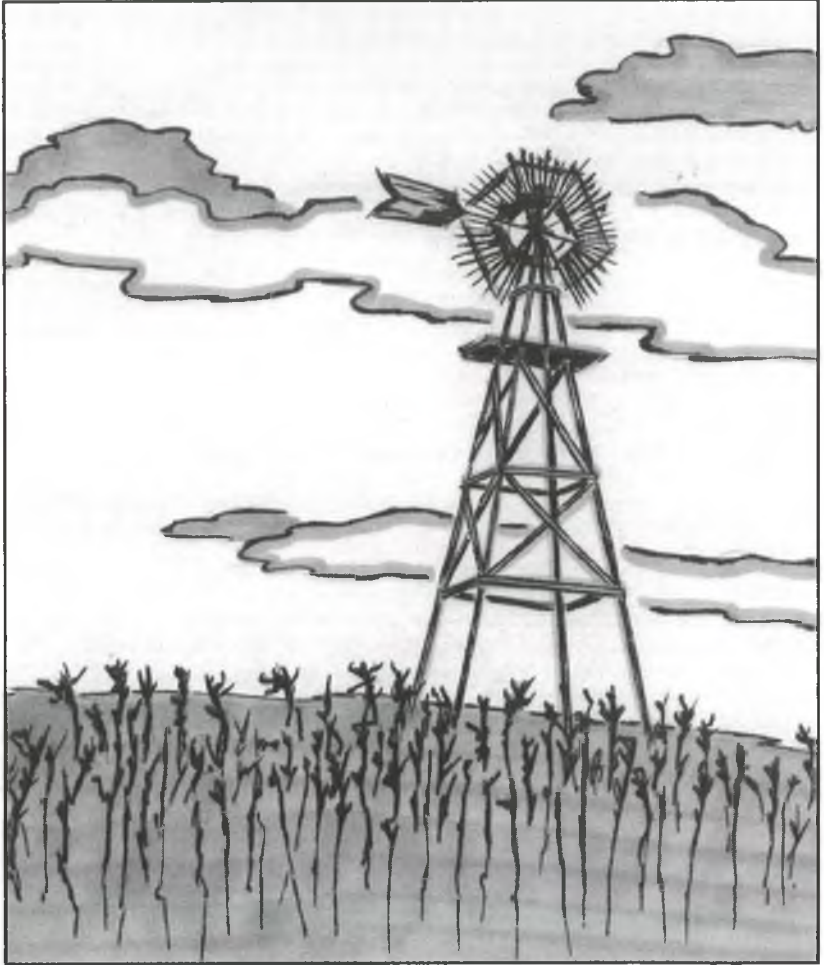
There is hope in Jesus through His Spirit. Christ can help us become true disciples. We need to claim His promises and make His treasure ours.

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 118.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 205, 206.

By Enrique Hall, a graduate student of education from the Universidad Adventista de Centro América, Alajuela, Costa Rica.

SEEDS AND BANQUETS



“Listen! I am standing at the door, knocking; if you hear my voice and open the door, I will come in to you and eat with you, and you with me” (Rev. 3:20, NRSV).

The Ultimate Goal

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Luke 14:15

In the solid clay of his fields, the Dutch farmer plowed straight furrows, his eyes focused on one spot on the horizon. Year after year he won the Golden Plow for the straightest furrow. The turned clay, showing its obvious fertility, was ready to conceive. The seed would die and create new life in multiplication. The pride of winning the Golden Plow could not exceed his joy over an ocean of waving grain. And later, when the wind turned the wings of the mill, the distinctive smell of new flour would be an even greater reward. The straight furrow was not his ultimate goal.

The sower is a communicator, establishing communication between the seeds and the soil. He is also a facilitator. He brings the factors for growth together by watering and fertilizing the fields and by counteracting natural disasters. A better word for *sower* would be *farmer*, of course. He doesn't just sow! He cultivates the soil, chooses the brand of seeds and scatters them, nurtures the plants, eliminates the weeds, and gathers in the harvest. He's involved in the process from the beginning to the end: from the straight furrow to fresh bread on the table. And when the bread is sliced and shared, the goal is achieved.

The servants in the parable of the great banquet are facilitators too. Their

The pride of winning the Golden Plow could not exceed his joy over an ocean of waving grain.

ultimate goal is filling up the hall with invitees.

In communicating with one another we are using media. For a long time we believed that "the medium is the message," and then someone came up with "the medium is the *massage*." This is based on our experience with media like cinema and TV, which became forceful and manipulative.

Sowers and servants, the two kinds of media portrayed in the parables, are "vessels" bearing God's name (Acts 9:15) "for the master's use" (2 Tim. 2:21, KJV). In the NIV the word *instrument* is used, although the original Greek word means "vase." Merchants of Athens display their produce—beans, nuts, and herbs—outside their shops in large vessels. Passersby are drawn by the sight of an abundance of legumes and nuts while their nostrils are lured by the fragrance of herbs and spices.

The sower and the master of the house and his servants are all instrumental in providing bread for the spiritually hungry. "Blessed is he that shall eat bread in the kingdom of God" (Luke 14:15, KJV). Sharing bread in heaven with the redeemed is God's ultimate goal. This statement provoked Jesus to tell the story of the banquet in Luke 14:15-23. Jesus' answer is worth pondering: "Don't take anything for granted. You'd better be serious! Heaven can't wait."

By Herman J. Smit, president, Greek Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Athens, Greece.

The Seed of Life

LOGOS

Matt. 13:1-9, 18-23; Luke 14:16-24

In June 1994 I had the opportunity to visit Las Vegas, Nevada, for two days. There, in the luxurious hotels, people from all walks of life stood before the gambling machines, trying their luck in expectation of quick gain.

Back home in Greece, 10,000 miles away, in a different culture, there is no Las Vegas, but in the many national lotteries that seem to be multiplying by the hour, I sense the same desire for easy money. People are chasing after riches, hoping that a good amount of cash will fill the void in their lives.

Hand in hand with the love for riches is the desire for entertainment. Amusement parks, theaters, sports arenas, and night clubs vie for attention and time. Partying and the use of alcohol and other drugs promise much but offer little more than a few moments of joy in exchange for a heavy head and an even heavier heart.

Some spurn money and natural desires and dedicate their lives to more noble activities, striving to make a name for themselves—be it in politics, science, or the business world. Yet, even there, a spirit of self-centeredness is often the driving force pushing people to prove themselves better than others.

Shortly before he died at the age of 33, Alexander the Great, who swept the world in conquest and tasted riches, pleasures, and glory, ordered that he be buried with his hands outside his coffin so that all could see he left with nothing. Solomon, having tasted everything this life has to offer, penned the famous words, “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2).

Christ’s Offer

In contrast to the void with which the quest for self-gratification unavoidably leaves us stands Christ’s offer for inner peace. “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, KJV), He said to a group of poor, exploited, discouraged Herews. “Whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst” (John 4:14, RSV), He said to a woman who had wasted her life in sin. And to the rich and famous but confused and empty Nicodemus, He offered the amazing experience of a new spiritual birth.

Christ’s claim that He can fulfill humanity’s every need is no vain boast. What became a reality for the above individuals can meet all your needs. He can forgive past sin—any sin—and give peace that comes from being forgiven. He can wipe away any feelings of guilt that burden the conscience and lead to despair. He can give victory not only over hated sins but over loved sins. He can take broken dreams and offer a safe and happy future. He promises to wipe every tear away and eventually to give eternal life next to His throne.

God’s Call to Us

Truly the contrast is great between what Christ offers and what the world offers. The experience of being in Christ is compared to a royal banquet. The taste of riches, pleasures, or human glory could fittingly be compared to straw. Yet the irony of it all is that multitudes—whether from ignorance or deliberate choice—live without the benefits of the companionship of Christ. They live on straw when the royal table is all set and ready to welcome them.

The parable of the sower and the parable of the royal banquet puts a twofold challenge before us. First, we are called to experience fully what life in Christ means. In the parable of the sower, the way in which God wants to work in our hearts is compared to a seed. It begins quietly with some precious words that find their home in the mind. Christ, looking at the seed in our hearts, will offer us opportunities to become closer to Him and make the seed grow.

But our cooperation is also needed. The life is there, hidden within the seed, but for it to grow and bring forth fruit, it needs to be cultivated. In the morning, before we begin the day's race, we need to take time to listen to His voice through His inspired Word. We need to take time to speak to Him about our needs, our plans, our spiritual struggles and victories, our hopes and disappointments. We need to invite Him to guide our lives and give us victory over every temptation. We need to ask Him to mold our character after His own.

Second, we are called to be part of the sowing work that is taking place around the earth. We can begin where we are. We can be examples of true and pure Christianity in our families and with our friends. Whatever gifts and abilities God has given us, we can use them to help the people around us, and we will discover that great joy comes from helping people in need.

Today God calls Christian Adventist young men and women to show to the world by example what it means to live with Christ. God wants to diffuse through us His healing grace to a parched earth that lives and dies without hope. There is

Hand in hand with the love for riches is the desire for entertainment.

no time for a lukewarm Christian experience, no time to waste in indifference, no time to waste our strength in sin. Today let's invite Him to take full control of our lives.

REACT

1. Compare and contrast life with Christ and without Him. Be specific.
2. What do you value most in your Christian experience?
3. What do you think are your spiritual gifts?
4. How could you use them this week to be an effective sower for the Lord?
5. What does the urgency of the invitation (the banquet is ready!) say about our task?
6. The sower must sow the seeds in the proper season. How does one know the proper season?

By Kimon G. Papaioannou, youth director of the Greek Mission of Seventh-day Adventists and pastor in Thessaloniki, Greece.

Images of Church Growth

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 13:23

The Parable of the Sower

“That with which the parable of the sower chiefly deals is the effect produced on the growth of the seed by the soil into which it is cast.”¹

“The seed sown by the wayside represents the word of God as it falls upon the heart of an inattentive hearer. Like the hard-beaten path, trodden down by the feet of men and beasts, is the heart that becomes a highway for the world’s traffic, its pleasures and sins.”²

“The seed sown upon stony ground finds little depth of soil. The plant springs up quickly, but the root cannot penetrate the rock to find nutriment to sustain its growth, and it soon perishes. Many who make a profession of religion are stony-ground hearers. Like the rock underlying the layer of earth, the selfishness of the natural heart underlies the soil of their good desires and aspirations. The love of self is not subdued.”³

“The gospel seed often falls among thorns and noxious weeds; and if there

“The gospel seed often falls among thorns and noxious weeds.”

is not a moral transformation in the human heart, if old habits and practices and the former life of sin are not left behind, if the attributes of Satan are not expelled from the soul, the wheat crop will be choked.”⁴

“The good-ground hearer receives the word ‘not as the word of men, but as it is in truth, the word of God.’ 1 Thess. 2:13. . . . The good-ground hearers, having heard the word, keep it. Satan with all his agencies of evil is not able to catch it away.”⁵

The Parable of the Banquet

To accept the invitation to the gospel feast, Christians “must make their worldly interests subordinate to the one purpose of receiving Christ and His righteousness. God gave all for man, and He asks him to place His service above every earthly and selfish consideration. He cannot accept a divided heart. The heart that is absorbed in earthly affections cannot be given up to God.”⁶

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 43, 44.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 44.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 46.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 50.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

6. *Ibid.*, p. 223.

By Herman J. Smit, president, Greek Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Athens, Greece.

Are You Up for a Banquet?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 14:17-20

Since moving to the Middle East a few years ago, my husband, John, and I soon realized what an important role entertaining guests and inviting them for a meal plays in the social life of Middle Easterners. Through their friendly and persistent invitations, they show how vital it is to them to impart kindness to both locals and strangers. Inviting guests for a supper or a banquet was also a common custom at the time of Jesus.

The emphasis of Jesus' parable is on the invited guests. As was the custom of that time, two invitations were extended to the visitors (Luke 14:17). The servants gave the first invitation sometime before the actual feast, whereas the second invitation was given on the actual day of the banquet. The latter invitation was there to inform the guests that everything was now ready and waiting for their arrival.¹ To refuse the second invitation would be a direct insult to the host and his household, "equivalent among Arab tribes to a declaration of war."²

However, using feeble excuses, all the invited guests of the parable refused the invitation. The refusal of the second invitation was like breaking a promise made

To refuse the second invitation would be "equivalent . . . to a declaration of war."

earlier, and the use of such transparent reasons for the refusal showed complete lack of respect toward the host. After all, who would buy a field without seeing it first (verse 18), or who would get oxen without trying them out before purchase (verse 19)? The third man in his turn finds his family obligations more important than the invitation.

The common trend in all these excuses is the complete lack of interest toward the host and his banquet. Somehow these people had become so busy with their everyday lives that the joy of the first invitation had faded away, and they had lost their interest.

Could something like this happen to us? Jesus' parable shows that if our priorities are not right, we might miss the reward altogether.

REACT

1. Why do you think Jesus mentioned the above excuses to portray people who reject the kingdom of God?
2. Why wasn't the third excuse more valid than the others?

1. Robert H. Stein, *An Introduction to the Parables of Jesus* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1981), p. 84.

2. Alfred Plummer, *Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Luke* (Edinburgh: T & T Clark UK, 1960), p. 360.

By Kertuli Giantzaklidis, a part-time worker at the Adventist Media Centre-Middle East, and John Giantzaklidis, pastor of the Nicosia Adventist Church, Cyprus.

Receiving and Sharing

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 14:24

As a little girl, when I saw the picture of Christ standing at the door, knocking to be let in, I would say to my mother, “Are the people of that house so busy that they aren’t listening and opening the door?” Imagine. Jesus standing at the door and nobody noticing!

The invitees to the banquet are going one step farther: the invitation card sits next to the calendar, and they’ve looked at it for days, but they couldn’t make up their minds. Finally they decided not to honor the invitation and to find an excuse. Life provides enough valid excuses! The man may indeed have wed the woman he loves, bought the piece of land for the house and filled the stable with racing horses—it’s all part of life—but should it prevent him from attending the banquet for just one or two hours? Would it really interfere with married life and business deals? Would it?

Have you noticed that when some people climb the career ladder, they seem to be having less time for God and the church? Here she is—a career woman, successful in her management job and taking home nice pay. She’s awfully busy,

Imagine. Jesus standing at the door and nobody noticing!

keeping long office hours and maintaining the necessary social contacts. Now and then she still comes to church. When Ingathering is in full swing, she says to the mission leader, “Here is a check! I’m sorry, I simply don’t have the time to go from door to door. Give me some leaflets and I’ll tell my business friends about it. Surely they will give!” Practical! So everyone is satisfied?

How to Surrender Completely to Jesus

Let’s look at the many figures of speech: When we “open the door” for Christ, He will bring peace and joy into our hearts, as we “share the table” with Him (see Rev. 3:20). Regular prayer and Bible study will “prepare the soil of the heart” for fruitful and joyful Christian living. And our spiritual life, strengthened through conflicts and trials, will gradually reach into maturity. Even inherited weaknesses, increased in strength by habit, can find a cure. Although the saints in the Bible stumbled and fell many times, they would confess their sins to God and stand up again. A sense of forgiveness would encourage them to continue their walk with God. And to walk with God means to do His will, with His help, and at any price.

REACT

1. Does talking with God mean to do His will at any price? Can we negotiate?
2. How does combining “earthly” and “heavenly” things work?

By Phivi Dialectaki-Theocharis, a secretary in a physician’s office, Athens, Greece.

Sowers and Servants

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 22:2, 3

The similarities in the parables of the great banquet (Luke 14) and the wedding banquet (Matthew 22)¹ are challenging us to intertwine the stories, although we may have to accept that the parables were told on different occasions or placed by the evangelists in different settings.

What they have in common is that both hosts prepared a great supper and invited many guests. All the guests declined the invitation and refused his friendship.² Both master of the house and the king then solved their problem by inviting passersby and just anyone from the neighborhood and beyond.

Where do we find ourselves in the story? That's a very personal question! The parable tells about inviters and invitees. Our answer to the question depends on our very own situation. If we have "taste[d] and see[n] that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8, NIV) and know that we are loaded with benefits every day (68:19), we will feel the presence of the Lord in our lives and become inviting invitees! If we have not completely surrendered to Jesus, then we are only invitees and not certain that we will attend the banquet. There's still time to make a decision!

We will feel the presence of the Lord in our lives and become inviting invitees!

The disappointment of facing an empty banquet hall is followed by a new initiative of the inviting landlord. "Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town." "Go out to the roads and country lanes" (Luke 14:21, 23). Jesus widened this into a great commission: "Go into all the world" (Mark 16:15).

Off the servants went! Off the sower went to sow! The seeds fell everywhere. The response was according to the kind of soil that received the seed. The sowing servants cannot always recognize the suitability and fertility of the soil. In our understanding, only the Father knows the hearts of those who are listening to the message. Our part is to share the invitations, to sow the seeds, to urge everybody to come to the feast.

We have nothing to fear: "My word that goes out from my mouth: It will not return to me empty, . . . You will go out in joy and be led forth in peace" (Isa. 55:11, 12).

1. See lesson 13.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 808.

LESSONS FROM THE HOUSEHOLD



“Therefore everyone who hears these words of mine and puts them into practice is like a wise man who built his house on the rock” (Matt. 7:24, NIV).

All God's Children Have Flaws

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 7:24

I live in Keene, Texas, where we have a lot of clay in the soil. The clay makes it difficult to build and not have shifting that causes cracking in foundations and walls. When people move to Keene, the first thing they learn to ask the realtor is, "Does the house have cracks?" After living here for several years, I've decided that all the houses have cracks!

My neighbor decided that when he built his house he would avoid this problem by putting extra steel bars and concrete into his foundation. Not only was he unsuccessful, but his problem appeared to be worse than usual. To solve his problem, he had to pour piers. A hole is dug beside and a little under the foundation, down to bedrock (in Keene, usually eight to twelve feet). Concrete is poured into the hole to create a platform. Using the platform as a base, the foundation is jacked up, and then metal and/or concrete is used to hold the foundation on more solid ground. In my neighbor's case, it took several such piers to fix his foundation.

In our spiritual lives, it is the same: all God's children have cracks (Rom. 3:23). We all have been built on the sand, and without spiritual piers we will never have

His attached garage was sinking away from the house.

a firm foundation. It is not enough to believe that we are strong in and of ourselves; we must be sure of the ground on which we stand.

Back to Keene. My neighbor on the other side had a similar problem. His house was just fine, but his attached garage was sinking away from the house. Everything looked great from the front, but in the back things were literally coming apart. Several piers later the problem was solved. Some of our lives are like this neighbor's house. We put on a good front, appear to have a solid life, but we're falling apart in the rear! A cracking foundation is imperceptible at first, but the small movement can cause big problems down the road.

This week's lesson examines three parables: the wise and foolish builders, the seven spirits entering the house, and the leaven. The first two use the metaphor of the house, and the third one uses a lesson from baking. Your challenge will be to examine these three parables and glean from them lessons for your life.

Don't forget to look at the context of each parable. Ask yourself, To whom is Jesus speaking, and what is the primary truth He is trying to communicate? After you have done this, go to Sabbath School and compare what others came up with from their study. The beauty of parables is their richness!

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

Grace Through Word Pictures

LOGOS

Matt. 7:24-27; 12:43-45; Luke 13:20, 21

Thank You, Lord. Now the Rest Is Up to Me!

During the year, occasions such as Christmas, birthdays, and Valentine's Day are times of giving and receiving gifts. Some gifts, especially when we were young, required some effort on our part to fulfill the intent of the gift. The gift of a bicycle would be useless unless you actually rode the bicycle; the gift of a car would not be complete until you actually drove that car; a gift of money is useless until that money is spent; and the gift of a model or hobby tools would not be complete until we actually made the model or used those tools. Receiving gifts requires some kind of action on our part to enjoy or use the gift.

In the following passages, Jesus is talking to His disciples in the form of parables, or word pictures.

Are You Wise or Foolish? (Matt. 7:24-27).

This is one of the great parables of the Bible. Jesus told it twice. The first part is presented in the positive and, in case you didn't get it, the second part is repeated, but in the negative. This parable concludes the Sermon on the Mount and is Jesus' appeal to His followers.

It is not outdated today as we witness flooding and the destruction of houses by winds and rain. Here in Texas, before you build or buy a house, you should check to see whether the location is in a flood plain. Jesus declares that the wise

When we stop doing bad things, we must fill the void with good things.

person is the one who hears and responds. "Obedience transforms the words of Christ into personal character."¹ Wise people will be firmly anchored by their firm foundation, a character to withstand the winds of temptation that can come from false teachings. "Happy the man who, when the storms of life are over, finds that, by the grace of Christ, his character has withstood all the fiery darts of the wicked. . . . His soul is anchored to the great Christian hope . . . and he cannot fall."²

Jesus then used a technique common in His teachings. He repeats the story in the negative, the only difference being the foundation of the house. The term *foolish* implies someone who has the knowledge of truth but fails to act on it. When the character is not grounded in God's grace, great will be the fall.

My House Is Empty. What Shall I Do? (Matt. 12:43-48).

This parable is Jesus' way of telling us that when we stop doing bad things, or take them out of our lives, we must fill the void with good things. In other words, make a trade. Shortly before this parable, Jesus had cast the demons out of a man who may have still been in the crowd listening. Jesus could have been speaking directly to him by warning him that without the indwelling of the Holy Spirit, the evil spirits could return and completely dominate him. He would thus end up

being a weaker person than at first. "Christianity is not a negative religion consisting of various prohibitions, but a positive, constructive force for good."³ The empty house is inviting two opposite forces: God's grace or Satan's evils. As you experience cleansing in your life, make the effort to replace bad with good. Surrender completely to Christ.

The Power of the Leaven (Luke 13:20, 21).

To understand this parable fully, put yourself back in Christ's time. Who comprised the majority of His followers? They were the lowly, uneducated people of His time and were attracted by His humble character and powerful teachings. The story of the leaven was His way of telling these people of the power of His teachings and the impact it would make on their lives. "There is a slow, but pervasive penetration of the present by God's future. In, with, and under the unjust structures of this world, divine justice is at work."⁴ It takes a small amount of leaven to have a great effect on the loaf. Thus, God's grace is like leaven in our lives to help us grow as members of His kingdom.

REACT

1. How is God's grace expressed in the parable of (a) the wise and foolish men, (b) the man with seven spirits and (c) the leaven?
2. What role does faith play in obtaining God's grace?
3. What are some of the bad things in your life that you got rid of, and with what did you replace them?
4. Name some ways leaven can work in a Christian's experience.
5. How do you know that your life is built on Jesus?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 359.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 360.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 399.

4. John C. Purdy, *Parables at Work* (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1946), p. 13.

The Temple of Our Lives

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Isa. 28:16

The Israelites had the problem of rejecting God's plan for them. More than once their actions revealed their hearts' condition.

"When the temple of Solomon was erected, the immense stones for the walls and the foundation were entirely prepared at the quarry; after they were brought to the place of building, not an instrument was to be used upon them; the workmen had only to place them in position. For use in the foundation, one stone of unusual size and peculiar shape had been brought; but the workmen could find no place for it, and would not accept it. It was an annoyance to them as it lay unused in their way. Long it remained a rejected stone. But when the builders came to the laying of the corner, they searched for a long time to find a stone of sufficient size and strength, and of the proper shape, to take that particular place, and bear the great weight which would rest upon it. Should they make an unwise choice for this important place, the safety of the entire building would be endangered. They must find a stone capable of resisting the influence of the sun, of frost, and of tempest. Several stones had at different times been chosen, but under the pressure of immense weights they had crumbled to pieces. Others could not bear the test

"The workmen could find no place for it, and would not accept it."

of sudden atmospheric changes. But at last attention was called to the stone so long rejected. It had been exposed to the air, to sun and storm, without revealing the slightest crack. The builders examined this stone. It had borne every test but one. If it could bear the test of severe pressure, they decided to accept it for the cornerstone. The trial was made. The stone was accepted, brought to its assigned position, and found to be an exact fit. . . .

"In infinite wisdom, God chose the foundation stone, and laid it Himself. He called it 'a sure foundation.' The entire world may lay upon it their burdens and griefs; it can endure them all. With perfect safety they may build upon it. Christ is a 'tried stone.' Those who trust in Him, He never disappoints. He has borne every test. He has endured the pressure of Adam's guilt, and the guilt of his posterity, and has come off more than conqueror of the powers of evil. He has borne the burdens cast upon Him by every repenting sinner. In Christ the guilty heart has found relief. He is the sure foundation. All who make Him their dependence rest in perfect security."

The character will be secure, and ultimately the assurance of never-ending life will be secure so we can be with the Rock never to be removed, ever.

**The Desire of Ages, pp. 597-599.*

By Michael Hansen, senior theology major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Born Again?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: John 3:1-21

We've all heard the cliché, "You can't teach an old dog new tricks." Have you ever really thought about what that means? Is it really impossible to learn new habits or change the direction of your life? In biblical times we find that Nicodemus and Jesus talked about this at their private meeting during the night. "I tell you the truth, no one can see the kingdom of God unless he is born again" (John 3:3, NIV). That's not just a change—that's beginning again! And Jesus said it can be done!

The question then arises, Why would an esteemed Pharisee, an astute community leader, need to change direction? What was Nicodemus doing wrong? Shouldn't Nicodemus have already been following the will of the Lord? Had he based his religion on a bad foundation?

Nicodemus had been taught from childhood only one way to think. He had to decide to search for himself how to be saved, not just to accept blindly what others thought God wanted him to do. He didn't know the will of the Lord until he actually met Jesus and talked with Him. Jesus became his friend. They built a relationship together. Nicodemus actually had built his religion on a faulty foundation, but he questioned that foundation. He wasn't satisfied to accept things as

The sad experience of *Challenger* showed us that.

they were. And through Nicodemus' searching and questioning, Jesus gave him the knowledge and understanding of how he could change. Being born again in the Spirit of Christ, making Jesus our foundation, is the only way we can change our direction and be saved.

No matter how hard we try to achieve perfection, we can't do it on our own. Just like the Pharisees of the old Jewish nation, we can become locked into tradition and works, letting others tell us what we should do and miss the real direction we should go.

We can send satellites and space shuttles to the heavens, but mistakes can be made. Problems occur, and we can lose control of them. Lives can be lost. The sad experience of *Challenger* showed us that. Just as we lose these billion-dollar inventions, there is no way we can make it to heaven by using our own knowledge. The only way we can achieve heaven is by calling on the supernatural hand of God for divine guidance and by building upon the solid rock of Jesus.

REACT

1. If Nicodemus, as a leader, didn't know the right direction, how can we, as individual Christians, know whether we're going the way we should?
2. How do we make Jesus our foundation?

By Dawn Anderson, a sophomore corporate-communications major, Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Renew Your Mind

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 12:2

“Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV).

Our day-to-day walk with Christ can easily become a journey of ups and downs. It is so easy to become inspired by a stirring sermon or overwhelming testimony. We promise ourselves and Christ that our new commitment will be stronger than ever. Then life takes over, and we find ourselves slipping from our goals. This is a cycle that each Christian must face. Try following these steps toward a stronger foundation in your friendship with Christ.

1. Renew Your Mind. This can be a daily commitment. Remind yourself that you have chosen to turn from the world. Forget about what you did wrong yesterday; God has forgiven you. Today is your focus. Ask God to put you in a mindset to do His will.

2. Let Go. We need to allow God to take over. He wants only the best for us and would never steer us wrong. Imagine that you were blind and someone gave you a new car as a gift. They hired a chauffeur to take you anywhere you needed to go. Would you try to drive, even if you could not see where you were going?

This is a cycle that each Christian must face.

Yet every day we choose to be in charge of our lives without knowing what is ahead. God is willing to take us to our destination if we will trust that He knows the best route to get there.

3. Strengthen Your Faith. In our relationship with Christ, faith is like a muscle. It can be very powerful when it is toned. However, if we never use it, it will not be strong when we need it. Sometimes we don't feel ready to act on our faith, but this is what it takes. We need to push our faith as far as it goes and know that God will take care of what we can't handle.

4. Realize That You Will Fail. As human beings, we are all of a sinful nature. It is normal for us to sin and turn away from God. When we do fall, He will pick us up—if we let Him. When we realize our dependence on God, His promises become more inspiring than ever before.

Through all these steps, the key to success is prayer. Talk to God. He wants to be your friend. He wants to see you happy. All you have to do is accept His friendship and start getting to know Him.

REACT

1. How can I exercise my muscle of faith in my home, school, or workplace?
2. Which promises can I cling to when I am confronted with trials?

By Ana Maria Grasso, social-work major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Saved by Grace? Perhaps.

OPINION

Key Texts: Eph. 2:8, 9; John 6:28, 29; James 1:16, 17; Rom. 4:5

“Saved by Grace.” Nearly every Adventist has been *educated* to agree with that phrase. Almost every person I speak with concerning the mechanics of salvation will say something like “I know that a person is saved by grace alone” or “I know there’s nothing I can do to earn salvation.” Yet, if pressed on the subject, there will nearly always be an “if,” “and,” or “but” trailing the statement. Many times, there is a huge dichotomy between what people believe and what they *say* they believe.

Although we understand theoretically that there are works God desires to do *in* us subsequent to salvation, it’s extremely difficult to distinguish this belief from the heretical one: God’s grace combined with our good works (works done by the power of the Holy Spirit, of course!) equal salvation. A simple test will prove whether what you believe and what you say you believe are one and the same. Ask yourself this question: The last time I felt that my salvation wasn’t sure was the doubt based on *guilt* I was feeling for something I had *done*? If your answer

Many times, there is a huge dichotomy between what people believe and what they say they believe.

is Yes, it proves that you were, at least subconsciously, believing in salvation by works; you believed that doing a bad thing was affecting your salvation in a negative way. The logical reciprocal of this type of thinking is that refraining from doing bad things must be affecting your salvation in a positive way.

Viewed in this light, it becomes easier to see just how many of us actually believe that God’s grace + our efforts (refraining from doing bad things) = salvation. This belief keeps us in fear. We’re constantly afraid that we’re not going to measure up or that we’re not doing our part.

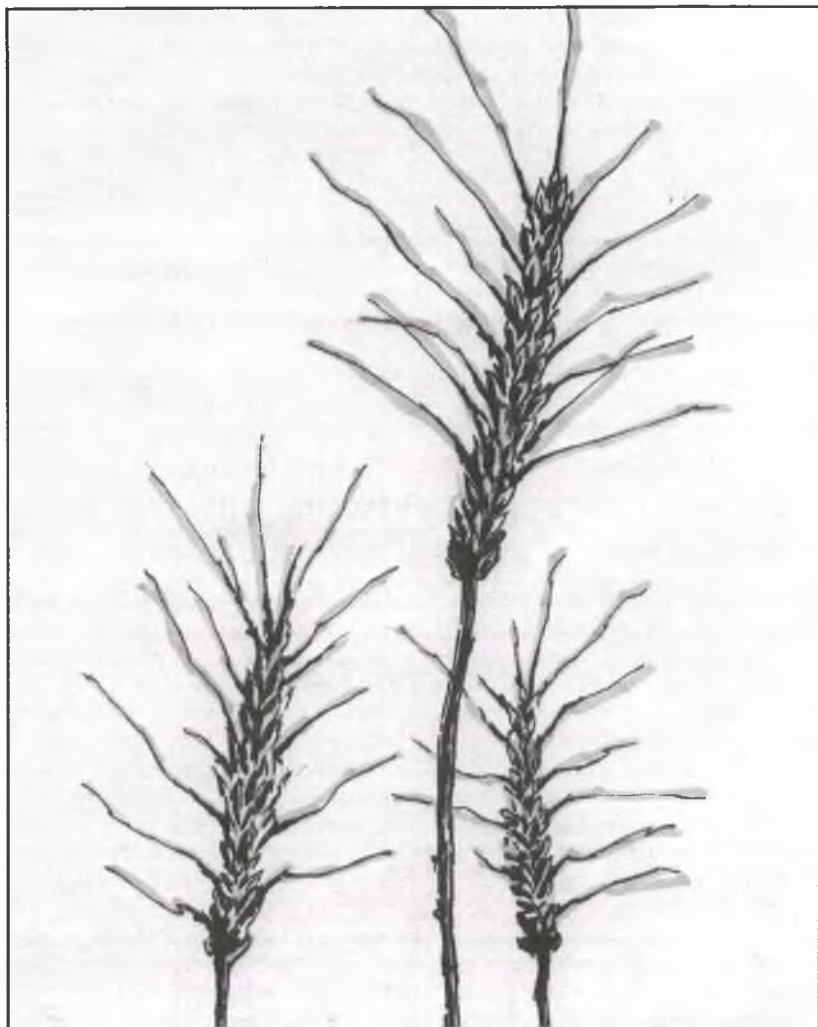
When one can finally face up to the fact that he or she doesn’t now, and will never, measure up to God’s perfect law, one can either give up and say, “It’s impossible to be saved!” or one can truly begin to rely on *grace alone* for salvation.

This latter of the two would seem to explain the joy Paul felt when he exclaimed in Romans 5:1, 2, “Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand” (NIV).

As you inspect your own Christian life, do you have peace with God? Really? If it’s true that perfect love casts out all fear, it’s reasonable to believe that if you have fear concerning your salvation, perhaps you haven’t really met Perfect Love. Get to know Him.

By James M. Hopps, senior theology major, Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

GROWING IN GRACE



“I pray that out of his [the Father’s] glorious riches he may strengthen you with power through his Spirit in your inner being, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith” (Eph. 3:16, 17, NIV).

Another Question

INTRODUCTION

Scriptures: Luke 17:20, 21; Mark 4:28, 29

There's another question; it keeps growing within my heart. I seek to know His domain—my home. I stretch my eyes across Orion's sky, still filled with questions, for I seek a home with streets of gold, pearly gates, and jewels so rare.

What did He mean when He said that the kingdom of God does not come visibly "because the kingdom of God is within you"? (Luke 17:21, NIV).

The Sower sows seeds, the good soil bringeth forth life, I see the stalk rising, the head then appears, then the kernel . . . but wait! The Sower has a sickle in His hand! He reaps a ripe harvest. Is this the kingdom of God? Growing within me? It is so unnoticed at first, but growing within my heart, and not only mine, for I share its radiance all around.

Is this truly the kingdom of God? So what about the streets of gold and jewels so rare?

These are my thoughts . . . these are our thoughts . . .

Another parable, another question. What truly is God's kingdom? Jesus ob-

Jesus obviously had something else in mind.

viously had something else in mind when He commented on this issue. He looked beyond the physical and saw the spiritual—in you and me.

Note the parallels:

- Sower = God
- Seed = God's Word
- Soil = The heart of man
- Growth of the seed = Growth and maturity in Christ
- Mustard seed = God's kingdom

This week we will learn and reinforce the truth of God's kingdom, exploring its meaning fully. Let us see ourselves as a part of God's big plan of salvation. Now, do you have another question? And will you receive another answer?

The kingdom of God? The kingdom within you . . .

By Miguel Mahoney, a junior computer-science major at West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica.

Means of Growing by Grace

LOGOS

Mark 4:26-32; 16:15; Rom. 10:14, 15; John 3:3

Last year I planted two sets of seeds in our vegetable garden. Within three days one set of seeds germinated, making the effort of planting them rewarding. Since no germinating time was written on either of the packages, I expected the other set of seeds to spring up shortly after the first set.

After five days of waiting, no germination was evident. I became impatient and decided to aid the process by watering the seeds. When eight days passed without any sign of sprouting, I began to skim carefully the soil from the top of some of the seeds. To my delight, the seeds had sprouted. I discovered that my attempt to aid the process of germination by watering the seeds had caused some additional soil to cover them. This could have been detrimental to the seedlings.

Christ indicated that the grace of God works upon the human heart to transform the character in just the way the Holy Spirit determines is best. He works patiently with us to manifest His grace. "The wind blows wherever it pleases. You hear its sound, but you cannot tell where it comes from or where it is going. So it is with everyone born of the Spirit" (John 3:8, NIV).

Although growing in grace is outside humanity's ability, God has solicited our help to spread the good news of salvation to those who have not yet heard about it (Mark 16:15). The part we have been called to play must not be regarded as insignificant. The Bible states clearly, "How, then, can they call on the one they

We have to decide for ourselves which side of the great controversy we are on.

have not believed in? And how can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? . . . And how can they preach unless they are sent? As it is written, 'How beautiful are the feet of those who bring good news!'" (Rom. 10:14, 15).

A couple responded to the invitation to attend a series of evangelistic meetings. At the conclusion of the meetings, the wife accepted Christ as her Saviour and was baptized. She was expecting her husband to join her in committing himself to Christ then or soon after her baptism, but that did not happen.

Year after year she prayed and hoped and wondered why her husband remained uncommitted, seemingly resistant to the workings of the Holy Spirit. After 25 years of patient waiting, to her joy and delight, he accepted Christ and became a committed Christian.

Would it not have been better for him to have enjoyed a life of sanctification 25 years earlier? Where was the Spirit of God all those years? Could rejoicing in heaven over the individual not have occurred 25 years earlier? What if in the intervening years the man had died? Why was the Holy Spirit's power in the husband's life not spreading (seemingly) as swiftly as it had been in the wife's life?

We can ask many questions for which we do not have all the answers. We do know that each individual is unique and that we have to decide for ourselves which

side of the great controversy we are on. Each person's will to decide is affected differently by the controlling power of sin. Since God has made us rational beings, He honors our gift of the power of choice by not forcing us to accept His plan for our redemption. But He has made available to us His Holy Spirit's power to aid our weak wills and help us grow in grace.

After the husband was baptized, he confessed to his wife that though he had heard the gospel preached during the meetings they attended 25 years earlier, it was her life, her changed attitude, her consistent devotion, her patience and tolerance that influenced him finally to accept Christ as his Saviour.

The sowing of seeds of righteousness, or the spreading of the gospel of salvation, is not confined to preaching. Much more powerful is the testimony we give through evidence of a transformed life.

REACT

1. Why did Jesus tell several parables to illustrate that the work of regeneration in human beings was of the Holy Spirit and not of man?
2. How can the acceptance of my limitations to bring about the conversion of people facilitate my spreading of the gospel of Jesus Christ?
3. If you were a friend of the woman mentioned in today's portion of the lesson, how would you have answered the questions in paragraph 7 of page 44?
4. Discuss how God's grace changes the direction of our lives.
5. How can each individual model God's grace? Be specific.
6. Who is "the sower"? (Could it be the Holy Spirit?)
7. How can the divine truth that is often difficult to grasp and even more difficult to accept get such a tenacious grip on the heart?
8. If our successful Christian life results from God's gift of grace rather than from our own efforts, how should we treat erring fellow humans?
9. How does the concept of the Holy Spirit dwelling in our heart differ from the New Age belief that God is within everyone?
10. Is one aspect of God's grace more important than the other in relation to your salvation? Explain your answer.
11. What part do you play in your Christian growth?

Grace to Grow

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Eph. 2:8-10

When I combine the definitions of *grow* and *grace* from *Webster's Encyclopedic Unabridged Dictionary* and discuss this topic, I arrive at the following definition: to grow in grace is to "increase by natural development in beauty or form with a manifestation of the Spirit of God operating in man to regenerate or strengthen him." The Bible, however, reminds us that we are in need of a Saviour so that we can grow in grace (2 Pet. 3:18).

Grace is a central doctrine of Christianity. Salvation is God's free gift through Jesus Christ (Eph. 2:8, 9). As a plant springs up, in most instances from a seed, and is watered and nourished in order to grow, so must children of God acknowledge that they are in need of a Saviour, in need of salvation. They must admit to weaknesses and insufficiencies and allow God to nurture them. They must open their hearts for Christ to dwell in them so the Holy Spirit may come and abide.

"If you are growing in grace and the knowledge of Jesus Christ, you will improve every privilege and opportunity to gain more knowledge of the life and character of Christ."¹

At all levels, the human psyche resists help. We live in a do-it-yourself world,

The premise that the believer is justified without any works of his or her own seems unbelievable.

so the premise that grace is unmerited favor and the believer is justified without any works of his or her own, without any claim to offer to God, seems unbelievable. But Ellen G. White says, "Day by day God labors for man's sanctification, and man is to cooperate with Him, putting forth persevering efforts in the cultivation of right habits. He is to add grace to grace; and as he thus works on the plan of addition, God works for him on the plan of multiplication."²

Additionally she says, "Daily prayer is as essential to growth in grace, and even to spiritual life itself, as is temporal food to physical well-being."³ It must be remembered, however, that yesterday's grace—like yesterday's food—is not enough for today and that there is an abundant supply of it.

When we acknowledge God's grace in our lives and submit our will to His leading, we give up a "present good for a larger return."⁴ Let us remember that "at every stage of development our life may be perfect; yet if God's purpose for us is fulfilled, there will be continual advancement."⁵

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 121.

2. *My Life Today*, p. 101.

3. *The Sanctified Life*, p. 93.

4. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 65.

5. *Ibid.*

By Beverly I. Henry, director of the division of continuing education at West Indies College, Mandeville, Jamaica.

Invisible, Incomprehensible, Divine!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Mark 4:26-29

Assuming appropriate growing conditions, the actions of the sower (Mark 4:26-29), whether he sleeps or rises, has no bearing on the germination of the seed. Should the sower spend all day expressing the virtues of growth to the seed, it would grow no faster. When the sower is finished, he may leave the field for days. In the Semitic, *milieu*, “leave it,” means leaving it to God, not to the laws of nature.¹ In the spiritual realm, the sower only begins the work; God’s grace, the mysterious work of the Holy Spirit, perfects it.

This is not to say that people should sit back in apathy and wait for a miracle. Rather, openness to the future “releases men from illusory hopes of human progress in the present and frees them for such active obedience to God’s will as can transform the present.”² This is a freedom through *active* obedience that can transform! It begins with the germination of the seed and represents two things: the small beginnings of God’s church and the results of the Holy Spirit in the heart.

The contrast is in the “insignificant and obscure beginnings of the kingdom [whether in the church or in the heart] . . . and the magnificent end that God has in store for those who are prepared to trust Him in the quite unspectacular present.”³

This is a freedom through *active* obedience that can transform!

Trust is the bottom line and through trust, faith. For the sower “knoweth not how” (verse 27) the seed grows. The most acclaimed biologists cannot explain the secret of life. It is beyond human comprehension. “When proof is possible, faith becomes impossible.”⁴ As the sower sows in faith that the seed will sprout and ripen, so, when we share God’s Word we know that, in His time, He will bring abundant harvest. We need not become discouraged when we’ve been praying and see no immediate results. God already has the outcome taken care of, though our finite minds may not understand. Our only certainty of this is by faith. “It is the Lord’s doing, invisible, incomprehensible, admirable, adorable, Divine!”⁵

1. Hugh Anderson, *New Century Bible: The Gospel of Mark* (Greenwood, S.C.: The Attic Press, Inc., 1976), p. 137.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 140.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 139.

4. Robert Schuller, *Tough-Minded Faith for Tender-Hearted People* (Toronto: Bantam Books, 1983), p. 1.

5. H. Spence, *The Pulpit Commentary: Mark and Luke* (New York: Funk and Wagnalls, 1950), p. 167.

Maturing Grace

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 7:7

“How-to” (the process of receiving grace) is an oxymoron. Grace is a gift of God, and all we can do is receive it. However, the parables of the plants give us a good illustration of how we can receive God’s grace.

Psychologists often discuss the difference between maturation and learning. Maturation comes about naturally as a child grows, unless something impedes its development. Using language, for example, comes by maturation. The child learns what language to use and how to use it. When we become a child of God, He gives us grace, and it will mature if the environment in which we place ourselves is favorable for its development. Several similarities of the growth of the plant and of grace are worth considering.

- In the parable, the sower planted the seed. It did not just fall. God, too, was purposeful in choosing us to become the means of distributing grace more abundantly. We must be receptive to God’s process if it is to be successful.

- Seed, like grace, will grow only under the right conditions of moisture, warmth, and electricity which God supplies.* If we, however, refuse to absorb the moisture and nutrients that God provides in His Word and the warmth of His

“How-to” (the process of receiving grace) is an oxymoron.

fellowship, we will not grow. As the root hairs of the plant grow in the direction of nutrient-filled water and absorb it into the system, we, too, must seek and absorb food for our soul.

- The plant receives more moisture only as it discharges it. Transpiration occurs as the air carries moisture particles away from the plant, helping to draw fresh fluids into the roots. Likewise, we cannot hoard grace. We can grow in grace only as we use it in our daily interactions.

- One of the most important functions of the plant is to produce seed for the harvest and to start the cycle over again. Sometimes we become impatient and try to harvest the crop when the seed is not mature. The unripe product is not viable, and the crop is lost. In everyday life, we often run ahead of the Lord. When we try to implement our own plans, we either fail or become successful in an endeavor ultimately leading away from God.

**Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 63.

Increase in Knowledge or Grace—or Both?

OPINION

Key Text: 2 Pet. 3:18

Many times in Christendom we hear the term *grow in grace*, but do we really understand the true meaning of the word *grace*?

Grace has a twofold meaning. We often emphasize God's goodness, kindness, and mercy, but what of the other aspect? The *SDA Bible Commentary* says that grace "is not merely God's mercy and willingness to forgive, it is an active, energizing, transforming power to save."¹

From the above quotation, we can say that God's grace is the power He gives us to obey His commandments. In line with this thought, the apostle Paul says, "It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose" (Phil. 2:13, NIV). Our Christian growth, which is demonstrated by good works, is accomplished by God's grace—power to obey.

Growing in grace and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ go together. The more we get to know Jesus personally, the more of His grace we will experience.

The Greek word *chariti* translated as "grace" in 2 Peter 3:18 also means "power."² This substantiates the fact that grace means not only God's unmerited

God's grace is the power He gives us to obey His commandments.

favor, but His power to obey. We can then say that when Peter speaks about growing in grace, he meant that one should grow in God's power for obedience.

The Greek word *gnosei*, translated as "knowledge" in 2 Peter 3:18, comes from *gnosis*, which means esoteric knowledge.³ *Esoteric* means "private" or "confidential." Putting these two meanings together (grace = power and knowledge + private or confidential), we will see that Peter is advocating that we should grow in the power of God and in the personal knowledge of Jesus Christ. In order for an individual to receive power, he has to meet Jesus personally.

By meeting Christ personally, one would eventually and inevitably develop a relationship with Him. When this personal relationship is flourishing, one will naturally grow in the knowledge of Jesus Christ and receive His grace.

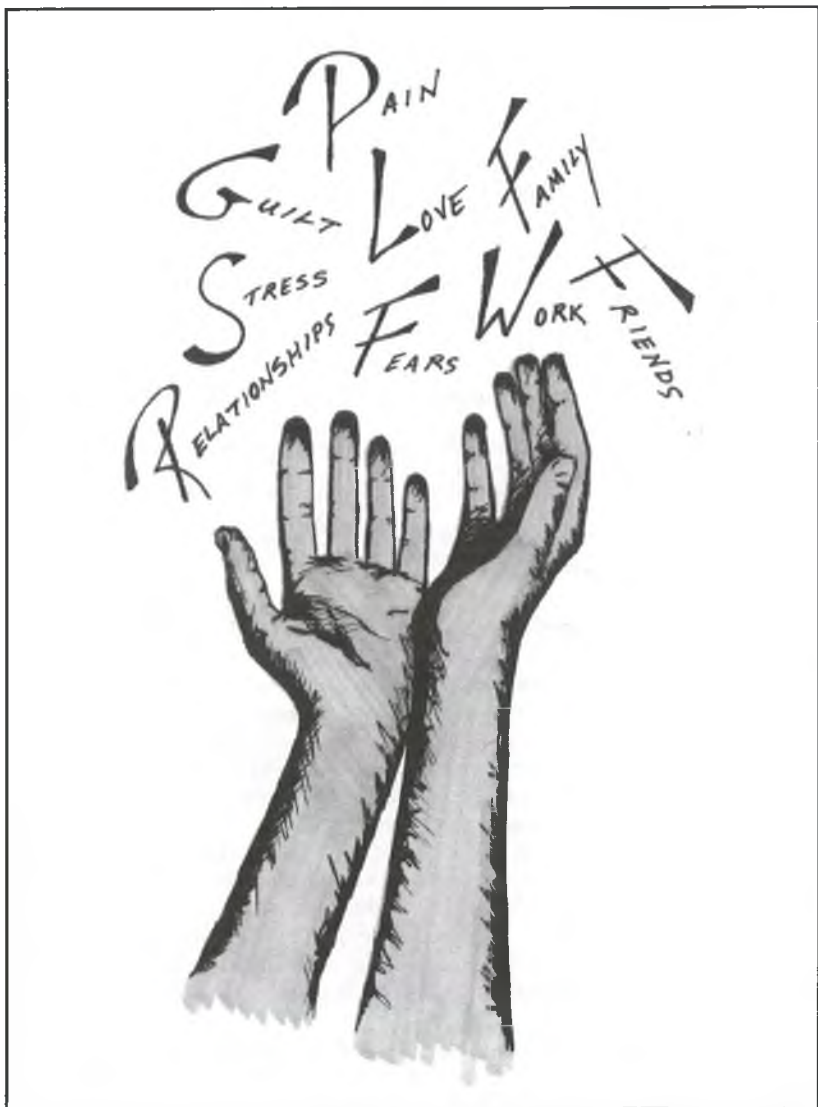
Through communication we get to know our friends and relatives. Through fellowship we get acquainted with them. Likewise with Christ, through communion with Him, we get to know Him and receive His grace—power to obedience.

1. *SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 504.

2. Barbara Aland, et al., *The Greek New Testament* (Germany: United Bible Societies, 1994), p. 197.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 38.

PRAYER POWER



“The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are open to their prayers” (1 Pet. 3:12, NKJV).

Let's Talk to Jesus

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 65:24

Do you ever feel alone? As if no one cares or really listens? We all experience times in life when it seems as though we haven't a friend in the world. Even God seems far away. We look up and angrily shout, "Where are You?" only to have Him whisper quietly, "Right beside you where I've always been." "Before they call," God says, "I will answer; while they are still speaking I will hear" (Isa. 65:24, NIV).

So, why do our prayers sometimes seem flat and dull, lifeless and void? After all, God tells us that He is more willing than an earthly judge to hear us, more eager than a neighbor to help us, more delighted than a father to give us good gifts. He tells us, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and the door will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives; he who seeks finds; and to him who knocks, the door will be opened" (Matt. 7:7, 8).

Prayer should lead to a personal relationship with Jesus. When we go to Him in prayer, He fills us with His presence, and His Spirit moves us to walk with Him.

Why do our prayers sometimes seem flat and dull, lifeless and void?

Our Lord said, "This is the confidence we have in approaching God: that if we ask anything according to His will, he hears us. And if we know that he hears us—whatever we ask—we know that we have what we asked of him" (1 John 5:14, 15).

Isn't that a wonderful promise? He knows better than anyone, and He knows exactly what's best for us. If you are having problems in your prayer life, bring them to Him. If He seems far away, tell Him so. Examine your life. Is there something between you and God? A cherished sin? An arrogant attitude?

Whatever it is, ask His help in getting free from it. There is nothing He wants more than a close relationship with you. Is there anything you want more?

Prayer

Praise the Lord for His wonderful kindness,
 Rejoice in His presence.
 Ask and you shall receive. Hallelujah, He is the Almighty,
 You are His child; He will not forsake you.
 Eternal life can be yours,
 Receive His peace.

By Sonia Colon, counselor to pregnant women on breast-feeding at Warren County Municipal Center Clinic, Hudson Falls, New York.

The Power to Make Things Happen

LOGOS

Luke 11:5-13; 18:1-8

Changing Your World With Divine Aid

The lesson text this week is about using prayer to open doors and to find solutions to the problems we encounter daily. The Greeks taught that we were at the mercy of the gods with our own traits. Buddhist philosophy suggests that events in a person's life are controlled by the law of causation. In contrast, humanists and atheists believe we can control our destiny, but only by our own institutions and not with the aid of divine intervention.

Very clearly in the words of Jesus (Matt. 6:28-34), the Bible states that God is faithful to answer the prayer of faith and will provide divine assistance. We are not forgotten or abandoned by our Creator (Deut. 4:31). In the story of the man who needs bread because of unexpected guests, God is portrayed as one who will provide aid in difficult situations, more willingly than earthly friends. The woman finds justice in wearing down the apathy of the earthly judge. She will also find justice in her cries to her heavenly Judge—only more quickly.

Taking a Risk in Relationships

In both of this week's passages, Jesus commends the boldness and persistence of the person making the request. Whether it is your neighbor or the God of the universe, asking for special favors can be risky. It exposes your weaknesses and your unpreparedness. It reveals your powerlessness and vulnerability. It is also risky because the answer is not a foregone conclusion. The answer may be No!

God has a few limitations of His own.

Revealing that you are unable to pay your bills could be embarrassing. Whom would you trust enough to ask for a loan to pay for your car insurance? Whom would you trust with your feelings of despair? Whom would you trust with your most hidden confession and request of forgiveness? Relationships require boldness and risk-taking. Jesus compares our people-relationships to our spiritual relationship with Him. It needs the same boldness and risk-taking. "Come boldly unto the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy" (Heb. 4:16). Boldness and persistence reveal our true intentions. It is putting our faith to the test to remove any ambiguity in our trust in God.

Just for the Asking

"Oh, Lord, won't You buy me a Mercedes Benz?" Could Janis Joplin be right? Is it this simple? Well, no. God has a few limitations of His own. In the garden He stated that the wages of sin are suffering and death (Gen. 3:16-19). Could we, by asking, live without suffering and death and have God's statement on sin voided? God also gave us free choice from the very beginning with the tree of knowledge of good and evil (Gen. 2:17). Could we, by asking, void someone's free choice in a prayer of petition?

The answer to these questions is No. The qualification to the promise of ask-

ing and receiving is that we must ask in faith. To have faith in God is to have a relationship with Him, to know Him and what He stands for. A person of faith has a good idea what God can do while maintaining integrity with what He stands for. A person of faith also knows what he or she really needs and whether or not that is in alignment with God's will.

Does this mean you can't ask for healing? Absolutely not. Just know that when God answers your prayer it is only a temporary answer, that sooner or later we all must die. We should also pray for our neighbor's salvation. Just understand how God is limited by free choice. Let me illustrate this point with a story.

I know a family whose daughter has serious emotional problems. One day she ran away from home at age 15, to be a prostitute in New York City—by choice! Her parents prayed that she would come home unharmed. As she hitchhiked on the interstate, the very first person to pick her up was a godly truck driver. He talked to her for three hours as they drove and finally convinced her to be dropped off at a relative's house in a distant city. God didn't "cure" her emotional problems, but He provided safety to allow her time and space to reconsider her choices.

Isn't God wonderful? He can pull out a godly truck driver at just the right time. Yes, there is power in prayer! Yes, there is power to change your world! Take a risk. Be bold in your relationship with God.

REACT

1. What do you worry about most? Does this mean you are trying to make changes by yourself?

2. How is the prayer of faith different from a faithless prayer?

3. Is it wrong to make deals with God? Explain Moses' and Abraham's bartering to delay God's judgment.

4. "When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on earth?" What does this question mean for you?

5. What has been your personal experience with quick responses and delayed responses to prayer?

6. How do you respond to the statement "God has a few limitations of His own"?

7. How can a person be continually in prayer? Be specific.

8. How would you describe your relationship with God?

9. Look back over the past week at your prayer times. What have you prayed for most? Least? With enthusiasm? Carelessly? What makes the difference? Should there be a difference?

Pray Without Ceasing

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 1 Thess. 5:17

How much time do you spend each day talking to friends, co-workers, teachers, and others? Are you aware of the importance of each minute? Starting and spending the day with Christ should be our top priority, but we ask, "How?"

"Christ's lessons in regard to prayer should be carefully considered. There is a divine science in prayer, and His illustration brings to view principles that all need to understand. He shows what is the true spirit of prayer, He teaches the necessity of perseverance in presenting our requests to God, and assures us of His willingness to hear and answer prayer."¹

Many of our prayers consist of asking for things we want or need. However, "Our prayers are not to be a selfish asking, merely for our own benefit. We are to ask that we may give."² Just as Christ's true nature was to love those with whom He came in contact, so should our nature be. In our own strength, it's difficult to reflect Christ's true nature until we look at what He did.

"Jesus Himself, while He dwelt among men, was often in prayer. . . . His humanity made prayer a necessity and a privilege. He found comfort and joy in communion with His Father. And if the Saviour of men, the Son of God, felt the

Each minute is important when we can use it to spread His influence.

need of prayer, how much more should feeble, sinful mortals feel the necessity of fervent, constant prayer."³

Considering the strength that Christ gained through communion with His Father gives me hope of handling the things that life presents to me. "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13, KJV). It is comforting to know that at a thought of the Master, He is with us. Just as Christ received strength from the Father, He can lead us to that ultimate Source of strength.

With this Source of strength available, how can we expect to walk through the day without Him? Each minute is important when we can use it to spread His influence.

The experience of prayer and its power strengthens our desire to maintain that connection and to have it grow. When you first meet others, you aren't instantly able to share with them your innermost thoughts and feelings. It is the same with the Lord; time spent with Him strengthens the relationship and allows for a continued commitment with Him.

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 142.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 93, 94.

By Debra F. Shepler, an elementary-school teacher at Kingsbury (New York) Junior Academy.

Would the Real God Please Stand Up!

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 11:13

To the average Jew of Christ's day, God was a shadowy, mysterious, frightening personage who ruled humanity's affairs with an iron hand. He was seen as a tyrant who must be appeased. Because of God's perceived unwillingness to provide for His subjects, it was felt that the only way to get anything out of Him was to keep pestering Him with ceaseless, repetitive requests until you finally wore Him down. Only then would He begrudgingly give you what you wanted—if only to get you to shut up and leave Him alone. This perception was what Jesus was trying to overcome in the parable of Luke 11:5-13.

Jesus always met people where they were, using their preconceptions to teach them eternal truths that far surpassed their warped concept of God. His listeners could comprehend a God who was like the unwilling neighbor, because it fit their preconceived notions. One can almost see their heads nodding in agreement as Jesus spins His tale.

But then Jesus puts an unexpected twist on things. He says, "Ask and it will be given to you." No begging involved. Just ask. "Seek and you will find." No sacrifices or repetitive prayers. Just seek. "Knock and the door will be opened." No

Just knock. What a radical concept!

standing outside in the cold, waiting for God to give in. Just knock. What a radical concept! This was an accessible God, eager and willing to provide all His people's needs.

To His listeners, this sounds wonderful yet foreign. So Jesus again uses something familiar to explain the unfamiliar. He now compares God's willingness to provide for His people with a father's eagerness to provide for his children. And as the fathers and mothers in the crowd look down at their sons and daughters and the children look back up at their parents, a new understanding of God's love and character awakens in each heart. Parents knew the happiness of giving gifts to their children and seeing their faces light up with joy. Every child understood the love implied in the gift. No fear was involved. No begging was needed. The parent gave freely out of love, and the child received freely in love.

If this was what God was like, then He was someone they could approach without fear. This was a God they could love!

This parable shows why Jesus was so successful in His mission on this earth. He met people where they were, with all their preconceptions and distorted ideas, and used those very ideas to lead them to truth. No demanding. No brow-beating. Just acceptance and love. We can all learn a lesson from that.

REACT

How can you use others' preconceived ideas to lead them to Jesus?

By Richard G. Edison, a physician's assistant in Hudson Falls, New York.

Prayer Power

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rom. 8:26

Often I have talked to well-educated people and wondered what I could possibly say to them that would impress them of the wonders of God. It can be intimidating to express yourself to someone you think has a superior intellect. What you say and how you say it is important. Words, once released, can't be easily taken back. From what you say, they will draw an impression of you whether favorable or not.

I get the same feeling sometimes when I think about expressing myself to God meaningfully. I often ask myself when I pray whether I am worthy of God's time. Romans 8:26 gives us the following hope: "The Holy Spirit is always ready to help us. We do not even know how we should pray or what we need, and when we think we do, we do not know how to say it right. The Holy Spirit takes our deepest emotions and longings and puts them into the beautiful language of heaven, pleading with God for us as if we were right there" (*The Clear Word*).

The condition of our hearts, the intentions we have, bear more weight in God's eyes than our clumsy words. We need have no fear when approaching God that He

It can be intimidating to express yourself to someone you think has a superior intellect.

will not understand our feeble attempts to communicate with Him.

There is hope for every petitioner who approaches the Throne of Grace. But first we must approach.

"Prayer is the answer to every problem in life. It puts us in tune with divine wisdom, which knows how to adjust everything perfectly. So often we do not pray in certain situations, because, from our standpoint, the outlook is hopeless. But nothing is impossible with God. Nothing is so entangled that it cannot be made right by God. No human relationship is too strained for God to bring about reconciliation and understanding. No habit is so deep rooted that it cannot be overcome. No one is so weak that he cannot be made strong. No one is so ill that he cannot be healed. No mind is so dull that it cannot be made brilliant. Whatever we need or desire, if we trust God, He will supply it. If anything is causing worry or anxiety, let us stop rehearsing the difficulty and trust God for healing, love, and power."*

*Quoted by R. A. Rentfro, "My Last Day on Earth," in *Review and Herald*, Oct. 7, 1965.

By Susan Chase, an art and elementary-education major at Castleton (Vermont) State College.

Why Pray?

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 21:22

Are prayers really answered?

If we have to wait until we have forgotten the prayer before we get the answer, is it worth it?

If we get an answer that we do not like, is satisfaction necessary?

As a new Christian, I am not sure of the answers to these questions, but for me prayer is not always comfortable. At night with the lights out I can pray very comfortably and profusely. There is no audience, no one to criticize me. If my words jumble up or I can't express myself just right, God understands. In a crowd, relating something like a blessing, I always have fears of being too loud or not remembering to include the proper blessings. I always feel that someone else could express the prayer more eloquently. Despite that, I know that the Lord will accept and understand what I say, no matter how clumsily said. He even understands the things I fail to say because I can't express them or I forget them.

Remembering to pray for small things regularly even at odd moments, such as at the grocery store, while driving, and, for me most important, while disciplining

If my words jumble up or I can't express myself just right, God understands.

my children, is often easy for me to forget. It's one thing to go to God about a large problem or concern, something important enough to warrant His attention. It's another to feel as if you're pestering Him continually with small stuff like getting through the checkout line quickly or making the gas in the tank last one more day. He knows all about it anyway; why bother Him?

But God *likes* us to present Him with all our problems. Nothing is too small for His attention. Not a sparrow falls out of the sky without His knowing about it (Matt. 10:29), and He knows everything about us, even the number of hairs on our head (Matt. 10:30). Prayer may not be easy to remember to do, but it's worth it. It also helps give me perspective.

The Bible tells us, "When you ask God for help, believe that you will receive it, and He will help you in ways that will amaze you" (Matt. 21:22, *The Clear Word*).

REACT

1. Why bother to tell God things He already knows?
2. Does God expect us to pray aloud in public, even if it makes us uncomfortable?
3. How do you think prayer is a gift?
4. What purpose is fulfilled in such things as saying "grace" over meals?

By Edythe Monroe, a freelance writer and homemaker from North River, New York.

HOW MUCH WILL YOU PAY?



“All who exalt themselves will be humbled, but all who humble themselves will be exalted” (Luke 18:14, NRSV).

Jesus' Pride

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Phil. 2:5-11

She was young, sensible, and mature beyond her years. He was older, growing, and left for university with no goodbye. They had cared about each other and had something special, but she was hurt—more than he could know. Why did he do it?

Special friends became strangers. He had his new life with its new experiences, challenges, and friends. She was left behind, devastated. For a while, the pace of life and overcoming the newness and strangeness he was facing occupied his mind, leaving no time for thoughts of those he had left behind. A person who cared so much now appeared so uncaring, so thoughtless.

As the newness became normality, he had time to think, time to reflect, time to realize what he had given up, whom he had lost. There was something missing—someone missing. What was the point? She would not want to know, not want to be kicked in the teeth again. He wanted to apologize and explain, but something stopped him. He wished he could phone her but feared rejection. He wanted to resolve it before it was too late, but he did not want to cause her any more hurt.

He wished he could phone her, but feared rejection.

So he stayed away. Did he care, or was he just making excuses to satisfy his conscience and prevent himself from looking silly? He was human, a man with feelings; his pride could not handle it.

In a technological world where everything is to our convenience, it is easy to walk away and hurt the One who is most precious to us. It is only when separated from the one you love and you risk losing him or her that you realize just how much he or she means to you and your life. The rich young ruler was unable to humble himself, to give away all that he had to follow the One. The prodigal son swallowed his pride and humbled himself to be exalted as the son of the father he had left behind. In the same way, I had to put my selfish pride to one side and risk looking like an idiot, vulnerable, human, and make the effort. We had something special, and it was worth saving—pride only hindered the process.

My Jesus came to this world because we were worth something special to Him and worth saving. “He humbled himself and became obedient to death—even death on a cross” (Phil. 2:8, NIV). He did that for us! How does that make you feel—special? Why not! He is Someone to be proud of. Think about it!

By Russ McKie, a sports-science student at South Bank University, London, England.

The Only Way Up Is Down

LOGOS

Luke 14:7-11; 18:9-14; Matt. 21:28-32

“To some who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else, Jesus told this parable” (Luke 18:9, NIV).

Two men went up to the temple to pray—two worshipers, two prayers, two different outcomes.

Only one of the men prayed. This is clear from the first part of Luke 18:11. Jesus said that the first man, a Pharisee, prayed to himself and not to God. In public prayer there is always the danger that the prayer being offered may become a public *performance*, an opportunity to impress the congregation rather than to commune with God. In this instance, the Pharisee looked upon prayer as an opportunity for self-congratulation. In effect, he was giving a character reference before God. But God did not listen to his glowing testimonial of himself.

God does not listen to the prayer of the proud. Prayer is for the helpless, for those who recognize their weakness and their dire need. The Bible is full of examples of powerful prayers inspired by a deep, heartfelt need. God will never turn away the person who prays with a sense of his or her need. But the one thing that shuts a person off from God is a spirit of self-sufficiency, and this attribute was displayed in full measure by the praying Pharisee. The personal pronoun “I” occurs five times in his petition. A list of negative virtues is followed by a selection of minor acts of piety (verses 11, 12), all of which he regarded with immense satisfaction. But this spirit of pride and self-satisfaction blocked his path of prayer to God.

Pride rendered the Pharisee’s prayer ineffective in another way. Not only did he give himself a pat on the back, but he also looked down on others, specifically the tax collector who stood some distance from him. No doubt the Pharisee’s words were true. The tax collector had probably been involved in dubious practices in which the Pharisee would never have engaged. But that was not the point. In the presence of an all-holy and all-pure God, both were sinners, but the Pharisee’s pride ignored this fundamental truth. The Scottish commentator William Barclay puts it well: “In prayer we do not lift ourselves above our fellow-men. We remember that we are one of a great army of sinning, suffering, sorrowing humanity, all kneeling before the throne of God’s mercy.”

The Pharisee’s failure to recognize his need had one further consequence. It was the tax collector and not the Pharisee who returned home forgiven by God and justified in His presence (Luke 18:14). In his pride and self-confidence the Pharisee asked for nothing, and that is precisely what he received. He went home from the temple in the same condition as he came, a sinner clothed in the filthy rags of his self-righteousness. Not only was pride a barrier to his prayers, but it also prevented God’s salvation from changing his life.

“Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5, KJV).

The atmosphere in the upper room was tense. The disciples of Jesus had gathered there to celebrate the Passover with their Master. The polite conversation gave way to an uncomfortable silence. All the disciples and Jesus were present,

but someone was missing. The host who had provided the room for the meal had not arranged for someone to wash the feet of those who had come. Foot-washing was a menial task performed by people of humble rank, so no disciple took the initiative to serve his fellows. Each waited for another to make a move, and as the minutes passed, so the tension increased.

Then Jesus took a basin and a towel and began to wash His disciples' feet. In this act of service Christ gave a new definition of greatness. Jesus, the Creator and Lord of all, washed the feet of some of His creatures; the Master served His pupils. He even washed the feet of the one who would betray Him in a few hours' time.

This act of foot-washing was a concrete example of a principle that Jesus taught throughout His ministry. His estimate of true greatness cut across worldly values. The first was to be last, a leader was to be servant of all; the one who humbled himself would be exalted (Matt. 20:25-27; Mark 10:43, 44; Luke 14:11; 18:14). By this act Jesus showed what is involved in genuine service and true greatness.

But this act epitomized the driving force behind Christ's entire ministry. His Incarnation was a series of downward steps. The Creator of the universe became a helpless baby. Jesus was brought up in a village with a notorious reputation. He knew what it meant to toil for a living, and His mission was driven by the desire

“I will go up!” boasted Satan; “I will go down!” pledged Jesus.

to serve (Matt. 20:28; Mark 10:45). In death he took the final downward step on a shameful, God-forsaken cross.

What a contrast with the motivation of Satan! His heart was filled with a constant desire to move upward (see Isa. 14:12-14). “I will go up!” boasted Satan; “I will go down!” pledged Jesus. Their ways met at Calvary, and love won. Pride was humbled before humility; self-sacrifice triumphed over self-service.

That victory holds true for today. It will do so forevermore.

REACT

1. Pride is a quality we hate to see in others but often fail to see in ourselves. Why is pride so deceptive?
2. Why is pride so hateful to God?
3. True greatness is found in service. How can this be practical in everyday life?
4. How is thinking that we can become perfect by the things that we do a type of pride?
5. If pride is like a cancer, what is the therapy that will cure it?

*William Barclay, *The Gospel of Luke, The Daily Study Bible Series* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, revised edition 1975, reprinted 1986), pp. 224, 225.

By David McKibben, associate pastor of the Crieff Seventh-day Adventist Church, Perthshire, Scotland.

Looking to Jesus

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Phil. 2:3, 4

The waves rise high before crashing down into a foaming mass along the shore. Jesus stands, beckoning Peter to Him. "Looking unto Jesus, Peter walks securely; but as in self-satisfaction he glances back toward his companions in the boat, his eyes turn away from the Saviour. The wind is boisterous. The waves roll high and come directly between him and the Master; and he is afraid. For a moment Christ is hidden from his view, and his faith gives way. He begins to sink."¹

Peter's pride almost costs him his life. He loses contact with Jesus as he seeks the admiration of others. It's as though Peter's problem of pride rises like a wall of waves in front of him, blocking access to Jesus.

When life is going well for us, it is easy to keep going in our own self-absorbed world. Our pride keeps us from admitting our dependence on God. We forget that He is the one who wakes us up each morning and gives us the gift of life each day. We hurtle into the day, satisfied that we can cope with whatever life brings us. And if what we do brings the admiration of others then, like Peter, we may look around, pat ourselves on the back, and fluff up our feathers with pride.

Only when problems come our way do we realize we are sinking. "Peter lifts

"When God seems distant, who moved?"

his eyes from the angry waters, and fixing them upon Jesus, cries, 'Lord, save me.' *Immediately* Jesus grasps the outstretched hand, saying, 'O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?' "²

I like that concept of Jesus reaching to help Peter straightaway. Even when we've forgotten that Jesus is around, as soon as we call on Him, Jesus comes immediately to meet our needs.

"Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, . . . our frailty to His enduring might. You are not to look to yourself, not to let the mind dwell upon self, but look to Christ."³

A sign posted on the board outside a church read: "When God seems distant, who moved?" God is always close by, so that when we realize our dependence on Him, our wall of pride separating us from Him is removed. This gives Him access to our lives and allows Him to change us into people more like Himself.

REACT

1. What are some practical ways that we can "look to Christ"?
2. How can we put God first above ourselves? Be specific.

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

2. *Ibid.*, italics supplied.

3. *Steps to Christ*, p. 70.

By Dawn-Louise Clee, first-year student of dietetics, Queen Margaret College, Edinburgh, Scotland.

A Taxing Time

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 18:14

In a letter to Jean-Baptiste Leroy, Benjamin Franklin penned this famous line: “In this world, there is nothing certain but death and taxes.”*

Many of Jesus’ parables have to be placed in their historical and cultural context, but the images of taxes and tax collectors still have an enduring power. Even today, if tax collectors find underpayment of taxes, they can (and do) demand complete repayment in a matter of weeks. In Jesus’ time, the role of tax collector had added significance. The Jewish nation was living under Roman occupation, and taxes were a constant reminder of Rome’s supremacy (“Render therefore unto Caesar the things which are Caesar’s; and unto God the things that are God’s”). Particular spite was directed toward Jews who became tax collectors, for they were seen as traitors to their own people. In fact, their status was so low that in Matthew 21:31 Jesus mentions them along with prostitutes. Jesus talks about these groups, not in condemnation, however, but with warmth and love. “For everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted” (Luke 18:14, NIV).

For Adventists it is easy to fall into the trap of feeling that we are blessed

“In this world, there is nothing certain but death and taxes.”

above other people in our knowledge of Bible truths. However, if this leads to our being filled with spiritual pride rather than humility, it makes our Christian lives a hypocrisy. Jesus’ message to us in this week’s lesson is all about feeling our own unworthiness of God’s love, which is the secret of true humility. Being the Supreme Ruler of the universe to being a baby in a stable is the perfect example of humility.

The Collins Concise Dictionary of the English Language defines the root of tax in the Latin as *taxare*; “to appraise.” By referring to tax collectors, Jesus alludes to appraisal of their self-worth and their need of God’s saving grace. Maybe it’s time for us to “tax” ourselves and see our true need of God. Maybe then we can pray, “God, have mercy on me, a sinner” (Luke 18:13).

REACT

1. What professions, activities, or behaviors do you think Jesus would have used today to teach us about spiritual pride? Explain your answer.
2. Does this help us understand these parables more clearly?

**Dictionary of Quotations*, s.v. Benjamin Franklin.

I Wish I Were a Tax Collector

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 18:11-14

In the parable of the Pharisee and the tax collector, Jesus talks about the actions of two completely different men. In Jesus' time Pharisees were supposed to be examples for the people; tax collectors were considered lowest of the low. Jesus showed how pride could corrupt even the Pharisee, while the tax collector recognized his guilt and humbled himself before his Almighty God.

By being humble, we are drawing closer to Jesus, our best and only true example. Jesus went through His life with people looking up to Him, worshiping Him, and following Him around. This praise, honor, and worship could have gone to His head. Despite this almost irresistible temptation, Jesus did not let it affect Him in the slightest. Instead, again He is our example of complete humility at the Last Supper when He stoops and washes all the disciples' feet.

This act was unbelievable to the disciples, yet it was necessary to show them that humility is such an important part of following Jesus and pride such an unnecessary human attribute.

Pride stems from a self-centered nature that this world encourages wherever

By being humble, we are drawing closer to Jesus.

possible. People are always striving to outdo others by having the most expensive car, getting the highest marks in class, winning awards, etc.

While we are taught to do the best we can, this can create a prideful nature. Our goals change, and everything is done for self, while the true reason for living is forgotten. Like the Pharisee, we can see only ourselves and how good we are compared to others, exalting ourselves and putting everyone else down.

To avoid this, we have to be like the tax collector, realize how small we really are, turn to God, confess our sins, and humble ourselves. This, in turn, will reflect in our daily lives. While still trying to do our best at all times, our reasons are to reflect God outwardly and not to make the world turn and look at us.

Like the disciples, we have to learn from Jesus' example and apply it to our lives. Without asking for help from God, we as humans will not be able to release our pride, but through prayer, study, and meditation of God's Word, we will find that pride does not really suit us, and we will no longer put ourselves above others. God will become the center of our lives. He will bless us as He promises to do and will ultimately give us a new body, life, and home with Him.

By Chris Baker, fourth-year apprentice aircraft electrician with British Aerospace, Kilmarnock, Strathclyde, Scotland.

Something to Be Proud Of?

OPINION

Key Text: Phil. 3:4

One day several summers ago, I was enjoying a flower show in a small English country church. As I wandered around admiring the ornate arrangements, I found myself talking with a tall woman in her late thirties. Our conversation at first centered on the display but slowly headed toward a more religious theme. Then suddenly out of the blue came a comment that I had not been expecting: "I have seen God, you know?"

I tried, without success, to convince her of my biblical belief that "every eye shall see Him," all at once when He returns. Ignoring my comments, she continued by claiming that each one of us is a "god," and that if we look into ourselves, we're sure to find God. (Consider how the old lie from Genesis 3:5 is still being used to deceive.) The woman was, in fact, a member of the New Age movement on a recruitment exercise.

This conceited inward-looking is not peculiar to New Agers but is perhaps very similar to the pride that we often feel. The things we have and the person we perceive ourselves to be can all too easily become a god to us. All too often we

She was a member of the New Age movement on a recruitment exercise.

feel proud of our achievements and our popularity. This is something, however, that must be guarded against. "Pride goes before destruction." It is this that the Bible warns us against in Proverbs 16:18, NIV.

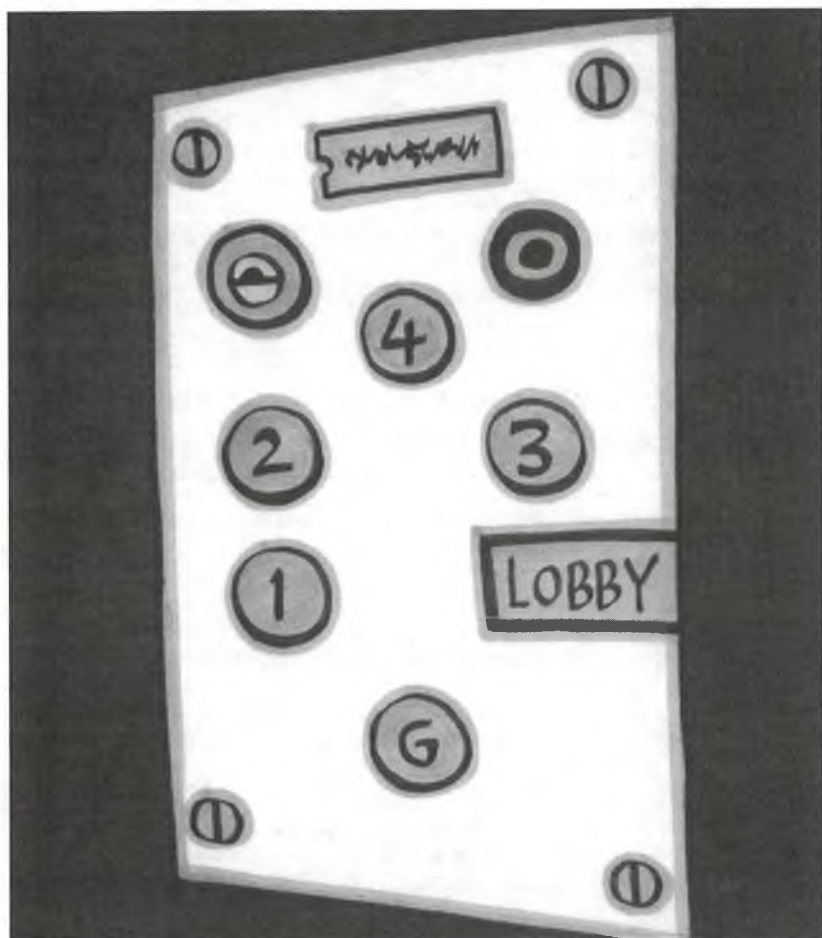
While not being proud or having inflated ideas of ourselves, yet we must respect ourselves, acknowledging that we are precious in God's eyes. We are no better or worse than anyone else; we are all simply loved by God. With such a knowledge, Christians should never need pride to make themselves feel worth something. The fact that we are so special that God sent His only Son to die for us should give us all the joy and self-worth that we could ever need. Rather than focus on what we have or what we can do, we should focus on God, who gives us everything we have. Then we can be proud of Him, "the Giver," and not of ourselves, "the receivers."

A good motto we can take from this week's lesson is in the words of the old hymn "When I Survey the Wondrous Cross."

"Forbid it, Lord, that I should boast,
Save in the death of Christ my Lord,
All the vain things that charm me most,
I sacrifice them to His blood."

By Sylvia Brown, second-year physiotherapy student, Glasgow (Scotland) Caledonian University.

SERVING THE MASTER



“And whatever you do, do it heartily, as to the Lord and not to men, knowing that from the Lord you will receive the reward of the inheritance; for you serve the Lord Christ” (Col. 3:23, 24, NKJV).

Only the Truly Talented . . .

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Col. 3:23, 24

There are four words that are just about the sweetest any human being can say or hear. These are words that make a difference, that have an impact. In fact, these words change lives! They can empower speakers to do things they never thought they would be able to do. They can lift the hearer to overwhelming happiness. These words almost have a force of their own.

The only trouble with these four words is that only the truly talented use them correctly. A lot of other people use them but never together. The truly talented use them together and in proper sequence and change the world with them. There are, of course, a lot of people who could be truly talented, but their potential is wasted. They never use these four words.

These four words can be used at any time. They are always appropriate. They can be used when you're busy or bored. They can be used in times of joy or grief. They can be used before finals or after finals. They can be used during work time or leisure time.

These four words can be used anywhere. They can be used at church as easily as in the gutter. They can be used in courts of kings and in bars. Their effectiveness

I last heard these four words spoken in an elevator.

is never lost because of location, and every language has an equivalent that is just as effective.

I last heard these four words spoken in an elevator. It is not often you hear anything said in an elevator. Elevators tend to shut off conversation as we struggle with the loss of private space and latent claustrophobia. We all stand stock still, silently gazing at the little buttons above the door as they light up one by one, marking passage of floors. This time the trip was different. As an already full elevator stopped at a floor, a slightly built young lady struggled with a file box full of paper. Her back arched as she struggled to balance the box, negotiate the step into the elevator, and stretch her protruding finger as far toward the fourth floor button as it would go. Her effort was futile. Everyone in the elevator had the same thought. We wondered how long she could continue to carry a load almost as heavy as she was! Then, from a corner in the back came those four precious words from a young boy, "How can I help?"

By Randall Skoretz, chaplain, Loma Linda (California) University.

The Ups and Downs of Being Talented

LOGOS

Matt. 25:14-30; Luke 16:1-9

“His master answered and said to him, ‘You wicked, lazy slave. . . . Take away the talent from him. . . . And cast out the worthless slave into the outer darkness; in that place there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth.’ ” (Matt. 25:26, 28, 30, NASB).

The unbridled wrath of such a demanding master. I visualize a beaten child, paralyzed to inaction, fearing any response would elicit physical punishment, or worse yet, abandonment. It is apparent from the start that the master did not think highly of this third slave. The talents were only given according to ability—he was granted only one. I would play it safe, too, wouldn't you? By burying this one talent, the slave assured that he would have something to return to his master. If slander and being cast to the place of “gnashing of teeth” was the punishment for breaking even, imagine what the price would have been for *losing* the talent.

Perhaps the key to this parable lies within this venture of the imagination. What could be a worse punishment? There is none. Total rejection destroys the total being. Given what we know, the slave actually had nothing to lose by investing. The master gave him an opportunity in which he had nowhere to go but up.

Nowhere to Go but Up

Having nothing to lose brings remarkable freedom. The story in Luke 16:1-9 also illustrates this freedom. The steward found motivation to succeed when he heard he was to lose his job. At the point of nothingness, all things become possible.

It is a small step to place ourselves in either story. Each of us began with nothing and was handed unlimited possibilities. “While we were yet sinners, Christ died for us” (Rom. 5:8). It is only in recognizing our starting point that we realize that we have nothing to lose.

Something's Holding Me Down

Development and growth are retarded when ego becomes involved. This theme is seen in both stories. Self-doubt, justifying self, and looking out for self were significant factors in the rejection of both these men.

The most subtle limitation in development, however, is the fear to think and respond from within. Interestingly, when the steward began to act shrewdly, he gained his master's praise (Luke 16:8).

It is much easier to live by a law—to act in accordance with prescribed dogma—than to risk the vulnerability of experiencing the unfolding of the law in one's own life. The Pharisees' claim to God was their scrupulous keeping of the law, yet they were rejected because they had closed minds (John 5:39, 40). There is nothing sacred about the law other than that it points us to the sacred. We do not connect with the sacred by *action* but through our *involvement* (Hos. 6:6).

The Sky's the Limit

In the parable of the talents, the master gives individual talents to individuals. The talents are hand-chosen by the master according to his personal knowledge of the individual (Matt. 25:15). The talents we receive are not replicas of those given to our parents, to our teachers, or even to an institution. The talents He gives are as unique as His unique creations. The master demands of me the responsibility to develop the talents that have been given to me. I am not responsible to develop or assume anyone's talents but my own. There is freedom in knowing that the Master created me to be exactly who I should be. There is freedom in knowing that what has been given to me is exactly what I should have. There is freedom in knowing that I do not have to fit into anyone else's mask or mold.

The hand of discipline and good intention has at times squashed the freedom of discovering one's own talents. The result is a misery of living a life that is not one's own. By failing to live my own life, I have failed the only task the Master has assigned. The "wicked, lazy slave" will be sent to the place of "weeping and gnashing of teeth." By contrast Matthew concludes the story with the reward that personal involvement brings. "Come, you who are blessed of My Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world" (Matt. 25:34). The sky really is the limit!

Opposition to this self-exploration stems from a need to fit into well-established

It is apparent from the start that the master did not think highly of this third slave.

norms, either in the church or in society. However, we were not created to fit into someone else's notion of who we must be. We were created for God's glory, not our parents', not our teachers', not even our church's, but God's (Isa. 43:7).

Wrapping It Up

In both our stories, there is an accounting (Matt. 25:19; Luke 16:2). I might ask myself, "What have I done with my talent?" No doubt this is an appropriate reaction, but this inward focus could cause one to miss the greater message. Perhaps these stories are more about the master than about the subordinates. Perhaps it is an accounting by the master that should draw our attention. Herein is revealed a God who rejoices in unlimited personal growth. Here we see a God who utterly rejects the stagnant excuses of limiting one's self by external forces.

REACT

1. If you would have been one of the first two righteous slaves in the Matthew 25 story, how would you have felt about the master's rebuke toward the "wicked, lazy slave?"
 2. What talents do you have in your life that you wish were not present? Explain your answer.
 3. If God is asking you to be true to who you are and to pursue whom He created you to be, who are you?
 4. How can we determine what our talents are?
 5. Are talents determined by what we are, or are they determined by who needs us?
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By Harold Brown, dean of men, Loma Linda (California) University.

Blessed to Bless

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Isa. 58:6-10

“Talents used are talents multiplied. Success is not the result of chance or of destiny; it is the outworking of God’s own providence, the reward of faith and discretion, of virtue and persevering effort. The Lord desires us to use every gift we have; and if we do this, we shall have greater gifts to use. He does not supernaturally endow us with the qualifications we lack; but while we use that which we have, He will work with us to increase and strengthen every faculty. By every wholehearted, earnest sacrifice for the Master’s service our powers will increase. While we yield ourselves as instruments for the Holy Spirit’s working, the grace of God works in us to deny old inclinations, to overcome powerful propensities, and to form new habits. As we cherish and obey the promptings of the Spirit, our hearts are enlarged to receive more and more of His power, and to do more and better work. Dormant energies are aroused, and palsied faculties receive new life.”¹

“Look at the life of many who claim to be Christians. The Lord has endowed them with capabilities, and power, and influence; He has entrusted them with

“Success is . . . the outworking of God’s own providence.”

money, that they may be co-workers with Him in the great redemption. All His gifts are to be used in blessing humanity, in relieving the suffering and the needy. We are to feed the hungry, to clothe the naked, to care for the widow and the fatherless, to minister to the distressed and downtrodden. God never meant that the widespread misery in the world should exist. He never meant that one man should have an abundance of the luxuries of life, while the children of others should cry for bread. The means over and above the actual necessities of life are entrusted to man to do good, to bless humanity.”²

“The lesson of this parable is for all. Everyone will be held responsible for the grace given him through Christ. Life is too solemn to be absorbed in temporal or earthly matters. The Lord desires that we shall communicate to others that which the eternal and unseen communicates to us.”³

REACT

What did Christ mean when He said, “The people of this world look out for themselves better than the people who belong to the light”? (Luke 16:8, Contemporary English version).

1. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 353, 354.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 370.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 373.

By Ralph Perrin, dean of students, Loma Linda (California) University.

Why God Gave Talent

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 63:3, 4

Talent. A noun that in ancient times was a unit of money. But our Lord is speaking of another definition, about special abilities or aptitudes, right? Well, what if not? How much difference would it make in your sphere of influence if, instead of practicing voice lessons for hours each day to bring joy to the convalescent, you were spending the same amount of time trying to make as much money as possible to do God's work? Think of all the good you could do as your income increased. Instead of sponsoring one child in Zaire, you could pay for a whole village. Ah, but you're right that in today's society it takes money to make money and as the third steward in Matthew 25 would well advise, the risk does outweigh the benefit. Oops, he was the one his master cast out.

Further study of the Holy Word makes it quite clear that God was speaking about the special gifts that He bestows upon each person. This, however, changes nothing from what was written above. All that we have, including time, abilities, opportunities, and possessions, belong to God, and we are but mere stewards. Our sole purpose is to use everything to bring praise and glory to our Master. There

Instead of sponsoring one child in Zaire, you could pay for a whole village.

is no mystery behind the Lord's mandate to "do it heartily, as to the Lord" (Col. 3:23, 24, NKJV). "Every individual, from the lowliest and most obscure to the greatest and most exalted, is a moral agent endowed with abilities for which he is accountable to God . . . the spiritual, mental, and physical ability, the influence, station, possessions, affections, sympathies, all are precious talents to be used in the cause of the Master for the salvation of souls for whom Christ died."¹

Talent is not given to flatter oneself or look down upon the work of others. "In looking for great things to do, neglect not the little opportunities that come to you day by day. He who neglects the little things, and yet flatters himself that he is ready to do wonderful things for the Master, is in danger of failing altogether."² When the Lord returns, will you be able to pay back the Master with the interest He so richly deserves?

REACT

1. How does an abuse of talent by someone you admire influence your personal development?
2. Should you say something to persons who do not appear to be using their talent toward praise for the Master? Explain.

1. *In Heavenly Places*, p. 224.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 226.

By Errol Fong, physical-therapy assistant, Loma Linda (California) University.

The Grateful Heart

HOW-TO

Key Text: Phil. 4:12, 13

For several years I worked at a youth camp in central Oregon. Each year one week was scheduled to accommodate blind campers.

Lisa was crippled, deaf, mute, *and* blind. The first time I saw her, she was being carried down to the dock where I was giving rides in the sailboat. Communication was through sign language, formed in the palm of her hand.

Lisa's deficits are not foremost in my memory. Rather, it was her grateful spirit. In spite of the fact that physically she had so little, her demeanor radiated cheerfulness and joy. As soon as I situated her in the boat, she gently reached up to feel my face. "Name?" she signed to her counselor. "Aaavied," Lisa said laughing, before the letter "I" had even been completed.

Lisa understood tragedy more than most of us ever will. Bitterness could have easily consumed her, as in the lives of other campers. But she had discovered God and the gratitude that accompanies knowing that she was a child of His kingdom.

So it is with us. Life will continue to present difficulties that threaten to stifle a grateful heart. But the fulfillment of God's power that turns sorrow into joy is unequalled. Here are a couple of ways to discover this gift:

The first time I saw her, she was being carried down to the dock.

- **Practice grateful living.** During small challenges, ask the question "Here, right now, for what or whom am I grateful?" A grateful heart will put insignificant troubles in proper light, and give you strength as you face greater challenges. Paul invites us, "Be joyful always; pray continually; give thanks in all circumstances, for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus" (1 Thess. 5:16-18, NIV). Some might think this is Pollyanna. But God is not soliciting ignorant, trite children. He simply realizes the inherent danger of our dwelling on our challenges and difficulties, to the point that we forget His omnipotent control.

- **Actively participate in solving the challenges of others.** In harmony with your personality type, give to someone before this weekend is over. You might first need to get acquainted with some I-don't-have-a-clue-who-they-are neighbors. Friendship is one of the greatest needs people have. Be a giver, a listener, a sharer. Exercise patience, generosity, thoughtfulness. God will help you in your creativity to reach others. He promises, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it" (Matt. 10:39).

REACT

1. What are the "nuts and bolts" for me in practicing grateful living?
2. How can I realistically incorporate giving to others in my daily routine?

By David Springer, junior physical-therapy student, Loma Linda (California) University.

Are You Ready for the Enjoyment?

OPINION

Key Text: Col. 3:23, 24

To be a servant of the Master is to reflect God's love by actively using our talents and skills to serve the world. In fact, this is the only reason God entrusted us with talents. But as God's faithful stewards, we must guard our talents from those forces that may stifle our motivation to use them to bring blessings and hope to others. In the past, I was unsure about my salvation, and this made me hold back on using my talents for God's cause.

Traditionally, the term *salvation* has meant only avoiding destruction, and the saints actual entrance into paradise. This narrow concept of salvation forced me to focus primarily on future events, and I began to neglect my duty as a Christian in becoming an active member of society. All my emphasis was on what, when, and how the events of the end of time will unfold.

There was a constant struggle to find exactly what I needed to do or not to do to secure my salvation or to avoid destruction. Salvation was not a pleasure of the present; rather, it was a reward of the future. This uncertainty of my own future salvation made me blind to the needs of people around me. By the grace of God,

God wants to work through your talents to bring salvation to others.

I realized that salvation is not an unreachable goal lost in the future; rather, it is an active process, right here in the present.

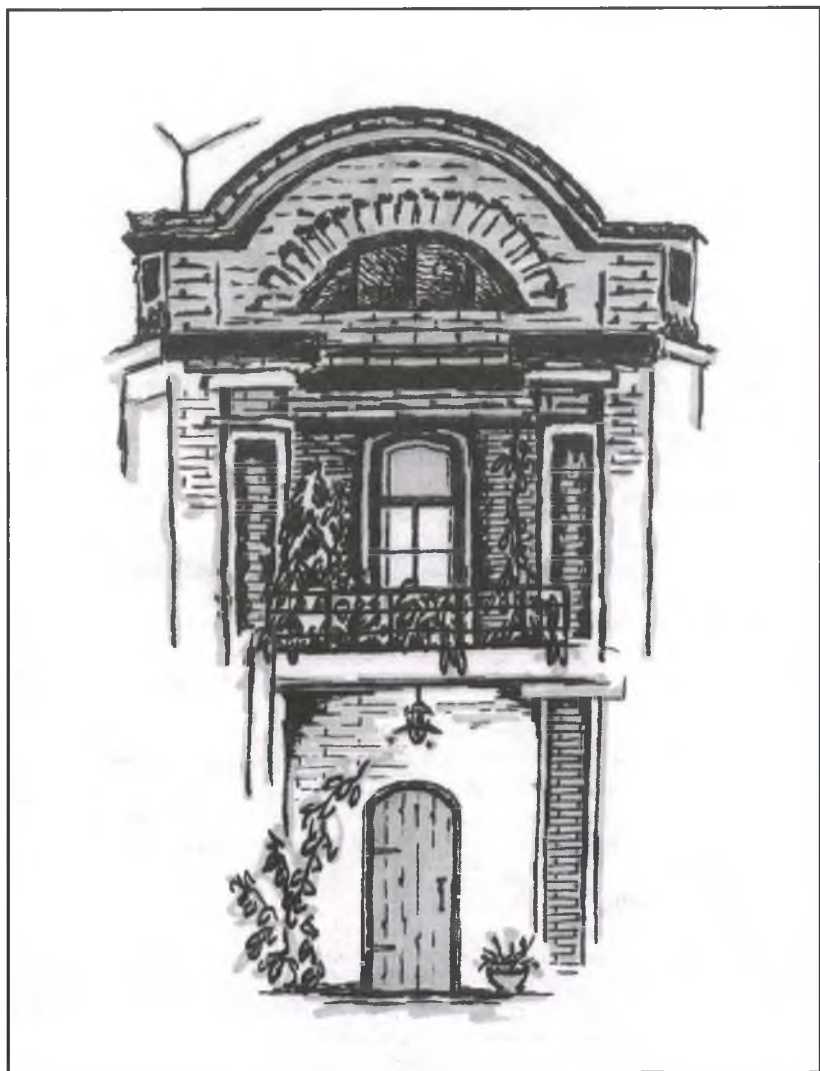
By using their talents to bring beautiful souls to Jesus, all can now enjoy assurance of their salvation. This concept of salvation brings a powerful realization that by the use of our talents for others we gain an intimate view of God's character and the security that in His arms we are saved. "By living to minister for others, man is brought into connection with Christ. The law of service becomes the connecting link which binds us to God and to our fellow men."

God wants to work through your talents to bring salvation to others. There is a place for you in His plan. If you just place your talent in His hands, no matter how small it is, God can touch hearts with it. What a great privilege to join heaven in reuniting God with His loved ones!

Beware! Just as I used to be obsessed with my security of salvation, there can be things that keep you from being used by God to reach out to others. Is there something holding you back from the pleasure of enjoying salvation through serving your Master? The assurance of salvation comes through the enjoyable process of reaching out to others. Are you ready for the enjoyment?

**Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 326.

TRUE LOVE



“You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your strength, and with all your mind, and your neighbor as yourself” (Luke 10:27, NKJV).

She Lived Love

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Lev. 19:34

“Ma’am, we need your assistance. Your neighbor in the upstairs apartment was murdered. Her mother and her two children are at church.” The officer shifted from one foot to the other, adjusted his cap, cleared his throat. “We think it would be better if someone Mrs. Sims¹ knows is present when we tell her about her daughter. Could someone here go with us?”

He gestured toward his partner standing by the squad car and gave a nervous half smile, waiting for Mama’s answer.

“Sure, she and the children should come here.”

The officer thanked Mama and nodded in my direction. I was 16 at the time. Half an hour later, she welcomed Mrs. Sims, six-year-old David, and five-year-old Susan into our home. They never returned to that upstairs apartment.

Mama never met a stranger. She smiled as big as Texas and had Grand-Canyon-sized generosity. Since they had not lived in the neighborhood long, Mama had seen Mrs. Sims only a few times. Yet she welcomed her home that day like a long-lost sister. Mama’s heart and home always had room for one (now three) more.

When Mama moved to another part of town, Mrs. Sims, Susan, and David moved with her. They lived with Mama five or six years—until Mrs. Sims died

“Your neighbor in the upstairs apartment was murdered.”

of a heart attack. As they waved goodbye, tearstained faces were the last Mama saw of Susan and David. They wanted to stay. Mama tried to adopt them. An aunt and uncle they barely knew took custody.

Mama attended church only for weddings or funerals. She stayed out of other people’s business, but our neighbors knew she was there for them. She handled heartache and problems (which most African Americans have). She lived to give; she lived love.

“In the story of the good Samaritan, Christ illustrates the nature of true religion. He shows that it consists not in systems, creeds, or rites, but in the performance of loving deeds, in bringing the greatest good to others, in genuine goodness.”²

I saw modeled in my paternal grandmother’s life every Christian ethic I know and practice. Through her I saw Christ in action.

1. A fictitious name.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 497.

Turnaround on Goodness

LOGOS

Luke 10:25-37

Ask anyone on the street, "Who is most likely to live forever in God's eternity, a good person or a bad person?" The answer certainly would not be a bad person. Most people would rather be good than bad. Being good generally brings approval from others. It gives a sense of positive self-worth. And most people think it is the right thing to do no matter what being good entails. Goodness is under discussion in the following parable.

The parable of the good Samaritan is a composite of an ego-driven law expert who engages Jesus in conversation and finds himself wrestling with guilt.

"Who is your neighbor?" Jesus asks a question in return, but only after giving options in a short story. "Who do you think proved to be the neighbor?" The answer was obvious because it cut across the plastic of pride, profession, position, or prestige. The good man of the story was good because he responded to human need and was motivated by an attitude of compassion.

We find ourselves in the lawyer because we feel guilty for having similar feelings. All too many times we are driven by social norms, even by religious arrogance, to be highly selective in our compassion to people. It is not that we don't care. It is that we carefully screen those for whom we will care. Comfort, compatibility, and caring have to combine so that we can have a sense of controlled goodness, thus fulfilling our obligation to be neighborly.

Christ did not then, and does not now, look at people and categorize them into

Christ looks constantly for people in the ditches of life.

a hierarchy of worth. Neither does He see people through the eyes of convenience or self-preservation. Every person whose mind is turned to Christ finds acceptance and relief from the destructive elements of sin. Christ looks constantly for people in the ditches of life, for those He might rescue and save.

You may be thinking, *I can't get involved with a lot of problems that other people have. I have enough of my own.* More important than doing heroic things for people in need is your attitude toward them. A good-Samaritan attitude recognizes the emotional as well as the physical condition of a person in need. A good-Samaritan attitude becomes vulnerable to human need even if there is nothing you can do except to take the time to recognize another's suffering.

It is significant to stop instead of to keep on walking. Stopping is the equivalent of being arrested by the Holy Spirit. Stopping is not an inconvenience but an opportunity "to walk on" with God. The priest and the Levite thought they were walking *with* God as they were walking *away* from Him. That is a sobering thought.

The Samaritan was not motivated by the hope of receiving recognition for his compassion. He saw human need and responded to that need because he had an attitude of humble equality. It was God's attitude coupled with God's grace that

motivated the Samaritan to stop, to stoop, to swab, and to save.

In the parable of the good Samaritan, Jesus teaches that love knows no boundaries of race or status. At the time of the story, Samaritans and Jews were arch-enemies. Here the Samaritan helps the robbed and wounded Jew wholeheartedly with as much, or more, love than neighbors who are the best of friends. Truly the love of God is more than theory. It goes beyond debate or philosophy. It calls one to be active with a purpose, helping to better the condition of anyone who struggles with life's problems. The parable will help you to see your neighbor as anyone with whom you come in contact.

The lawyer's question at the beginning, "What must I do to inherit eternal life?" (Luke 10:25, NIV) was never directly answered by Jesus. However, the lawyer did get the message that eternal life comes through the undeserved grace of God and that through this new life you will be enabled to have real love toward God and your fellow men to put into practice the goodness of God.

Application

Personal opportunities to care are endless. Here are a few to start you thinking:

- Care for a single parent's children for a weekend.
- In a restaurant, pay the bill for someone whom you do not know.
- Offer to mow a neighbor's lawn while they go on vacation.
- Take food to someone either before or after they move.
- Tell someone you are praying for him or her.
- Be a buddy to someone struggling to overcome a destructive habit.
- When visiting someone, show a genuine interest in his or her life and resist

the urge to talk about yourself.

REACT

1. Have I been walking away from someone or some situation that I really need to help or make right?
2. What is my attitude toward others outside my comfort zone?
3. How will I know when I am really good?
4. Who are the Samaritans in your life? Why?
5. How desperate does someone have to be to be considered a "neighbor in need" by you?

Go and Do Likewise

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 10:36, 37

It was the spring of 1987, and I was a graduate student at Loma Linda University. I was privileged to attend the annual meeting of the American Society for Microbiologists in Atlanta, Georgia. I had secured lodging at a moderately priced motel, and with the constraints of a student's budget, sightseeing was limited to places within walking distance.

During one sojourn, I found signs pointing to a federal historic site and shortly arrived at the Martin Luther King, Jr., National Historic Site. I was overwhelmed at the beauty and simplicity of the monument erected to the memory of this great leader. Before me was a small marble crypt set on a circular brick platform at the center of a shallow pool. Its whiteness stood out in stark contrast to the brilliant blue of the sky reflected in the waters.

I entered Freedom Hall and admired the displays of photographs, artifacts, and memorabilia from the life of Dr. King, chronicling the movement he led and for which he gave his life. One of the most impressive exhibits was a ten-foot statue entitled "Behold." This monument to the African-American experience depicts

I found signs pointing to a federal historic site.

Kunta Kinte holding his infant daughter Kizzie up to the sky as part of a ritual baptism. I saw Dr. King's vestment, Nobel Peace Prize medallion, and many other objects of interest. Prior to my departure, my attention was arrested by a painting depicting peoples of all races, standing together. This, more than anything else, illustrated the message behind the parable of the good Samaritan. It said to me that the unity of brotherhood in Christ makes us all neighbors.

How do you, as a Christian, answer the question "Who is my neighbor?" How well do you coexist with your antagonists as "your neighbors"?

By William Payne, assistant professor of medical technology, Arkansas State University, Jonesboro, Arkansas.

Loving Deeds, Not Creeds

EVIDENCE

Key Text: 1 John 4:12

A lawyer asked Jesus, “What must I do to inherit eternal life?” (Mark 10:17, NIV). In Greek the emphasis is on the word *do*. The current Jewish opinion was that you simply had to *do* all the things taught by the scribes. Jesus’ stories heard by the multitudes seemed to suggest that out of a love relationship with the heavenly Father, loving deeds would flow. Hoping to trap Jesus into saying something that would discredit His new creed, the Pharisees asked a professor of Jewish law to pose this question.

Jesus didn’t answer the lawyer’s question but instead asked him what he thought the answer might be. The lawyer quoted from Leviticus 19:18, in which the Greek word *plesion*, translated “neighbor,” included only fellow Israelites either by birth or conversion to Judaism.¹ He could love his good Jewish neighbors, but he knew that he hadn’t gone much beyond that. Fighting the conviction of Jesus’ simple responses and wanting to defend himself, the lawyer asked, “And who is my neighbor?” (verse 29). He had been studying the Scriptures, and his question, though

Both the Jewish priest and Levite in the story were listening that day.

provocative, was tinged with sincerity. He knew the law; but without a relationship with the Lawgiver, he didn’t grasp the spirit of the law.

Jesus tactfully answered the lawyer by telling a story that was circulating in Jericho at the time. The 13-mile road from Jerusalem to Jericho was rough and dropped 3200 feet through barren land, bordered in places by high limestone cliffs that provided hideouts for robbers. Both the Jewish priest and Levite in the story were listening that day.² The Samaritan and Jews described by Jesus were neighbors (near-dwellers) who worshiped the same God and based their religion on the same Books of Moses, but they were spiteful enemies.

Jesus asked, “Which of these three do you think was a neighbor to the man who fell into the hands of robbers?” (verse 36). The lawyer was forced to answer his own question again. When the Master Storyteller finished the parable of the good Samaritan the lawyer’s prejudice toward Jesus was gone. Jesus, showing mercy to the lawyer who was trying to involve Him in conflict, had given him an example of true religion—enabling him to catch the spirit of the law and be a neighbor to anyone who needed his help.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 782.

2. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 380.

Being a Good Samaritan in Today's Society

HOW-TO

Key Text: Gal. 5:14

On a recent ABC news show *Turning Point*, aired on the week of February 11, 1996, children were being interviewed on the subject of morals. The reporter asked whether the children would risk their lives to help someone. We need to ask ourselves the same question: Would I risk my life (as the good Samaritan did) to help someone? And would my answer be the same as the children's—an unequivocal No!

Those same children were asked whether they could see themselves killing or doing harm to someone, and they said they could. The parents were shocked at their children's response, but when asked if they had ever helped someone in need, few were able to say Yes. Their reason: fear of being harmed.

It is important that we as parents and young adults set the example for the youth and be good Samaritans or good neighbors to our fellow humanity. We need to train our children and be examples. See Proverbs 22:6 and 2 Timothy 1:5. Our children are the leaders of tomorrow, and a generation of children is growing up with no love for fellow humanity in need.

Does our fear ever justify not helping someone in need? The same question

The reporter asked whether the children would risk their lives to help someone.

can be asked: Did the fear of becoming unclean justify the priest and Levite in not helping the man on the side of the road? We need to put our fear aside and lay claim to the promises of God to protect and watch over us (Ps. 34:7).

Is it not always necessary for us to put our life on the line when helping someone in need? All one needs to do is "love your neighbor as yourself." Set the example by putting others' needs ahead of your own. Society's future depends upon what kind of example we set for the next generation.

REACT

1. Are there ways to help others on the roadside in need without putting one's life on the line?

2. Are there other ways we can put our neighbor's needs above our own—for example, not parking in a handicap parking space even though you will be in the store only a few minutes? Can you think of some other ways?

By Earleen DeGolyer, vice-president, True Care Medical Supply, Inc., Jonesboro, Arkansas.

God's Children

OPINION

Key Text: 1 John 3:18-24

We have a family tradition, started before we were married, that has caught on with our three young children. We love good food and have many family favorites. When one of us has a rare treat or that last special bite left on his plate, knowing that another in the family would really savor it, too, he sometimes passes it to the other and says: "True love!" Everyone in the family knows what it means: "This is really special to me, but because I truly love you, I'm willing to give it up for you to enjoy." It's a little thing, relatively speaking, but it has created an awareness in our children that has gone way beyond just food. I've watched our kids interact with almost unconscious unselfishness, not just with one another, but with other children and adults. They're not saints by any means, and they're certainly not consistent, but they've woven into their daily lives the concept of kindness to others, even if it involves a sacrifice on their part. Small, seemingly insignificant acts can help us define the spirit of "true love."

What does this tell us as adults? Children behave almost instinctively, rarely acting on conscious, directed decisions. Their actions reflect their spirits. If the innocence of childhood can incorporate unselfish love for others so readily, think

Small, seemingly insignificant acts can help us define the spirit of "true love."

of the possibilities for us adults as we learn and grow to be more like God's children. The Samaritan did not stop to ponder whether the man lying before him deserved his help; nor did he dwell on the ramifications of his actions. His unselfish love flowed easily and freely to the injured Jew.

Admittedly, this is not always that easy. As medical professionals, my husband and I treat the sick and injured, no matter what the surrounding circumstances may be. Without the grace of God and the forgiving spirit He gives us, it would be very difficult to care compassionately for the belligerent drunk driver lying in a room next to the body of the child killed by his careless actions. When we need additional strength, we can turn to God for guidance (1 John 3:22) just as our children come to us when they are faced with problems. With His Spirit, we can live by His law of love (1 John 3:24), the real definition of "true love."

REACT

1. How can you identify things in your life that help you and those around you define the spirit of "true love"?
2. What small additions can you make to your life that can serve as beacons of "true love"?

By Dallie Fernando Ricca and Greg Ricca, anesthesiologist and neurosurgeon, respectively, in Jonesboro, Arkansas.

TO FORGIVE IS DIVINE



“Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you” (Col. 3:13, NIV).

True Forgiveness

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 6:14, 15

Corrie Ten Boom and her sister, Betsie, were imprisoned in Hitler's Ravensbrück Concentration Camp. One guard was especially cruel to them. Corrie could handle the abuse against herself but couldn't bear to witness the beatings the guard inflicted upon her sister, which eventually claimed Betsie's life. In the years that followed, a great resentment toward this guard welled up within Corrie.

Once the war had ended, Corrie devoted her life to serving the Lord. Part of her mission involved going to Germany to share the message of God's love with a people heavily laden with guilt. After one service, the people stood in line to greet her. Among them, she recognized the same guard who had so cruelly abused her and Betsie. He said, "I appreciated your message tonight. Since Ravensbrück, I have come to know Jesus Christ as my Saviour, and I am now seeking your forgiveness."

Corrie now faced the ultimate test. Would she forgive the man responsible for inflicting so much pain on her and Betsie? Suddenly, all the horrible memories of Ravensbrück, the beatings, and Betsie's slow, agonizing death came flooding back. Feelings of pain, anger, and resentment clutched at Corrie's heart.

She knew, however, that forgiveness held a condition: "If you do not forgive

Would she forgive the man responsible for inflicting so much pain on her and Betsie?

men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses" (Matt. 6:15, NKJV). The man reached out his hand and asked, "Corrie, will you forgive me?"

Corrie stood for what seemed an eternity. Then finally she cried out from within, "Jesus help me! I can lift my hand. I can do that much. You supply the feeling!"¹ As she reached out and grasped the hand of the former guard, a healing warmth began to flood her entire body. With tears in her eyes, she said at last, "I forgive you, brother, with all my heart."²

Until then, Corrie had never experienced so intensely the healing power of God's love. At the same time, she testified that it was not her love, rather the power of the Holy Spirit as recorded in Romans 5:5 that enabled her to forgive.

This heart-rending account reminds us that we too need divine intervention in order to forgive. In our human nature, we are inclined to harbor feelings of pain, anger, resentment, and revenge toward those who have wronged us. Nevertheless, we all can experience the same healing warmth as Corrie, the warmth that accompanies true forgiveness. For the power to forgive will come to each of us when we allow the Holy Spirit to be our strength when we are weak.

1. Corrie Ten Boom, *Tramp for the Lord* (Old Tappan, N. J.: Fleming H. Revell Co., 1974), p. 55.

2. *Ibid.*

By Lisa Gamblin, third-year elementary-education major, Canadian Union College, College Heights, Alberta.

Tones of Forgiveness

LOGOS

Matt. 18:21-35

Forgiveness! What is it? Are there degrees of forgiveness? The answers to these questions can help one forgive totally.

In the *World Book Dictionary*, there are three definitions of forgiveness: (1) the act of forgiving, pardon, (2) willingness to forgive, and (3) remission of a debt. Each part is important to the whole. Let us look at each separately.

1. The act of forgiving, pardon. Matthew 6:14, 15 says that your heavenly Father will forgive you if you forgive those who sin against you, but if you refuse to forgive them, He will not forgive you. This text helps me a lot. Sometimes when others do something to me, I just do not want to forgive them. I want to punish them. They hurt me, and I want them to suffer. I guess it's part of my human nature. When I read this text, it helps me realize that the only person I'm hurting is myself. Forgiveness is helping me more than the other person. Maybe that sounds selfish, but it is true. Forgiveness is the most help to the person who forgives.

2. Willingness to forgive. I could ask a question. How about the times when we are the ones whom someone else does not want to forgive? What happens then? I know that I want them to forgive me and put it in the past. Should it not go both ways? The golden rule applies. "Do to others what you would have them do to you" (Matt. 7:12, NIV). There is also a good text that comes to mind when one is in the above situation. Luke 6:36-38 advises, "Try to show as much compassion as your Father does. Never criticize or condemn—or it will all come back on you. Go easy on others: then they will do the same for you. For if you give, you will get!" (NEB).

There are sins that God judges more harshly.

3. Remission of a debt, obligation, or penalty. In court, when a sentence is given, the accused has to suffer the penalty of the sentence. When Adam and Eve sinned in the Garden of Eden, a sentence was given: eternal death. Someone had to pay. It was meant to be us, but Jesus was there to pay it for you and me. He died our death for us. That put Him in a position to give us a sentence just as severe or worse, but He did not. He forgave us. We surely did not deserve it. Not only did we sin to start with, but we killed Him too! We are the lowest of the low. And yet He forgave us. On the cross He said, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do" (Luke 23:34, KJV). Talk about major forgiveness! I know that I would not have been able to say that, without God doing it for me, if people were hammering nails in my hands and feet and piercing my side. This was the ultimate act of forgiveness. Jesus paid our penalty and did not expect anything from us but to accept the fact that He did it.

This leads to the second question: Are there degrees of forgiveness? To answer this question, first you must decide whether there are degrees of sin. Ellen White talks about this: "The Lord has not given us a list of graded sins."¹ Yet she also says that "those who have put on Christ by baptism . . . should not set up idols in their hearts. . . . Those who have . . . tasted a Saviour's love, and who then persist

in uniting with the foes of Christ . . . will be more severely judged than the heathen who have never had the light and have never known God or His love.”²

These statements show us that there are sins that God judges more harshly, but His judgments are not the same as we would judge. We would probably designate the greatest sin to be something like murder, rape, or incest. Those are the things we see as the most horrible, unforgivable sins. But that is not the way God sees it. To Him, a murderer who finally meets Him and really accepts Him is better than someone who is baptized, calls himself a Christian, and does not really love God or want to follow Him with all of his being.

This is where forgiving comes in. As humans, we want to forgive just as we judge. Makes sense, doesn't it? For a non-Christian, this would be true. But for Christians, we are to forgive as God forgives. And God is love. The actual act of forgiving is always the same. The hard part, which makes some cases more difficult than others, is the path that leads to the forgiving. The one thing that makes all the difference is love. That is where the separation should come between a Christian and nonbeliever. The Christian has Christ's love. Christ gave us the perfect example of love. Through His death, it is made possible for us to love and forgive.

REACT

1. Does time change the degrees of forgiveness? If a person is slow to forgive but eventually forgives, is that as legitimate as quick forgiveness?

2. Does forgiveness improve with its difficulty? In yesterday's portion of the lesson, was Corrie's forgiveness made better by the horrors that needed to be forgiven, or is forgiveness of any kind a miracle of grace?

3. What effect would my church have on the surrounding community if its members could freely bestow the kind of forgiveness that Christ's example has shown us?

4. Is it possible to be an unforgiving servant to yourself? Explain your answer.

5. Is the process of forgiveness the same when it is yourself who needs forgiveness?

1. *Messages to Young People*, p. 91.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, pp. 365, 366.

Love Forgives

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 130:4, 7

No matter how hard we fall, God's forgiveness is like His love, a free and gracious gift. It is already promised to us, and all we must do to receive it is ask for it and accept it.

We do not deserve to be forgiven for our actions. This is also true for the unforgiving servant in this lesson's parable. He received pardon, yet did not show mercy to one who needed his forgiveness. But "Jesus has purchased redemption for us."¹ "It is ours . . . if we will prove worthy of eternal life."² We prove worthy by living a life controlled by God and showing His love and forgiveness to others.

"How often is Christ disappointed in those who profess to be His children. He has given them unmistakable evidences of His love. He became poor, that through His poverty we might be made rich. He died for us, that we might not perish, but have eternal life."³

God's forgiveness is most evident in the sacrifice that His Son, Jesus, gave—His death on the cross. Even now, after His death and resurrection, Jesus feels so much love for the entire human race that He intercedes for us with God.

I was once asked, "Is love a feeling?" For all the sins that we have committed

I have to believe that Jesus' love must involve a feeling.

against the principles and laws of God, I have to believe that Jesus' love must involve a feeling. If He had not a feeling of compassion for us, He would not have forgiven the things we did against Him.

The difference between our forgiving and divine forgiveness is the Lord. Because He is our example, we should therefore forgive as He forgave. For He forgave us many times, many more than seventy times seven. If we do not accept God's love and forgive as He forgave, then we do not "Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom, because judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment!" (James 2:12, 13).

A connection with Christ is not just a behavior toward Him, but it is a relationship of being dependent on Him. If we have this relationship with Christ, we will be guided by the Holy Spirit to forgive from our hearts. The power and strength in God's Spirit is enough to allow us to show, sometimes without knowing and with humility, Christ's tender mercies and loving forgiveness to each one we contact.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 1, p. 199.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 3, p. 525.

By Timothy Gifford, second-year business major at the University of New Brunswick at St. John.

Clan Warfare in the Church?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 23:34

“Then said Jesus, Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do” (Luke 23:34).

In the sixteenth century, 800 Scotsmen, from the Fraser and MacDonald clans, engaged in a deadly battle from which only 14 men survived. You would think that some important issue had been at stake, or perhaps the fight was over territory, as was often the case between clans; however, the cause of this fatal encounter was a mere perceived slur. The chieftain of the MacDonald clan felt that he had been insulted by the Fraser clan and because the MacDonald chieftain lacked a forgiving spirit, 786 men lost their lives.

Perhaps a parallel can be drawn from this and applied to some churches. In church conflicts, human lives are not in danger, but human eternal destinies are involved. In some churches certain members of the congregation will not sit on the same side of the sanctuary as other church members. Sometimes a member will believe that another has slighted or insulted him, a member of his family, or a member of his social group. There are times when a member has felt he was intentionally wronged but has been mistaken in this belief. He has merely allowed himself to be oversensitive.

The chieftain of the MacDonald clan felt that he had been insulted.

When people really have been intentionally insulted by others, are they then justified in rallying sympathy for themselves and encouraging their church friends to ostracize the offending members? Is there, in any circumstance, justification to exhibit an unforgiving spirit? Surely if others have not asked for our forgiveness and do not appear to feel any remorse at all for their behavior, we would be justified in withholding forgiveness—at least until remorse is apparent. Or would we? For this answer we must look to Christ's example.

If ever there was justification for being unforgiving, Jesus certainly could have claimed it on the cross. He was completely innocent of *any* wrong, yet His own people, his fellow “church members,” engineered his cruel death. Did Christ believe that because of their unjust action, divine forgiveness could be withheld? On the contrary, Christ answered unjust actions with a beautiful prayer: “Father, forgive them” (Luke 23:34). If Christ could forgive such behavior, surely we should eagerly forgive our fellow sinners, no matter what the offense, thereby avoiding “clan warfare” in our church.

By Dianne Craig, third-year history and English student, University of New Brunswick at St. John.

Purchased and Forgiven

HOW-TO

Key Text: Micah 7:19

It is safe to assume from this week's lesson that it is pretty important to practice forgiveness. Our being pardoned depends on it. But how can we forgive someone who has hurt, used, or abused us? Easier said than done, right? Aren't some crimes and actions too big, bad, and ugly for forgiveness? Aren't there any exceptions? We all have been at that place in our lives when someone has harmed us in a cruel and deliberate way. Does God still expect us to forgive?

Let's look at it this way: have you or I ever wronged God? Sure, you say, but that is different. Is it? We, the collective human race, are the cause of Christ's sacrifice and death. He pardoned our sins with His blood. *Our* sins. The person sitting next to you in class, the executive vice-president down the hall, the murderer, and the rapist are to be treated as our brothers and sisters. That's quite inclusive. It means that I must forgive you and you must forgive me—no matter what. Back to the first question: How?

● **Remember** that provision has been made for all of us to be pardoned by God. He has provided forgiveness of a huge debt. Think about it. Feeling humble? Let's move on.

We're not talking about a three-strikes-and-you're-out kind of forgiveness.

● **Accept** God's Spirit into your heart. Only through the Holy Spirit's direct influence can we have God's forgiveness in our hearts. In a word: pray!

● **Love!** The idea sounds a little tired and worn out? Has the word *love* been spread so thin by cupids, hearts, and "flower children" that the meaning has become invisible? Don't worry, God handles that department too. The Holy Spirit, if asked, will provide His amazing and never-fading gift of all-inclusive love. "He that loveth his brother abideth in the light" (1 John 2:10). Sound better?

● **Forget** it. Leave the hurt and the pain in God's capable hands. Another cliché? It is possible to forget. After all, God has already done it millions of times. Each time we ask for forgiveness, He casts our "sins into the depths of the sea" (Micah 7:19). And don't forget: we're not talking about a three-strikes-and-you're-out kind of forgiveness.

All right, so what if we have some trouble with this unconditional forgiveness? It sounds really nice, but does it really work? No! Forgiveness is probably one of the toughest assignments God asks us to complete, *unless* we have the all-important qualifier—a two-way relationship with the Expert on forgiveness. Only through a closely bound, prayerful, joyous, communicative relationship with our dearest Friend can we accept and grant true, lasting, blanketing forgiveness.

By Heather Craig, an English and history student, University of New Brunswick at St. John.

Who Is the King?

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 5:44

In a cold, dimly lit office in Victorian England, Bob Cratchett scratches the figures with his nearly frozen quill. A knock at the door disturbs his concentration. Scrooge pushes by him to insult the Ingatherers before turning them away. As Scrooge returns to his own warm office, he notes an error of one penny in Bob's calculations. During the confrontations at the door, Bob has made a mistake.

Scrooge goes ballistic! In a total rage, he fires Bob. Bob begs for forgiveness. Scrooge won't even listen. He turns Bob out. Bob is ruined. His reputation is shot. His family could starve. The future looks grim.

At home, Bob is optimistic and forgiving. Why, he would even invite Scrooge for Christmas dinner if it were possible.

We can apply the parable of the king and his servants to this situation. The king was the one who forgave the huge debt. In this story, that would be Bob Cratchett. Bob forgave the large offense: the well-being of his family, his home, his career in danger. Similarly, the unforgiving servant would be Scrooge, despite Scrooge's greater fortune and social standing. The social order is turned upside down. The

Scrooge pushes by him to insult the Ingatherers before turning them away.

high becomes the low and the low becomes high when we look at issues through God's eyes. The person who acts like the king, God, becomes the king. Instead of one person of privilege, there are many enjoying the privilege of being like Him. No wonder Jesus told truths like this in the form of parables.

How do you react? Can you easily forgive one who puts your family and you in jeopardy? Human nature leads us to feel hurt and angry and to want revenge. What a horrible place the world would be without forgiveness! Forgiveness doesn't come easily, especially if someone has really been hurt or insulted. But with God's help, it can be easier. And it is essential.

"I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you" (Matt. 5:44, NKJV).

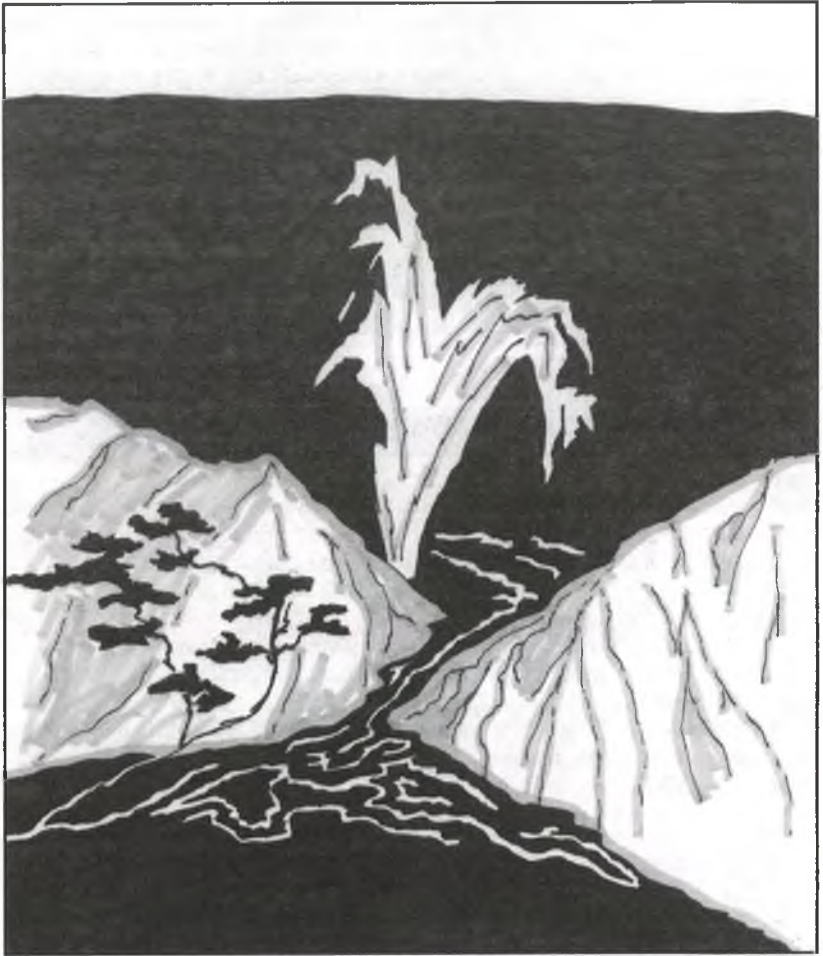
REACT

1. The unforgiving servant probably said Thank you when the king forgave his huge debt. But really he had no thought of accepting anything offered by the king: forgiveness, love, freedom. How would the unforgiving servant have lived, if he had been king?

2. If forgiveness turns the social triangle upside down (one king to many kings and many servants to a few unforgiving servants), what does that suggest about the possibilities of many people joining the kingdom of God?

By Jason Peck, a senior at St. John (New Brunswick) High School.

WE'RE ON OUR WAY!



“Therefore you also be ready, for the Son of Man is coming at an hour you do not expect” (Luke 12:40, NKJV).

Taking Your Time?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Luke 12:40

An hour before the scheduled departure, the coordinator of the medical mission called up. "There will be a delay," she said.

My husband, Bobby, and I had been invited to join the team. We would visit evacuation centers in *lahar*-stricken Pampanga, about 60 kilometers north of Manila. Some years back, Mount Pinatubo, dormant for six centuries, erupted. The volcano spewed out a superheated mix of gas, rock, and other debris. The eruption wrought havoc in the lives of tens of thousands of people.

Today the aftermath of that eruption still hounds many. Come rainy season, volcanic debris called *lahar* flows down the volcano's slopes, burying villages and dreams. In Pampanga, the evacuation centers are overcrowded. Evacuees need food and medicines. Epidemics threaten lives.

Medical teams from different hospitals have volunteered to help the people in evacuation centers. Today was our medical team's opportunity to help. We would leave at 7 a.m. The plan was for my husband and me to rendezvous with the team in a prearranged place. As we readied ourselves, the call came about the delay.

I looked at my watch. "We have enough time. Let's not hurry. The team won't leave without us," I told Bobby.

The volcano spewed out a superheated mix of gas, rock, and other debris.

After a time, we hit the road. "Drive slowly, there's enough time," I said. After a while, we reached the agreed-upon place. We bought a newspaper, then sat at a conspicuous place where we could be easily spotted by the team. The time? Who knows, and why bother? *They will be delayed*, I told myself.

Nine-thirty. Ten-thirty. Eleven-thirty! I'd finished my newspaper, and the sun was becoming so hot! *Where's the team? How can they be so late?*

"I'll go find a phone," Bobby said. When he came back, he looked bewildered. "I was told that the team left the base four hours ago," he said. That could have meant only one thing: they came to the meeting place *ahead* of us and, after a futile wait, left without us!

Shame and frustration engulfed me, not only because of the wasted hours of waiting, but more so for the missed opportunity to lighten other people's sufferings—all because we leisurely took our time.

Heaven, too, can be missed. Minutes and seconds count. We may have the good intent of helping others or of spreading the good news, but we may be taking too much time doing something else.

Jesus is ready; are we coming?

By Linda Lim-Varona, a physician at the Manila Sanitarium and Hospital in Pasay City, Metro Manila, Philippines.

Watching and Serving

LOGOS

Luke 12:35-40; Matt. 25:35-40

“Let your loins be girded and your lamps burning, and be like men who are waiting for their master to come home. . . . Blessed are those servants whom the master finds awake when he comes” (Luke 12:35-37, RSV).

Luke uses metaphors to describe the spiritual readiness an alert Christian should demonstrate.

Keep loins girded. In the Old Testament, girding the loins is included in the preparedness checklist for the Passover (Exod. 12:11). Elijah tucked his cloak into his belt to outrun the rain (1 Kings 18:46). When Job was challenged, he was asked to do the same thing (Job 38:3). In the New Testament, tucking one’s flowing outer robe under one’s belt or sash was done to prepare for travel, fighting (Eph. 6:14), or work (cf. 1 Pet. 1:13). In Luke’s usage, girding up one’s loins means dressing up for service, as the NIV suggests.

This metaphor also talks about being always ready—*already* ready—for the Master’s return. Turner, quoting a certain Cadbury, explains the command to gird one’s loins as “the apparently illogical command to be already in a certain state.” He goes on to say that grammatically this is “the meaning of the perfect tense [Greek *perizosamenoī*] in general, and therefore inclusively of the perfect imperative.”¹

“‘Let your loins be girt’ . . . will then be more precisely rendered, ‘Let your loins be *already* girt.’ To put this in the second person will be to bring the point out even

This metaphor also talks about being always ready—*already* ready!

more clearly; it is not, ‘Gird up your loins,’ but ‘*Be the kind of person who never needs to be told to gird them up, because he will always live in this condition.*’”²

Keep lamps burning. The word Luke uses for lamps is *luchnoi*, portable ones “usually set on a stand.”³ They’re probably similar to Matthew’s *lampades* which held little oil and would frequently need replenishing.

Keep awake and on the watch. Because the lamps need constantly to be re-filled with oil, the replenisher should be constantly on the watch. The word Luke uses for “watch” in verse 37 (*gregoreo*) means more than to be “awake.” It carries more the idea of “vigilance and expectancy as contrasted with laxity and indifference.”⁴

This alert attitude is called for especially because no one knows at what time the master would come back. The suddenness of the Lord’s return is clear in Luke’s burglary imagery.

Among the Jews, the night was divided into three watches (see, for example, Exod. 14:24; Judg. 7:19); among the Romans, four (see Mark 13:35). In our passage, the time of the master’s return would depend on whether Luke thinks of a three- or a four-watch system. In any case, it is late! And the lateness of the return makes the alertness of the servants more commendable (verse 38).

Those who wait for the Lord's return stand within an expectation. The Advent is sure, but its timing is unknown. It requires an attitude of watchfulness.

"Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these my brethren, you did it to me" (Matt. 25:40, RSV).

For Jesus' followers, the time of waiting for His return should also be an interval of serving. Their personal responsibility should be to know and do the will of the Master (cf. Luke 12:41-46). Work should be their business.

Good deeds are not only works of compassion and morality but reflect where people stand in relation to the kingdom and to Jesus Himself. The recipients of a Christian's good deeds are "the least of these" (Matt. 25:40, 45). This should include all people in distress of some kind.

Service performed for others was the reason the sheep were welcomed and invited to take their inheritance. However, this same service seems more an evidence, rather than a cause, of their admission into the kingdom. How the sheep and goats treated Jesus' brothers was not for the purpose of being accepted or rejected by the King. The sheep did not show love to gain a reward, nor did the goats fail to show it to flout retribution.

The goats committed a sin of omission. The charge against them was not that they did something evil in the sight of the Lord. The charge was that they did not do that which is good.

While waiting for the Lord's return, true disciples will love one another and serve the least brother with compassion. In so doing, they unconsciously serve Christ.

REACT

1. "In times of crisis, one cannot become a Christian; one must have been a Christian." How do you understand this statement?

2. If you were asked to prepare a list of the "least of these," who would be in it? Explain your answer.

3. Why is it never enough for Christians *not* to do evil? Why is it necessary that we do good?

4. If we are to do good for others, how can we avoid allowing this lifestyle to become "works-oriented"?

5. If Christ will not come until *all* prophecies are fulfilled prior to His return, why does He admonish us to be ready anytime now?

1. Nigel Turner, *Grammatical Insights Into the New Testament* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1983), pp. 41, 42. Italics supplied.

2. *Ibid.*

3. W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White, Jr., *Vine's Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), s.v. "lamp."

4. Vine, et al., s.v. "wake."

Servants, Not Weathermen

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 12:35-37

Awaiting the Lord's return is not preoccupation with the "signs of the times." Neither is it self-absorbing preparation. God calls us to watch as *servants*, not as *weathermen*. We are not to put on ascension robes; we must be dressed for service.

"It is because this work is neglected that so many young disciples never advance beyond the mere alphabet of Christian experience. The light which was glowing in their own hearts when Jesus spoke to them, 'Thy sins be forgiven thee,' they might have kept alive by helping those in need. The restless energy that is so often a source of danger to the young might be directed into channels through which it would flow out in streams of blessing. Self would be forgotten in earnest work to do others good.

"Those who minister to others will be ministered unto by the Chief Shepherd. They themselves will drink of the living water, and will be satisfied. They will not be longing for exciting amusements, or for some change in their lives. The great topic of interest will be, how to save the souls that are ready to perish. Social intercourse will be profitable. The love of the Redeemer will draw hearts together in unity."¹

Awaiting the Lord's return is not preoccupation with the "signs of the times."

"The Lord calls upon those who believe in Him to be workers together with Him. While life shall last, they are not to feel that their work is done. Shall we allow the signs of the end to be fulfilled without telling people of what is coming upon the earth? Shall we allow them to go down in darkness without having urged upon them the need of a preparation to meet their Lord?

Unless we ourselves do our duty to those around us, the day of God will come upon us as a thief. Confusion fills the world, and a great terror is soon to come upon human beings. The end is very near. We who know the truth should be preparing for what is soon to break upon the world as an overwhelming surprise."²

REACT

Why is disinterested service for others no different from waiting and watching for the Lord's return?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 641.

2. "Even at the Door," *The Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, Nov. 22, 1906.

Wait and Watch Are Active Words

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 12:35-40

Readiness for Christ's return—this is what our passage is all about. The parable tells us that His return bears similarity to how customary Jewish weddings were celebrated. Here “Jesus teaches publicly concerning His second coming.”¹

To many, *waiting* connotes passivity, thus it becomes more of a state of mind rather than a physical activity. But what does the context of our passage say?

The Greek *prosdechomai* (rendered “to wait for” in verse 36) means “to look for” with a view to favorable reception. This describes the preceding verse: “Be dressed . . . like men waiting for their master to return” (verse 35, NIV). Someone said that “be dressed” means “be active, diligent, determined, ready.”²

Two Greek words represent *watch* in our passage: *gregoreo* (verse 37) in this case means “to keep awake”; *phulake* (verse 38) means “a guarding.” In the parable, the master told his servants to be active, diligent, determined, ready. Jesus warned His listeners: “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect Him” (verse 40, NIV).

Waiting for Christ's second advent is not waiting passively.

“Watchfulness is the keynote of this brief parable.”³ In the light of parallel passages and other parables that stress the same point, Richard Rice writes, “Several of the parables in Jesus' great sermon on last things . . . emphasize the importance of preparing for the future by fulfilling our present responsibilities. . . . The watchful servant was the faithful servant, the one at work when the master finally came home.”⁴

“The attitude of ‘watchfulness’ . . . presupposes a direct connection between the present and the future. . . . Christian eschatology views the end of history in continuity with what precedes it. The future will complete, or fulfill, the process of history as a whole. But its relation is particularly close to the period of history that directly precedes it.”⁵

Waiting for Christ's second advent is not waiting passively. Though the hour of Christ's return is unknown, it is certain.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 797.

2. Adam Clarke, *The Holy Bible Containing the Old and New Testaments: A Commentary and Critical Notes*, vol. 5 (New York: Abingdon-Cokesbury, n.d.), p. 444.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 797.

4. Richard Rice, *The Reign of God* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University Press, 1985), p. 347.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 346.

By Sherwin G. Villarica, a ministerial intern in Central Luzon Conference, Manila, Philippines.

Getting Ready for the Master's Return

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 12:39, 40

Jesus will come at a time when we least expect Him to come—when we are too occupied with the treasures and pleasures of this world.

The suddenness and unexpectedness of His coming calls for a state of constant preparedness on the part of every Christian. For him or her, getting ready for the Master's return means three things:

Being alert. This calls for intense watchfulness. Signs of the times are fast fulfilling. Immorality. Crime. War and rumors of war. Pestilence. Megafamines. Earthquakes. Rise of false christs and false prophets. Increase of technology. Jesus said, "So likewise ye, when ye shall see all these things, know that it is near, even at the doors" (Matt. 24:33).

Being aware. This talks about consciousness. Jesus is coming at a time unappointed. Like a thief who strikes without first making appointments, so Jesus will come in like manner. This fact should warn us to be ready 24 hours a day. No lackadaisical attitude. No Laodicean lifestyle. Awareness is bearing in mind that Jesus' coming is nearer than when we first heard this warning message.

Being awake. Let us wake up from our spiritual lethargy. In any workplace, sleeping on the job is a serious offense that calls for disciplinary action. The

Preparing for the Master's return also means preparing others.

harvest field is teeming with golden grain, but the reapers are few. If we truly love the Lord, we will not be sleeping while we wait for Him to come. Instead, we will be awake and ready for His sudden return.

Preparing for the Master's return also means preparing others for that great climactic event of earth's history. Christians should not waste the special privilege of sharing the good news of salvation to all. Everyone—regardless of race, religion, position—is a candidate for heaven.

Jesus will come again not as a Babe wrapped in swaddling clothes. Instead, He will come as a Judge who will also vindicate His holy character. He will come with the heavenly hosts, and every eye will see Him.

Yes, Jesus is coming again. When? Nobody, not even Jesus Himself, knows *when*. Only the Father does. Let us then be all dressed and ready to meet Him when He comes.

To be watchful means to be keenly or intensely observant. A watchful person is always alert, always aware of what is happening, and always ready for action.

Forward Focus

OPINION

Key Text: Luke 12:35-40

How we run our Lord's business has been greatly influenced by the thought of the Lord's imminent return. Could it also be that the nearness and suddenness of His return persuaded some of our pioneers and leaders to adopt only short-term plans in the business of church growth and governance?

As a result, instead of being more capable of anticipating changes and making the necessary adjustments, we have placed ourselves in a position in which we merely react to stimuli from a rapidly changing world.

Understandably enough, our preference is to live in the security of the past. Likewise understandable is our fear to move forward into the unknown future. But this is a fear that sound logic and common sense can help us overcome.

I don't think we are deliberately avoiding our responsibilities to make the church more caring. Our focus is in the wrong place. Instead of focusing on the nearness of His coming (the church has been waiting for more than one hundred and fifty years), we must focus on the Master. That way, we become more creative, more innovative, more flexible, and more responsive servants.

Jesus did not simply tell us to "be dressed for service" (Luke 12:35, NIV); we are also admonished to "keep . . . [our] lamps burning" (verse 35). Obviously, we

Understandably enough, our preference is to live in the security of the past.

cannot keep our lamps continuously burning throughout the long night of waiting unless we have made ample provision for it.

Applying this in church management, a master plan is required that will effectively chart our course into the next century. This is not unbelief in the nearness of the Master's return but an application of sound principles.

Foresight—how the church sees itself at least a decade from now—accompanied by meticulous planning and a scientific system in approaching work, plus the benefit of divine guidance in how to apply them, will bring optimum results, while provisions for anticipating "weariness" are factored in. Being busy does not necessarily translate into fruitful labor even if you are in God's work.

When the Master returns, will He find that His servant has increased His goods? "It will be good for that servant whom the Master finds doing so when he returns. . . . He will put him in charge of all his possessions" (verses 43, 44).

REACT

1. When will God compensate for the deficiencies of church organization?
2. What are some consequences of ignoring sound management principles in running a church organization?

By Arturo Tomasitos P. Roda, marketing consultant of Asia Network, in Mokati, Philippines.

FIVE PLUS FIVE EQUALS FIVE?



“Abide in Him, that when He appears, we may have confidence and not be ashamed before Him at His coming” (1 John 2:28, NKJV).

Things to Consider

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 25:1-13

Weddings! Weddings galore. In this day of instant tea and coffee, there seems to be a mad rush to tie the knot. Hardly a week passes by without a new announcement. Weddings are occasions for rejoicing and celebration. One famous preacher once commented that he had seen many a poor marriage, but never had he conducted a sad or unhappy wedding.

Africa is no exception when it comes to celebrating weddings with pomp and circumstance. Although the Western (European and American) culture is threatening to overshadow much of the traditional ceremony, where practiced, it remains an occasion of significant cultural value to the community. Perhaps the most noticeable changes—particularly among the Christian community—has to do with the church ceremony. The preparation, however, still holds elements of tradition, which are widely practiced.

Questions must be raised. Is he or she from a “good” family? Is there a history of witchcraft in the family? Are the parties concerned related? In the Luo tribe in Kenya, it is unthinkable to marry even a distant cousin.

Negotiations must be made. Unlike in the Western culture, a marriage or wedding is a community affair. The elders are the ones who make all arrangements.

The elders on the other side will ask, “Which one?”

The metaphors used in the course of the negotiations make the occasion more colorful. For example, the elders from the young suitor’s side will announce to the bride’s father that they have come to look at or take a young goat from the homestead. The elders on the other side will ask, “Which one?” It’s all very interesting.

Bride price must be paid. This token of appreciation on the side of the young man to his in-laws has been turned into a commercial venture. But it is meant to say Thank you for taking care of her. Some pay with a few cattle, but the modern mode of payment is money.

For purposes of becoming acquainted, frequent visits are made by either party. All this has to be done before actually formalizing the marriage.

All this serves to remind me of another wedding day soon to come. This will be the last and final wedding the inhabitants of earth will ever see. Just as the young suitor has to undergo the various requirements before he receives his bride, so our Lord Jesus has met all the requirements to make us His bride. He paid the bride price with His life on Calvary. Our part now is to be ready. Remember the five foolish virgins who were turned away by the bridegroom? Are you preparing your heart for the great wedding day when Jesus will pronounce you His own, or are you going to hear these words: “Depart from me; I do not know you”? The choice is yours.

By Priscah Otondi, who works for Habib Bank International, Nairobi, Kenya.

Christians and Almost Christians

LOGOS

Matt. 25:1-13; 20:1-16

“As with all Jesus’ parables, the message of the parable of the ten virgins is simple. It is meant to illustrate truths He has just been teaching: that He is coming again, that He will then judge sinners and reward the righteous, that people must be ready, and that His coming will be unexpected.”¹

While you might have heard or read this story many times before, let us look at it again.

- **All ten virgins had lamps (Matt 25:1).** In appearance, the ten virgins were indistinguishable. They wore the same-styled bridesmaids’ dresses. They had on the same-styled shoes. They all had the required lamp to carry in the wedding procession.

- **All were in a state of expectancy (verse 1).** While all the virgins professed good faith and had good intentions, the story reveals that good intentions alone are not sufficient in one’s Christian life.

- **All experienced the anxiety and fatigue of delay (verse 5).** Life’s realities, the good as well as the bad, are experienced by all of us. Being a Christian does not exclude you from becoming sick, failing exams, or being unable to find a job upon graduating from college or university.

- **All slept (verse 5).** “There is no indication in this context that sleep represents laziness or faithlessness. Even the wise virgins fell asleep. . . . The sleep of the foolish bridesmaids might suggest their false confidence, whereas the sleep of the prudent ones could suggest their genuine security and rest in the Lord.”² Note well that the virgins were not rebuked because they slept.

- **All heard the announcement of the coming bridegroom (verse 6).** The bridegroom’s arrival at midnight underscores the unexpectedness of Christ’s return. How was the announcement received by the virgins? Did it send shivers up and down their spines, or were they all excited that finally the bridegroom had come?

- **All stirred themselves (verse 7).** Awakening from sleep, the five foolish virgins seemingly still had no idea of their predicament. Professing to be a Christian can be addictive and stupefying. When signs and wonders are of no effect when impending danger is not recognizable, watch out, you are heading for the twilight zone.

- **All trimmed their lamps (verse 7).** It was at this moment that the foolish virgins realized their plight: they had no oil. “Just when a vigorous and lively light was needed, the last fitful glimmers were dying away within the empty bowls of the foolish virgins . . . they had refused to encumber themselves with vessels of oil.”³ Why bother, they might have reasoned, “Our lamps are filled, and besides, we can borrow if we should need extra.” They were willing to run the risk.

“The foolish ones took their lamps but did not take any oil with them” (verse 3). Not so with the five wise virgins. They were unwilling to take such a risk. They carried with them extra oil (verse 4).

The parable clearly reveals that the only difference between the five foolish virgins and the five wise virgins was their state of preparedness. The wise virgins fully

understood that to be prepared was to be “in a state of readiness,” not “getting ready.”

The wise virgins were ready. “The virgins who were *ready* went in with him to the wedding banquet” (verse 10). They had made adequate preparation. “Their outward profession was substantiated by inward possession. They had the oil of preparedness, namely . . . the saving grace of God within them.”⁴

“The foolish virgins had only a form of godliness but had no spiritual life or power because they did not belong to God. They were committed to Jesus Christ religiously, intellectually, socially, and no doubt emotionally. But they were not committed to Him in their hearts, because their hearts had not been regenerated by His saving grace.”⁵

To be almost ready is to miss out in the joy of entering the wedding banquet with the bride and bridegroom. The experience of the five foolish virgins should teach us the importance of *being* ready as opposed to *getting* ready.

The true Christian lives a life of preparedness in Christ Jesus. The almost Christian lives a life unto himself—*getting* ready.

The wedding was announced for 10:00 a.m. The guests were all seated by 11:30 a.m. The bride and her party had arrived at noon. By Kenyan standard, this was early (most brides are usually two to three hours off schedule).

The bridegroom was nowhere to be found. Finally at 3:30 p.m., he drove into the church grounds. The word got around, “He is here,” “He has finally come.” The mood changed from one of concern and worry to one of joy and gladness.

“There is no indication in this context that sleep represents laziness or faithlessness.”

What had made the difference? The bridegroom had arrived to take his bride.

As I waited in the church to conduct the wedding, my thoughts were on the bride. Suppose the groom hadn’t turned up. With confidence, she received his hand, no concern about the delay, perhaps only happy that he was there to keep his promise: “I will marry you.”

Jesus, our bridegroom, has made the same promise. Let us be prepared as His bride when He comes.

REACT

1. What is the significance, if any, of the equality in the number of the wise virgins and that of the foolish ones?
2. How possible is it for someone to slumber spiritually without knowing?
3. “I am now bored with Adventism; Jesus has taken too long to come!” exclaims a teenager. How would you help him or her?
4. How can a Christian be ready for Christ’s return?

1. John MacArthur, *The MacArthur New Testament Commentary, Matthew 24–28* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1989), pp. 85, 86.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 88.

3. James Morrison, *A Practical Commentary on the Gospel According to St. Matthew* (Minneapolis, Minn.: Klock & Klock Christian Publishers, 1981), pp. 497, 498.

4. MacArthur, p. 87.

5. *Ibid.*

By W. Ray Ricketts, campus-ministries director/university chaplain for secular universities, East African Union Mission of Seventh-day Adventists, Nairobi, Kenya.

Not Disappointment but His Appointment

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Heb. 10:36-39

The parable of the ten virgins illustrates the experience of the early Advent movement in 1844. In the ranks of the early Adventists were to be found the wise virgins, those who had “received the grace of God, the regenerating, enlightening power of the Holy Spirit. . . . These had . . . a faith in God and in His word, which could not be overthrown by disappointment and delay.”¹

There were also the foolish ones, who were “without a thorough understanding of the truth or genuine work of grace in the heart. . . . had gone forth to meet the Lord, full of hope in the prospect of immediate reward; but they were not prepared for delay and disappointment.”²

God designed to prove His people. He designed that they “should meet with a disappointment. . . . The passing of the time was well calculated to reveal”³ the wise and the foolish.

“At the appointed time the Bridegroom came, not to the earth, as the people expected, but to the Ancient of Days in heaven, to the marriage, the reception of His kingdom. . . . It was those that had oil in their vessels with their lamps that went

“Their only safe course was to cherish the light.”

in to the marriage. . . . Those . . . who, in the night of their bitter trial, had patiently waited, searching the Bible for clearer light,—these saw the truth concerning the sanctuary in heaven and the Saviour’s change of ministration, and by faith they followed Him in His work in the sanctuary above.”⁴

The parable also finds fulfillment in the church just before Christ’s second coming. As the ten virgins, each with a lamp and a vessel for oil, go forth to meet the Bridegroom, no difference is seen between them for a while. “All have heard the message of Christ’s near approach, and confidently expect His appearing. . . . [But as] a time of waiting intervenes, faith is tried; and when the cry is heard, ‘Behold, the Bridegroom cometh; go ye out to meet him,’ many . . . are destitute of the Holy Spirit.”⁵

“Their only safe course was to cherish the light . . . already received of God, hold fast to His promises, and continue to search the Scriptures, and patiently wait and watch”⁶ “for in just a very little while, He who is coming will come and will not delay” (Heb. 10:37, NIV).

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 394.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Early Writings*, p. 235.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 427.

5. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 408.

6. *The Great Controversy*, p. 408.

By Christopher Chege Wokabi, final-year electrical-engineering student, University of Nairobi, Kenya.

Time Tells the Difference

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: 1 Cor. 3:13; 1 Thess. 5:6; 1 Pet. 1:7

At the onset there was no visible difference between the ten virgins awaiting the arrival of the bridegroom. Nature has a striking illustration of this story in the life of deciduous and nondeciduous trees. At one point there is no apparent difference between deciduous and nondeciduous trees, as far as leaves are concerned. As the seasons pass by, however, deciduous trees shed their leaves in preparation for winter. Of 10 trees, half deciduous and the other half nondeciduous, during summer all would look green and very nice. By winter, however, five would be leafless and five with leaves. To those who do not know the characteristics of these trees, time tells the difference.

True character is usually revealed when critical moments come. The ten virgins are watching in the evening of this earth's history. All claim to be Christians. All have a call, a name, a lamp, and all claim to be doing God's service. All apparently watch for His appearing. But five are wanting in character. They will be disappointed when they find themselves outside the banquet hall. Only time will tell the difference.

By winter, however, five would be leafless and five with leaves.

When things are not going on smoothly in your spiritual journey, do you remain firm, or do you "shed" Christ? We should wait with patience and rely on our confidence in Scripture. This requires daily growing in God's Word so that when the trials come we don't lose our patience. "It needs time to grow unto Jesus the vine: do not expect to abide in Him unless you will give Him that time. It is not enough to read God's word, and when we think we have hold of the thoughts, and have asked God for His blessing to go out in the hope that the blessing will abide. No, it needs day-by-day time with Jesus and with God. We all know the need of time for our meals each day—every workman claims his hour for dinner: the hurried eating of so much food is not enough."

This challenges us to put on the "whole armour of God" (Eph. 6:11) and not to be without reserves of oil as were the foolish virgins. Like soldiers we should be ready "in season, out of season" (2 Tim. 4:2). We must not be like civilians when the battle is raging and Christ expects us to be on the battlefield. May the Lord help us to be ever ready or "evergreen," and the difference should be obvious.

REACT

Why is it important to remain united to Christ on a moment-by-moment basis?

*Andrew Murray, *Abide in Christ*, p. 7.

By Eunice Misiani, a lecturer in the zoology department, Kenyatta University, Nairobi, Kenya.

The Watching Issue

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 25:9, 13

A college student asked an interesting question: "Were the wise fair to their colleagues to have carried extra oil but not to have cared to warn their friends before crisis hour? Was their counsel not too late?"

This may be overstretching the parable, but perhaps the student was stirred by the theme of assisting others along the way. When we keep watch over our colleagues, we end up watching for ourselves. The Greek of "You" in verse 13 is plural. It includes corporate watching. The best credential to carry on any pilgrimage is love for one another.

The parable of the ten virgins, however, reveals that all watched for some time before they slept. They would not have awakened were it not for the loud cry. They all relied on an outside act to wake them, but how did the prudent five excel? Crisis is good in revealing the quality of our preparation. The prudent had an extra quality in their preparation.

The prudent not only expected the bridegroom but also wished Him to come. They loved His coming. It was spontaneous for them to cry out, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for Him, and He will save us" (Isa. 25:9).

Today we also need not only to expect the second coming, but to long for it.

All watched for some time before they slept.

The flesh deceives us into thinking that it is easier to sleep than to watch. Yet, the opposite is true. Watching is a fruit of a genuine relationship with Christ. It involves an ambition of living for Him and dying for Him (Phil. 1:21; 3:7-15).

The Holy Spirit is sent to keep us watching. But if we continually resist Him, we end up sleeping. The following counsel is worth noting:

- Superficial and temporary interest in divine things brings spiritual drowsiness (Matt. 13:22).
- Relationship to Christ is not transferable (Ezek. 14:14).
- The basis of our faith always needs a periodical check to see whether it is truly in harmony with the everlasting gospel of Christ.

When we understand the gospel and experience its power, then we shall wait for its reality at glorification with inexpressible anxiety. A student worth his salt should not spend a year at college without leaving an impact on one or two of his roommates. Such an impact can be attained through: (a) friendship evangelism; (b) prayer groups; and (c) sharing of the promises of God's Word at all seasons of life.

By Caesar J. Wamalika, associate university chaplain, East African Union of Seventh-day Adventists, Nairobi, Kenya.

Character Revealed in Time of Crisis

OPINION

Key Texts: Matt. 25:1-13; Ezek. 33:31

The Maasai are a warrior community inhabiting eastern Africa; more precisely, one is likely to encounter them in Kenya and Tanzania. Among this ethnic group, young boys aged 15 to 18 undergo the rite of initiation, which takes the form of circumcision. The significance of this rite of passage draws from the termination of childhood and a commencement of adult life. Prior to this event, the Maasai boy undergoes thorough training.

Some prerequisites must be adhered to for one to undergo the initiation process. The most breathtaking part of it all is that a young Maasai man must fight and kill a lion in order to be fully accepted into the adult world. The Maasai consider this stage as a very important landmark of initiation. Preparing for this event thus takes a lot of commitment and courage, without which one would be rejected by society.

One's strength of character during this crucial moment will hence determine an individual's rejection or acceptance into society. "It is in a crisis that character is revealed."¹ In the parable of the ten virgins, five were rejected by the bridegroom

A young Maasai man must fight and kill a lion in order to be fully accepted into the adult world.

because they lacked ample preparation involving commitment. This is the group of the careless virgins. The other five, who were found ready, were welcome to the wedding procession; they were wise and faithful.

"The class represented by the foolish virgins have been content with a superficial work. They do not know God. They have not studied His character; they have not held communion with Him; therefore they do not know how to trust, how to look and live. Their service to God degenerates into a form."² This is the group of people of whom Ezekiel the prophet spoke as showing much love with their mouth whereas their heart goeth after their covetousness (Ezek. 33:31).

"The ten virgins are watching in the evening of this earth's history. All claim to be Christians. All have a call, a name, a lamp, and all profess to be doing God's service. All apparently wait for Christ's appearing. But five are unready. Five will be found surprised, dismayed, outside the banquet hall."³

The foolish five were rejected, and thus the insignificance of their presence. Surely, this is the day when five plus five equals five, and so shall it also be at the second advent of Christ. To which group will you belong?

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 412.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 411.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 412.

By Martha M. Opiyo, second-year sociology student at the University of Nairobi, Kenya.

THE NAKED AND THE DEAD



**“He has clothed me with the garments of salvation,
he has covered me with the robe of righteousness” (Isa.
61:10, RSV).**

Un-Dressed

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Rev. 3:17-19

“I will greatly rejoice in the Lord, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of righteousness, as a bridegroom decketh himself with ornaments, and as a bride adorneth herself with her jewels” (Isa. 61:10).

Vague unease lapped at the edges of my mind as I walked through the crowd toward the front. The chatter of voices wafted upward, filling the cavernous, stained-glass church with sound and warmth. I found my way to the elders’ room and onto the rostrum. My unease grew as I watched them file into the pastel pews.

My home church barely held one hundred, yet there were nearly one thousand people here today. Too soon the preliminaries were over. I strode to that rocky island called a podium. As I placed my Bible on the podium and adjusted my notes, I felt exposed and vulnerable on this barren outcropping of the rostrum. A pregnant pause filled the church as the first words formed on my lips.

Suddenly I looked down—at me. Where were my shoes? My socks? This was Sabbath morning, and I was to preach. Then I noticed that I didn’t have any pants—just a jacket and tie and shirt and . . . my Fruit-of-the-Looms. The stifling

I felt like a crazed rabbit glued to the double-yellow stripe.

silence seemed punctuated by my own heartbeat. The steel jaws of embarrassment clamped around my throat. The silence turned my mouth into concrete. I felt like a crazed rabbit glued to the double-yellow stripe, frozen by the headlights of an oncoming Peterbilt. Doomed! Then I awoke.

The sheets clung to my sweating body as the relief flooded over me. It had been just a dream!

As I remember that dream, I still feel the unthinkable horror. I would *never* preach in my underwear. Lawyers don’t argue cases in bathrobes. Brides don’t show up for their weddings in bra and panties. Yet we think nothing of walking through this life without the righteousness of Jesus. The most precious of all garments we leave unbought on the sale rack of heaven.

Even now there is one knocking at our heart’s door saying, “I counsel you to buy from Me gold refined in the fire, that you may be rich; and white garments, that you may be clothed, that the shame of your nakedness may not be revealed” (Rev. 3:18, NKJV).

By Marlan Knittel, associate pastor of the Santa Cruz (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Does He Really Care About Everyday Stuff?

LOGOS

Matt. 22:1-14; Gen. 3:7-11; Mark 14:52; Luke 14:23, 24; 2 Cor. 5:1-5; Rev. 16:15

Quite often in our Christian experience it doesn't seem to us that God is really, truly concerned with our everyday well-being. Oh, sure, we know that we can go to Him with our problems and struggles, but when it comes to just plain everyday living or things, we aren't really always sure that He is there for us. And if He is, wouldn't He be more likely to do something for us in such a way that would probably not make us the happiest? Isn't it amazing that, as we look back in our lives at the times that God has intervened, or has miraculously protected us, we can easily see that the things that He did always turned out to be the best for us? Yet, each time that we face another one of life's major—or minor—crises, uncertainty arises concerning God's watch-care for us.

Jesus' parables were designed to teach His listeners what God, their heavenly Father, is like. Their design hasn't changed in nearly two thousand years; they are intended to teach us what God, our heavenly Father, is still like today. The people in Jesus' day had a rather negative, restricted view of God, and they did not see Him as a father figure. Sadly, too many of us today, even Seventh-day Adventist Christians, have virtually the same viewpoint of God. Our rationale is "if He really were like a father to me, He would cause events in my life to turn out the way I would like for them to turn out." And He surely would want me to have a lot more fun in my everyday life.

God knows how we feel if we aren't wearing the right outfit.

When Jesus told the parable of the wedding garment (Matt. 22:1-14), He showed us that God is even concerned about what we wear. Not in the way that we sometimes perceive that the church members are concerned, but He is really concerned whether we have anything to wear at all.

God knows how we feel if we aren't wearing the right outfit; as a matter of fact, He knows how we feel if we are wearing nothing at all. He knows our embarrassment, and He knows how vulnerable and exposed we feel. More important, God doesn't want us to feel embarrassed, vulnerable, and exposed. He wants us to feel—and be—secure.

When He met with Adam and Eve in the Garden of Eden after they had eaten of the tree, He listened as they related their new feelings toward Him. With sadness, He heard them tell Him they were now afraid, for they were naked. He saw them trying to cover themselves with clothes of fig leaves, and with tenderness and concern, God took the time to make "garments of skin for Adam and his wife and clothed them" (Gen. 3:21, NIV).

In writing to the church at Corinth, Greece, Paul, for the second time, paints a picture of how God wants us to let Him be our clothier. Paul says if things go wrong in this life, and our earthly tent in which we live is destroyed, we have a

building from God, an eternal house in heaven, not built with human hands. He goes on to tell us that we should long to be clothed with our heavenly dwelling, because when we are clothed, we will not be found naked (2 Cor. 5:1-3).

Once more we see that God is concerned with how we are clothed and reminds us that He can provide so much better than we.

John the revelator picks up on the theme when he quotes Christ: "Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed" (Rev. 16:15, NIV). He knows how terrible we would feel in that last day, watching Him come in the eastern sky and finding ourselves not under His care, naked and exposed as we had never been before. We have no doubt from this quote what the time frame is, for it is quoted during John's vision of the sixth plague.

As Jesus relates His parable to the listeners, the chief priests and Pharisees as well as the lay people, it is obvious what time frame His story concerns. He's relating what the kingdom of heaven is like and talks about those who are invited to the banquet, but don't wish to come. Luke said they had too many other things to do, so they couldn't be bothered with coming to the banquet (Luke 14:23, 24). When those original invitees don't show up, the king in the parable invites those who, in their wildest dreams, had no thought of being invited.

But there is one who, instead of being grateful at achieving more than he had ever dreamed of, still thinks that his way is the best. He has no intention of having to place himself at the king's disposal. He's going to do it his own way. He refuses the king's wedding garment.

There will be those of us, as God issues His last invitation to be with Him for eternity, who will still insist on doing it our way. All the things that He has done for us, and caused everything to turn out best for us, will go by the wayside. We're sure that the food is great, the music is divine, and the fellow guests are wonderful; but really, what kind of banquet can it be when the guests have been gathered from off the street?

REACT

1. Explain why you agree or disagree with the statement "God knows how we feel if we aren't wearing the right outfit."

2. Why were the guests at the wedding feast inspected by the king?

3. How does the guest without the wedding garment represent many professed Christians today?

4. How can I specifically show today that I truly honor the King of the parable?

Clothed With His Garment

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rev. 7:13, 14

The story is told of a vain, selfish, and proud emperor. He didn't care about his people or anyone but himself. A group of his servants plotted to take revenge and came up with a plan to convince the emperor that he needed a wonderful new garment. This garment was to be made of a unique material—gold, which would show off his greatness. This fabric, of course, did not exist, but the servants convinced him that he could see it. Afraid to admit that he was unable to see it, he went along with the idea and believed this was the greatest garment ever woven.

A parade was organized so the emperor could show his new garment to the citizens. The crowds applauded and pretended that they could see his new garment, for they feared admitting that the emperor was naked. The innocent voice of a child awakened the emperor to the reality of his nakedness, leaving him at once speechless and ashamed.

Like the guest at the wedding feast in the parable of Matthew 22 who did not accept the free wedding garment, the emperor was self-condemned. Are many of us like the emperor? Are we deceived by our own self-righteous acts?

The innocent voice of a child awakened the emperor to reality.

“A banquet has been prepared for us. The Lord has spread before us the treasures of His Word. But we must not come to the repast clothed in citizen's dress. We must have on the white robe of Christ's righteousness, which has been prepared for all the guests.”¹ “Remember that every one who shall be found with the wedding garment on will have come out of great tribulation.”² The guest who was thrown out of the wedding feast rejected the wedding garment that was available upon entering. We offer God our filthy garments rather than accept His garment of righteousness, which transforms our selfish efforts into His likeness. We think our good works will make Him like us more.

I praise God for the wonderful reminder in Ephesians 2:8, 9: “For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God: not of works, lest any man should boast.”

“Those who reject the gift of Christ's righteousness are rejecting the attributes of character which would constitute them the sons and daughters of God. They are rejecting that which alone could give them a fitness for a place at the marriage feast.”³

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1097.

2. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, April 17, 1894.

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 316, 317.

By Carmen O. González, employed by the Salvation Army in a school-based program for pregnant and parenting teens in Syracuse, New York.

Who Is Worthy?

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Isa. 54:17

As I write this, I am preparing for my own wedding after months of preparation. I've tried to imagine how my bride and I would feel if no one responded to our invitations. Certainly we would feel deeply disappointed, unimportant, rejected, and lonely. From this parable we can see that we also have hurt God, not only by our rebellion toward Him but by our indifference. We show indifference by being so absorbed in our own interests that we have little or no time for His.

Our Father has spent millennia preparing for "union of humanity with divinity."¹ The central focus of this preparation was the Incarnation of His Son. The perfect humanity of the divine Son of God, sacrificed in our behalf, makes this wedding, this union of humanity with divinity, possible. And though *He* has everything *ready* (Matt. 22:4, 8), still we wait for the human family to be perfectly and completely linked to Divinity for all eternity.

This parable tells us God is very patient and persistent. He is determined that His plan for saving us, this wedding of humanity with Divinity, *will* take place. Plan A, the gospel invitation given to the Jews while Christ was on this earth, did

How would my bride and I feel if no one responded to our invitations?

not succeed. He, therefore, implemented Plan B, i.e., a second invitation to the Jews given after Pentecost. When Plan B failed, Plan C followed. Under this plan, the King's servants proclaim the gospel invitation around the world. Thus, the wedding *will* be furnished with guests (Matt. 22:10).²

God also patiently persists in our individual lives, instructing us day by day how to love, until He succeeds (Phil. 1:6; Ps. 138:8).

This parable tells us who is, and who is not, worthy to be a member of the kingdom of God. Do you, like me, sometimes feel unworthy of that privilege? Fortunately, our invitation is not based on how we feel, but on *His* worth. God invites both the good (those who have lived respectable lives) and the bad (those whose lives are a wreck) to the wedding (Matt. 22:10). Our acceptance into the wedding depends solely on our response to the gracious provisions of our King. Those whom He proclaims unworthy are *not the recognizably bad*, but only those who have spurned His gracious invitation and abundant provision for their great needs.

Anyone who truly honors the King and His Son, from the heart, will be among the chosen welcomed with open arms to the greatest wedding of all.

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 307.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 308, 309.

The White-Knuckler

HOW-TO

Key Text: Isa. 61:10

It was a white-knuckler. I had missed the turnoff to the highway and had gone too far on the two-lane rural road to turn back now. This was no ordinary snowstorm, it was a whiteout! To make matters worse, I had run out of windshield-wiper fluid and had only a small six-inch patch on my windshield that remained clear enough to see through. Becoming completely exasperated, I had only one thought in mind, "Just get me home!" At last, three hours later (it was usually an hour trip), I pulled up to the curb outside my house, pried my fingers from the steering wheel, and bolted to my haven. Heaving a sigh of relief, I thought aloud, "I have *never* been so happy to be at home!"

As thankful as I am that I have never had to make another trip home as dreadful as that one, I sometimes think life is a bit like that drive in the snow—a white-knuckler. When I feel completely exasperated, frustrated, depressed, and desolate, I sometimes say to God, "Just get me home!"

Because I love weddings, one of my favorite thoughts of heaven is found in Revelation 19:8, 9, in which the redeemed will enjoy the marriage supper of the Lamb of God. The passage implies that this will be an exceptionally delightful

This was no ordinary snowstorm, it was a whiteout!

and blessed event, in which Christ will at last be united with those who chose salvation.

In Matthew 22:1-14, Jesus speaks of another wedding, yet it is hardly described as a joyful event. It is marred by the selfishness and stubbornness of the invited guests who senselessly murder the messengers. Despite this, the King proceeds to invite anyone off the street to attend the wedding and even provides their garments. You would think the people would marvel at such generosity, but still there is one guest who refuses to wear the garment and does his own thing.

And so it is with us. No matter how good we look on the outside, God always knows what we are wearing. We are all invited, but unless we allow Christ's righteousness to clothe us, we will be seen as we really are, dressed in our own motley rags. Simply put, those who think they can make it on their own merit will be cast out.

It is the greatest desire of the Saviour that we all be there. We all have been offered the garments of Christ to wear. So when life seems to be a total whiteout, I keep one thought in mind, "Lord, just get me home!" "Behold, the dwelling of God is with men. He will dwell with them, and they shall be his people" (Rev. 21:3, RSV).

By Kenya J. Hall, a trauma nurse and paramedic instructor in Dallas, Texas.

Guess Who's Coming to Dinner?

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 22:2-10

She was a strikingly tall woman, and I mused absently, during the semisocial, semi-professional gathering, on her sizable hands, feet, and strangely angular jaw. When introduced by a mutual friend, the unmistakably masculine voice that boomed from within piercingly illuminated the mystery. She had been a woman only for the past ten or fifteen years. While my mind reeled with the shock to all my home-grown prejudices, I heard her ask, "Would you like to come to my Chinese New Year's party next week at my house?"

I said, "Yes."

An accountant friend of mine declined the invitation, and when I queried him about it later, he somewhat scornfully replied, "I don't think those at the party will be my kind of people."

The party was indeed an unusual mixture of people and lifestyles: Christians, Buddhists, atheists, writers and artists, bankers and lawyers, teachers and two grandmothers. I found the party guests to be witty and compassionate, active and intelligent. I asked her at the close of the evening why I, a near stranger, had been invited. "I just thought you'd have a nice time," she replied, somewhat startled.

It's a pity that my friend the accountant was too worthy to attend.

And frankly, I did. It's a pity that my friend the accountant was too worthy to attend.

One would assume that the original invitees to the wedding banquet (Matt. 22:2) were the "right" kind of people. Friends of the family, community leaders, pillars of the local congregation, they were invited based on social acceptability. They were the worthy. Imagine the king's disbelief at their refusal. Imagine his horror and outrage at their violent reaction to his second invitation (verses 5, 6). Rethinking his definition of "social norms," he issued his new invitation to anybody who *wanted* to come to the party, and the wedding hall was *filled* with guests—both the "good" and the "bad" (verse 10).

God has issued an invitation to attend the grandest party in the cosmos. But to whom has it been issued? Your pastor? Your parents? Your teachers? Billy Graham, perhaps? Mother Teresa? Like my friend the accountant, we spend our lives determining who is worthy of our time, our money, our friendship. We speculate in our churches who is worthy to be a member, to be a church leader, to be saved. Our perspective as invitees prompts us to ask the question "Who is worthy?" Am I? In the parable of the wedding banquet, Jesus illustrates a different perspective: that of the extender of the invitation. His parable asks not, "Who is worthy?" but instead, "Who will come?"

Who will come? Will you?

By Brandeis C. Hall, promotions and creative-services manager for World Radio Geneva and a freelance journalist, living in Geneva, Switzerland.

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Lesson 2: Moved Through Compassion

Scriptures: Luke 5:12-16; 9:12-17; Matt. 8:1-17; 9:4-6, 36-38.

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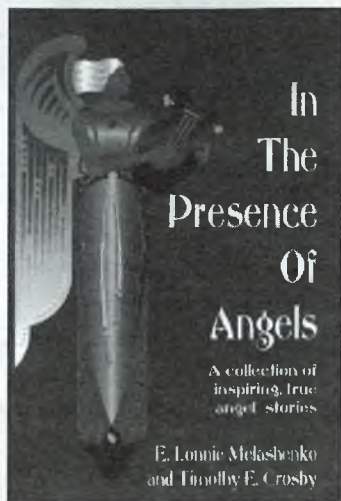
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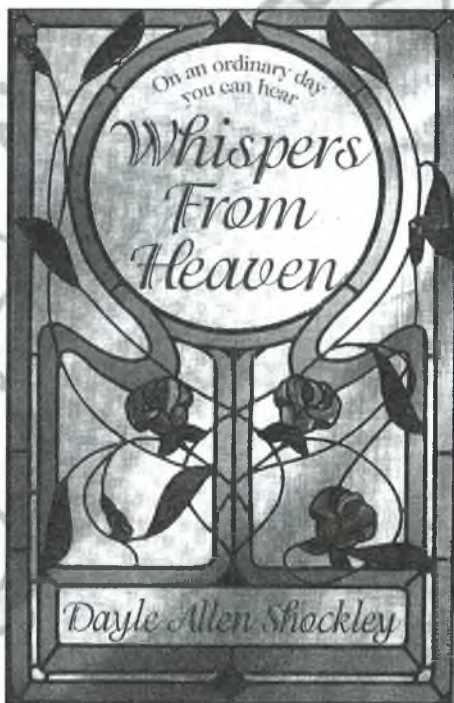
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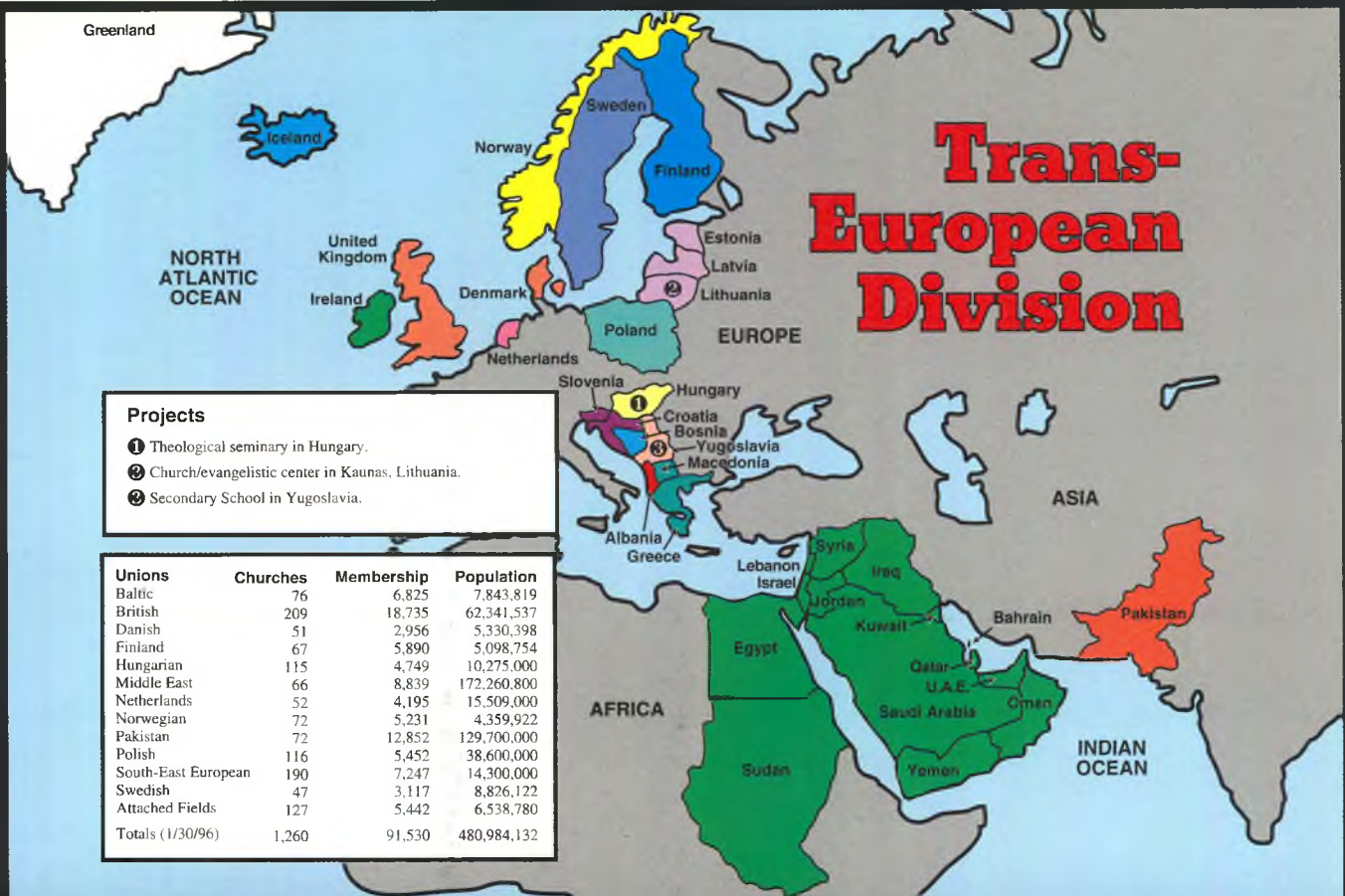
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Middle East	66	8,839	172,260,800
Netherlands	52	4,195	15,509,000
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Pakistan	72	12,852	129,700,000
Polish	116	5,452	38,600,000
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