

APRIL-JUNE 1998

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LIFESTYLES OF THE SPIRITUALLY WEALTHY

APRIL - JUNE 1998

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CQ is written by Seventh-day Adventist young adults and their friends around the world.

Editorial Office: Sabbath School/Personal Ministries Department, General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A.

Place orders with: Pacific Press Pub. Assn., P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A.

Other than the King James Version, Scripture versions used in this quarterly are as follows:

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CQ (ISSN 0744-2939). Volume 21, No. 2. Published quarterly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. and printed by Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. Place orders with Pacific Press Pub. Assn., P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. One-year subscription in U.S.A., \$13.25; single copy, \$5.95. One-year subscription in countries outside U.S.A., \$16.25; single copy, \$5.95. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Periodicals postage paid at Nampa, ID 83687.

POSTMASTER: Send address changes to *CQ*, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. Send editorial inquiries to *CQ*, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904, U.S.A. Send circulation inquiries to Pacific Press Publishing Association, P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. When a change of address is desired, please send both old and new addresses.

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Printed in the U.S.A.



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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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COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

This Quarter's Illustrator



The artist for this quarter's issue of CQ is Cosmin Dumitrescu, a 28-year-old native of Bucharest, Romania. A graduate of the Romanian School of Fine Art with specialties in architectural and industrial design, Cosmin now lives in Pennsylvania. He and his wife, Monica, enjoy playing instrumental music (organ, piano, violin, and recorder) as well as wilderness backpacking and gardening.

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 three hundred 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 fifty-nine thousand.

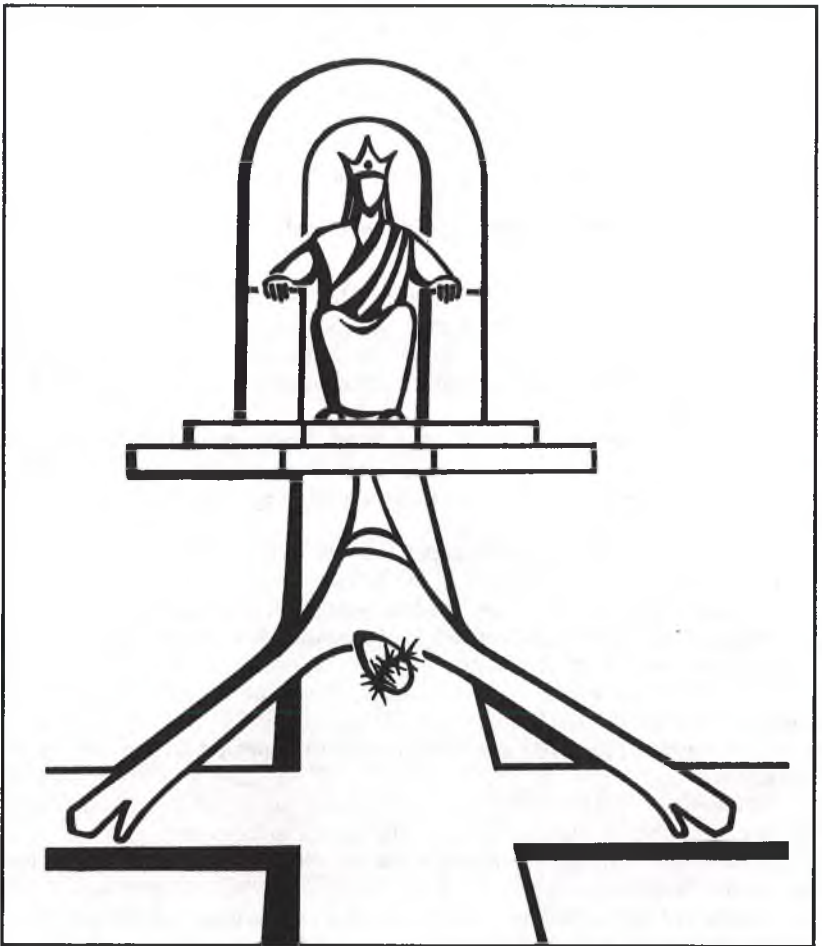
Pointers for Study

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 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.*

THE GOD WHO WOULD BE KING



“Has God not chosen the poor of this world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom which He promised to those who love Him?” (James 2:5, NKJV).

From Lamb to Lion

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 21:5

In the late-twentieth-century world, where the majority of nations have some form of democracy, talk of kings, queens, and kingdoms sounds outdated. The world's remaining monarchies are nothing more than ceremonial institutions, relics from another time. And the antics of some members of royalty reported in the tabloids have discredited this institution even further.

For most of human history, however, peoples believed that royalty was divinely instituted, and the populace were ruled by kings and queens whose word was law. Autocratic rulership practically enslaved the people to the whims of capricious mortals. Consider the pyramids of Egypt, built over centuries by thousands of people as the exclusive graveyards for the Pharaohs and their families.

When the gracious God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob called Israel out of Egypt, He undertook to be their only ruler. He would govern them directly through the ministry of the Levitical priesthood. This is called a theocracy. But during the latter part of the judges, because of the threat of invasions by surrounding nations and a desire to be like the nations around them, the tribes of Israel asked God for a king (1 Samuel 8). The tragic consequences of their foolish choices are docu-

The antics of of royalty reported in the tabloids have discredited this institution even further.

mented in the biblical history of a period of less than 500 years.

Nevertheless, God made a covenant with David to establish a dynastic "house" for him and his descendants forever (2 Sam. 7:11-16). From the lineage of David, Christ, the messianic Saviour of Israel, would be born and would sit on David's throne in an eternal kingdom (Isa. 11:1-10; Amos 9:11-12; Luke 1:30-33). What qualified Christ to be king, however, was not so much royal lineage, or popularity (Matt. 21:9), or bending the knee before the great usurper (Matt. 4:8, 9), but submission to the sovereignty of God the Father (Heb. 5:7-10). And being found obedient, even unto the death (Phil. 2:8), He was raised by God from the grave and declared to be Israel's Anointed One (Rom. 1:1-4; Acts 13:33; Ps. 2:2, 7). Through His death and resurrection, the pre-Easter claims of Christ, such as His divinity and the redemptive nature of His mission, were authenticated (John 10:30; Matt. 20:26; Acts 2:36).

Becoming the messianic sacrifice of Daniel 9 qualified Christ to be the priestly prince of Daniel 8. And being the mediating prince of Daniel 8 qualified Him to be the royal Son of man, receiving "everlasting dominion" (Dan. 7:14, NIV) from the Ancient of Days. Christ's Lordship, which Peter preached about on the day of Pentecost, is therefore grounded in the sacrifice of Christ. As the slain Lamb of God, Jesus became the reigning Lion of Judah (Rev. 5:5, 6; John 1:19).

By Weiers Coetser, a senior in theology, Helderberg College, Western Cape, South Africa.

The Presence of the Future

LOGOS

Matt. 5:1, 17-20; Luke 17:20, 21; Matt. 13:33; John 1:11; Exod. 20:19

Not only does Matthew often quote Old Testament Scripture to indicate how Christ is the fulfillment of messianic prophecies, but the very structure of his Gospel suggests that Jesus is the king of Israel incarnate. God's covenant with Israel was often characterized by the threefold covenant commitment that God would be their God and they His people, so that He could dwell among them (Lev. 26:11, 12; Zech. 2:10). Through the incarnation, the entire ministry of Jesus, according to Matthew, is encompassed with the assurance of God's abiding, redemptive presence among those who have covenanted themselves with Christ (Matt. 1:23; 28:20; 18:20; 25:40, 45). For them Christ is the "Last Adam" who, through His victory over sin, received from the Father the kingdom this world forfeited by the first Adam at the Fall (1 Cor. 15:22-28, 45-49; Luke 22:29, 30; Dan. 7:14, 27). The kingdom of heaven announced by both John and Jesus (Matt. 3:2; 4:17) is therefore centered in the Father and the Son.

The God of the kingdom is a God of infinite love for all of creation, but especially for those who, from lostness, have freely accepted Him as king (Deut. 7:8, 9; John 3:16; Rom. 8:37; Eph. 5:2, 25). This kingdom is, therefore, not in the first place about value systems, character building, or reflecting the image of God, but about God's compassionate love for the blood-bought subjects of the kingdom (Matt. 8:12; 13:37; Luke 22:29, 30; Rev. 3:20).

"Kingdom" Is God's Reign

Though the Old Testament does not specifically talk about the kingdom of God, the notion of God's rule is pervasive. A person should, however, differentiate between the general, eternal kingship of God in the universe (Ps. 103; 145:13), and His specific, covenantal kingship in Israel (Isa. 41:21; 52:7). In fact, this covenantal kingship of God is found through the patriarchs, the priests of ancient Israel, the faithful kings of the Israelite monarchy, and finally Jesus Christ; and His church becomes the instrument of divine intervention in human history to reestablish God's righteous reign on earth (Gen. 12:2, 3; Gal. 3:8; Exod. 19:5, 6; 1 Pet. 2:5).

God's reign is therefore first His supernatural acts of redemption (Rev. 12:10). But the miraculous, divine intervention Israel expected as a dynamic appearance of the Messiah mysteriously came into the midst of time through the incarnation of Jesus, like yeast working imperceptibly through dough (Matt. 13:33; Luke 17:20, 21). The forgiveness of Christ's Cross, the new life of His resurrection, the absolute righteousness of His obedience, His regenerating power of the Spirit, brought the triumphant future kingdom of the Messiah quietly and humbly into the present (Mark 2:5; John 3:3; Matt. 5:22, 48; Rom. 3:21; Acts 2:17). Not only did the parables of Jesus illustrate His triumph over the kingdom of Satan, but His miracles of healing and exorcism forcefully evidenced the cessation of Satan's captivity of humanity (Matt. 12:22-28; 11:4, 5, 12; Luke 16:16).

But God's redemptive reign has not yet been fully realized in the present age. It is only preparatory to God's future, universal reign of righteousness on earth

(Dan. 2:35, 44). This is the final stage of God's kingdom that the church must pray for (Matt. 6:10), at which time the renewal of all things will take place (19:28), and the "blessed" will inherit the kingdom prepared for them (25:34). And in the same way the Old Testament "Day of the Lord" was foreshadowed by localized "days of the Lord" (Isa. 34:4-8; Joel 3:14), so Christ claimed prophecies of that day to be fulfilled in the immediate future of the disciples (Luke 9:27; Matt. 10:23; 16:28; Mark 9:1). The church was given evidences at its very inception that God's reign would ultimately be fulfilled in the visible, glorious kingdom of God (Matt. 25:31).

God's Kingdom Has a Realm

In the same way that the reign of God has two distinct phases of development ("grace" and "glory"), the realm of God's kingdom has two spheres of existence.

Because God's kingdom is founded on infinite love (Ps. 89:14), no one can be coerced into its realms of light and life (Col. 1:12; John 5:24). To all who hear the gospel invitation, God graciously gives the choice to enter or remain in Satan's kingdom (Acts 26:18; Matt. 22:13). The parables of the two sons (Matt. 21:28-32), the wedding banquet (22:1-14), and the ten virgins (25:1-13) illustrate God's free invitation to all who choose to enter His royal fellowship (Deut. 30:15, 19; Matt. 11:28-30; Heb. 4:16).

The time is coming, however, when the presence of believers in the heavenly kingdom will not only be by faith (Eph. 2:6; Heb. 10:19, 22) but by sight (Matt.

God's redemptive reign has not yet been fully realized in the present age.

24:30, 31; 25:31, 32). What Christians call the second coming of Christ has stages of visible fulfillment not clearly set out in the gospel accounts of the end (1 Cor. 15:22-28; Revelation 20). In the same way Daniel 2 did not see the gospel age, the gospels did not see the heavenly millennial age between the appearance of Christ and the ultimate end, when all that which was undone by sin will be restored and infinitely eclipsed by God's new creation (2 Pet. 3:10-13; Rev. 21:1-5).

REACT

1. In what way does the existence of God's kingdom relativize earthly structures of government?

2. Where should Adventists stand between the two extremes that either *identify* the kingdom and the church or *postpone* the kingdom during the era of the church?

3. In what way can we "domesticate" the principles of the kingdom in such a way that the holiness of the kingdom of heaven is compromised?

4. Is a consistent Christian life sufficient as an effective witness for the kingdom of God? Explain your answer.

5. In which way can the teachings of Christ in the Sermon on the Mount be relevant for modern society as a whole?

By Johan A. Japp, associate professor of theology, Helderberg College, Western Cape, South Africa.

Thrones of Grace and Glory

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Mark 4:26-29

“As used in the Bible, the expression ‘kingdom of God’ is employed to designate both the kingdom of grace and the kingdom of glory. The kingdom of grace is brought to view by Paul in the Epistle to the Hebrews. After pointing to Christ, the compassionate intercessor who is ‘touched with the feelings of our infirmities,’ the apostle says: ‘Let us therefore come boldly unto the *throne of grace*, that we may obtain mercy, and find grace.’ Hebrews 4:15, 16. The throne of grace represents the kingdom of grace; for the existence of a throne implies the existence of a kingdom. In many of His parables Christ uses the expression ‘the kingdom of heaven’ to designate the work of divine grace upon the hearts of men.

“So the throne of glory represents the kingdom of glory. . . . This kingdom is yet future. It is not to be set up until the second advent of Christ.”¹

“If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one. But, though professing to be converted, we carry around with us a bundle of self that we regard as altogether too precious to be given

“If we would humble ourselves before God, . . . there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one.”

up. It is our privilege to lay this burden at the feet of Christ and in its place take the character and similitude of Christ. The Saviour is waiting for us to do this.”²

“True character is not shaped from without, and put on; it radiates from within. If we wish to direct others in the path of righteousness, the principles of righteousness must be enshrined in our own hearts. Our profession of faith may proclaim the theory of religion, but it is our practical piety that holds forth the word of truth. The consistent life, the holy conversation, the unswerving integrity, the active, benevolent spirit, the godly example—these are the mediums through which light is conveyed to the world.”³

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 347.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, pp. 189, 190.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 307.

By Gideon P. Reyneke, a senior in theology, Helderberg College, Western Cape, South Africa.

Christ, the Climax of the Law

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 5:17-20

The paradox of Christ's teaching on the law of the kingdom is that obedience to it is made possible by making it impossible! For example, in the sixth antithesis of Matthew 5:21-48, He says that His followers must love their enemies (verse 44). In this respect they have to be perfect, even as no one less than God Himself is perfect in His loving care for all (verse 48). No wonder the disciples cried out in shocked desperation: "Who then can be saved?" (19:25, NIV).

When Jesus was therefore admonishing His audience during the Sermon on the Mount to attain to a righteousness that overflows the banks of pharisaical obedience to God (5:20), He was making it well-nigh impossible for his audience—unless they understood what He meant when He claimed that He did not come to abolish the law but to fulfill it (verse 17).

The "law" (verse 18), was scribal shorthand for the entire Hebrew Scriptures. Jesus consequently claims that His special mission from God was to fulfill the will of God embedded in the law of the Old Testament (Rom. 2:18). Similarly, Jesus says that His baptism by John is necessary, since it is proper "to fulfill all

The apparently impossible righteousness of the kingdom of heaven therefore becomes possible.

righteousness" (Matt. 3:15, NIV). The crux of the matter is, therefore, the meaning of "fulfill" and "righteousness" in this passage (Matt. 5:17-20).

The word *fulfill* can simply mean that Jesus' teaching gives the law its full meaning originally intended by God. The scriptural statement that Abraham was justified by his faith (Gen. 15:6) is in a sense fulfilled (given substance) only when his actions of obedience demonstrated the genuineness of his faith (James 2:23). This would endorse the continued validity of the Old Testament in the Christian era. Within the context of Matthew 5:21-48, a clear statement on the binding nature of the Old Testament would preempt any possible misunderstandings of Christ's attitude toward the law. However, the eleven so-called formula quotations of Matthew in which he announces the fulfillment of Old Testament passages in the life of Jesus, applies the word *fulfill* to Old Testament messianic predictions (Matt. 2:15; 11:13). In the same way the exemplified teaching of Jesus now fulfills the prophetic anticipations of the law.

As the suffering servant, Christ becomes our righteousness (Isa. 53:11; Rom. 3:20, 21; 1 Cor. 1:30). In the obedience of His redemptive righteousness, Jesus attained the final, climactic goal of the "law and the prophets" for Israel (see Matt. 5:18). The apparently impossible righteousness of the kingdom of heaven therefore becomes possible through Him whose name is "The Lord Our Righteousness" (Jer. 23:5, 6).

By Johan A. Japp, associate professor of theology, Helderberg College, Western Cape, South Africa.

Making the Kingdom Credible

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 24:14

Entrance into the kingdom of heaven comes through the new birth of the Spirit (John 3:3, 5). But once in, how do you stay in? Predestinarians have an easy answer: the elect will not exit once they have entered. But the rejection of Judaism in New Testament times (Matt. 21:43), as well as New Testament warnings against personal apostasy (Heb. 6:4-6; Rev. 2:5), tell a different story.

You remain a citizen of the kingdom by being a witness for the kingdom (Rev. 12:11; 22:17). Salvation into the kingdom of heaven is the gift of God's grace, through faith (Eph. 2:8). But being a witness of Christ's great salvation confirms Christians increasingly in that faith by which they have been saved, are being saved, and will be saved (2 Tim. 1:9; 1 Cor. 1:18; Heb. 9:28). Witnessing through the "word of the kingdom" (Matt. 13:19, NASB), imbues you with the power of the kingdom (10:7, 8; 1 Tim. 4:16).

Representing the church, Peter received the keys of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 16:18, 19), the same keys that God entrusted to the spiritual leaders of Israel (Luke 11:52). But by misinterpreting God's Word and misrepresenting God Himself, they were locking themselves and all others out of the kingdom of heaven

You remain a citizen of the kingdom by being a witness for the kingdom.

(Matt.23:13). Their exclusive, manipulative, hypocritical attitude alienated the very people whom God wanted to reach through them (Eph. 2:14).

Abraham and his descendants were placed at the crossroads of ancient civilizations to be a light to the nations (Gen. 12:3; Isa. 49:3, 6). This light was the glory of God's saving righteousness, to be diffused throughout the world by those whose lives reflected the pure, compassionate character of God (Isa. 58:8; Exod. 33:18; 34:6, 7; Hab. 2:14). But when Christ came as the embodiment of God's saving righteousness, the Old Covenant was completely eclipsed (2 Cor. 3:7-11). This is the glory that all generations of Christians have to reflect to the world (2 Cor. 3:18; Rev. 14:7).

The key placed in the hands of the church to unlock the kingdom of heaven is the credibility of a consistent and compassionate Christian witness. Reflecting Christ's character is a condition for His return. It is not a condition for God to accept converted sinners, but for unconverted sinners to accept God. Only when the world realizes through the witness of Christians that God is Christlike will the saving knowledge of God flood through the world in a surge of salvation (Hab. 2:4; Rev. 18:1).

By Jorge A. Ramos, a religion student at Helderberg College, Western Cape, South Africa.

The Shift of the Eras

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Cor. 15:24

Like his contemporaries, Job initially believed in a so-called principle of cosmic equilibrium that included a universal, retributive justice more or less automatically put into operation by your relationship to law. But through personal tragedy of staggering proportions and dramatic divine revelations, he had to learn the lesson that the cosmos is not a closed system governed by timeless, immutable laws. Rather, justice was determined by the divine purpose of God and truth based on an implicit trust in God.

In the same way, the kingdom of heaven is a present reality, a truth as it is in Jesus (Eph. 4:21). His character and life determine its nature; His Cross brings its forgiveness, and His resurrection its empowerment. The doctrine of last things (eschatology) is really the doctrine of the Last One. It is all about the way God has—since the beginning—come to humanity. In the Old Testament, He came to us indirectly in a promissory and typical way through the revelations of the pre-incarnate Christ. At the incarnation He came to the Jews through Christ as the Suffering Servant of Isaiah 53. After the ascension, He comes to the church through the Holy Spirit as the personal representative of Christ on earth. At the Second

The cosmos is not a closed system governed by timeless, immutable laws.

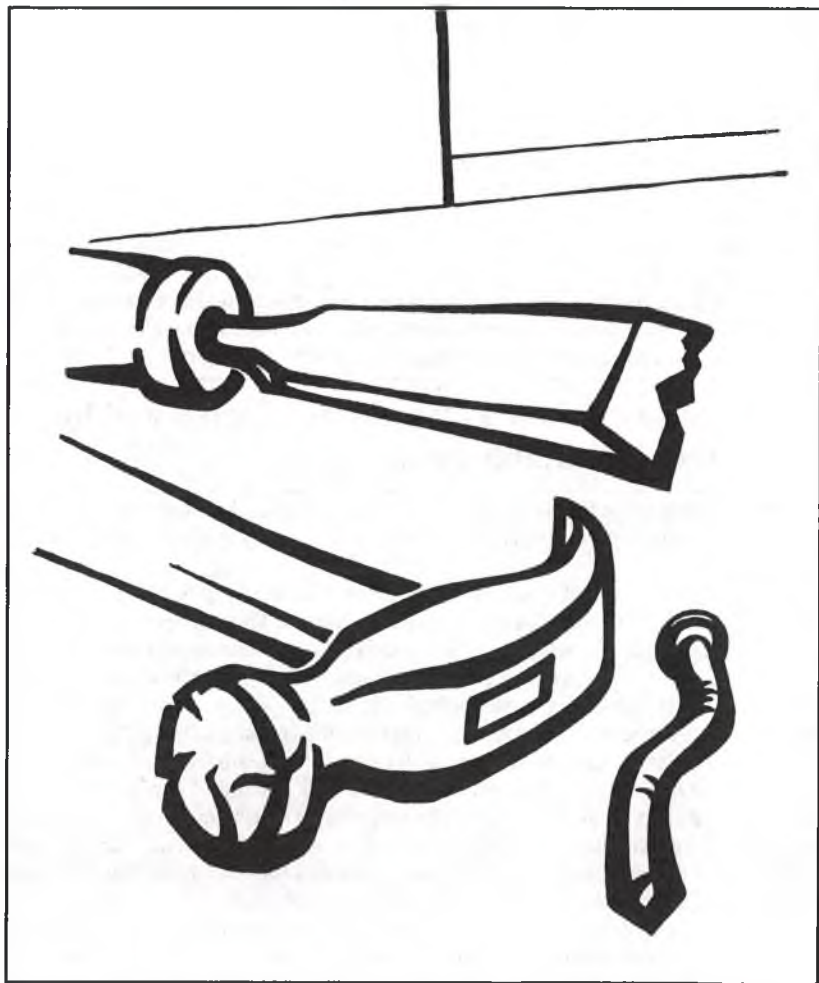
Coming, He comes to the world in the person of Christ as the righteous judge. All these comings of God to humanity constitute the realization of the kingdom of heaven.

The dynamic nature of God's kingdom means that the form of Mosaic law may change with decisive events in the history of salvation. Though Jesus said that not the very least of the law would ever be canceled (to paraphrase Matthew 5:18), it certainly did not mean that no religious practice would ever become obsolete through the fulfillment that Jesus brought. In fact, as all know from the book of Hebrews, the entire system of types and ceremonies ceased to be of significance as a religious practice when Jesus died His sacrificial death (Matt. 27:51). Yet, it remains part of the spiritual instruction of the Old Testament canon and in that sense still binding on all Christians. The majority of Christians would like to add some of the health laws of the Old Testament as well as the seventh-day Sabbath to the list of things abrogated as religious practices for Christians. But the New Testament does not in any way warrant such a conclusion.

So, after the last enemy of God's kingdom, the power of death, has been conquered, Christ the Mediator will restore the kingdom to God (1 Cor. 15:54-57). In His humble subjection of Himself as the Last Adam to the Father, He paradoxically receives the kingly power of this world forever (Rev. 11:15).

By Monique Viljoen, senior religion major, Helderberg College, Western Cape, South Africa.

GOD'S ANSWER TO POVERTY



“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:3, NKJV).

The Blessed Inner Life

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Luke 4:18, 19

Poverty is a growing problem in our world. Billions of people lack the resources for health, food, and shelter. Yet Scripture proclaims “good news to the poor” (Luke 4:18, NRSV). Christ provides a message of hope, especially for those who are needy. As dark as this world may become, the gospel has a message of hope: “Blessed are the poor in spirit” (Matt. 5:3). “Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God” (Luke 6:20).

Although these texts may have been written to give hope to the poor, everyone needs to pay attention. Whether they know it or not, all desperately need Christ. Let us imagine that today Jesus walks into London’s Hyde Park. He sits down on a bench between a rich London financier and a homeless man who sleeps on that very bench at night. Would He have fundamentally different messages for them? No, because the heart of the gospel message pertains to everyone equally. Christ’s kingdom is not of this earth, and the reward of His followers will come after this world has passed away.

In the Beatitudes, we can see one of the clearest expressions of the gospel message. The rich financier may go to church every week. He may even donate money to the homeless of London. Yet, if he himself is not poor in spirit, he has not grasped

Whether they know it or not, all desperately need Christ.

the message of Christ. Jesus demands an internal transformation. Outward expressions of that change are not unimportant, but without a heart that has been tuned to Christ, all is in vain. Desiderius Erasmus summed up the teaching of the Beatitudes in one phrase: “Blessed are they who hear the word of God internally.”

Though Jesus’ message to the two men in the park was the same, their reactions to it may have differed dramatically. For the poor man, Christ’s message means hope that real riches can await him in paradise. The rich financier, upon hearing the message, must realize that his wealth means nothing. In the sight of God, he is no different from the man who sleeps on the bench. Christ’s message is a warning to anyone—rich or poor—who trusts in the material things of this world. It is a message of hope, though, for those who have realized that this world is transitory and that we must turn our inner lives to Christ. Then we can rejoice in our Saviour, who will take our poor spirits and make us princes in the New Jerusalem.

* Desiderius Erasmus, ed. J. P. Dolan, *The Essential Erasmus* (Toronto: Meridian, 1983), p. 70.

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The Beatitudes: A Closer Look

LOGOS

Matt. 5:3-11; Luke 4:18, 19; 6:20; 14:21; 2 Cor. 8:9; James 2:5

Pretend, if you can, that you are a first-grader listening to the Beatitudes. Listen for the repetitions.

For starters, the repeated “Blessed” (Greek: *makarioi*) demands our attention. These nine cascading blessings at the beginning of Jesus’ sermon stand without parallel in ancient literature. This mound of “blesseds” helps us to grasp the basic flavor of the gospel. Even though Jesus sets high standards in the Sermon on the Mount and even in the Beatitudes, the basic message of Jesus in the Sermon on the Mount is one of immense relief. Matthew has stacked “blessing” on top of “blessing” on top of “blessing” to help us see the riches that God wants to give us.

In most English translations of the Beatitudes, we can observe the repetition of certain consonantal sounds—especially the p’s and the m’s. Notice the poor in spirit, pure in heart, peacemakers, persecuted for righteousness’ sake; and the mourners, the meek, the merciful. This extensive alliteration suggests that Matthew (and Jesus) intended the Beatitudes to be recited out loud.

The Beatitudes are built around a poetic one-two rhythm: “Blessed are . . . for they shall . . . We can see this one-two rhythm even in the introductory lines of Matthew 5:1, 2, where Matthew appears to be warming us up to a performance. The poetic quality of the Beatitudes makes them easier to remember. Earlier, the psalmist spoke of being delighted in the law of the Lord and of meditating on His

If it were up to me as a human, all this would be reversed.

words day and night (Ps. 1:2). Committed to memory and recalled, the Beatitudes can serve as a spiritual scaffolding to help the mind and heart remain centered on the words of Jesus.

One of the big challenges in understanding the Sermon on the Mount and the book of Matthew is figuring out what is meant by “kingdom of heaven.” Matthew never comes right out and tells us. It includes more than a simple definition allows. But the Lord’s Prayer includes the petition, “Your [God’s] kingdom come . . . on earth as it is in heaven.” This “kingdom of heaven” refers to God’s rule, acknowledged by those He has created and redeemed.

Even paying attention to the grammar of the Beatitudes has its rewards. In all the beatitudes, except two, the rewards are cast in the future tense. In the first and eighth beatitudes, dealing with the poor in spirit and the persecuted (5:3, 10), notice how Matthew uses *is*, a verb in the present tense. Interpreters have long discussed whether the rewards in the Beatitudes are actually available now or whether we will have to wait until the coming of the Lord to receive them. A case can be made that each of them is experienced in part, at least, in our present life. But the sharp contrast of *is*, the verb in the present tense, of the first and last beatitudes against the consistently future tense, *will be*, of all of the rest of the Beatitudes, calls us to a closer look.

The phrase “for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (verses 3, 10) has been understood in two ways. It could mean “Right now they have full rights to the kingdom of heaven” or “For right now they are part of the kingdom of heaven.” Either way, Matthew insists that right now God’s kingdom is intimately connected to the poor in spirit and to the persecuted. The other blessings related to the kingdom come later. At least the full impact of the other blessings comes later. Here we encounter a profound idea. Christians believe that to some extent we get the blessings now—experiencing God’s mercy ought to be a present experience, etc. Christians believe that these blessings were and are present in the person and ministry of Jesus. But Jesus did not say, “Blessed are the pure in heart, for they are seeing God.” Like Paul, we know that now we can see only dimly the things of God, but later we will see Him face-to-face.

If it were up to me as a human, all this would be reversed. Give me the earth now, give me the vision of God now, and I will take the kingdom later. Answer all my questions about the power of evil now, satisfy my desire for justice now, and I will follow You with confidence into the unseen future. But this is not the way of Jesus. We are called now to accept His assurance that those who come to God in their spiritual poverty and brokenness already belong to the kingdom, in spite of all appearances to the contrary.

The first four beatitudes direct attention to our relation to God; the last four direct attention to our relation to people. In this way the beatitudes are like the Ten Commandments in the Old Testament—the first four give our duty to God and the last six our duty to people. We can even see a similar two-part division in the Lord’s Prayer in Matthew 6:9-13. All these show the priority of our relationship to God, who created and sustains us, over all other relationships and responsibilities.

Paying attention to patterns and architecture in the Beatitudes doesn’t have to be busywork. When we pay attention to the structure and formal features of the Beatitudes, which begin the Sermon on the Mount, we meet the most important ideas in the Sermon of the Mount.

REACT

1. What is the progression or development in the Beatitudes as a whole?
2. Do we ever graduate from the first beatitude? Explain your answer.
3. Do we ever stop being “poor in spirit”?
4. What are the key words in the passages listed under “Logos” above?
5. How do you balance this with the negative connotation the phrase *poor spirited* carries?

By Ernest Burse, professor of biblical studies at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

Feeding on the Husks

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 5:3

“He who feels whole, who thinks that he is reasonably good, and is contented with his condition, does not seek to become a partaker of the grace and righteousness of Christ. Pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give. There is no room for Jesus in the heart of such a person. . . . Those who know that they cannot possibly save themselves, or of themselves do any righteous action, are the ones who appreciate the help that Christ can bestow. They are the poor in spirit, whom He declares to be blessed.”¹

“Christ’s first words to the people on the mount were words of blessing. Happy are they, He said, who recognize their spiritual poverty, and feel their need of redemption. The gospel is to be preached to the poor. Not to the spiritually proud, those who claim to be rich and in need of nothing, is it revealed, but to those who are humble and contrite. One fountain only has been opened for sin, a fountain for the poor in spirit.

“The proud heart strives to earn salvation; but both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ. The Lord can do nothing toward the recovery of man until, convinced of his own weakness, and stripped of

“Christ’s first words to the people on the mount were words of blessing.”

all self-sufficiency, he yields himself to the control of God. Then he can receive the gift that God is waiting to bestow. From the soul that feels his need, nothing is withheld. He has unrestricted access to Him in whom all fullness dwells. ‘For thus saith the high and lofty One that inhabiteth eternity, whose name is Holy; I dwell in the high and holy place, with him also that is of a contrite and humble spirit, to revive the spirit of the humble, and to revive the heart of the contrite ones.’ Isa. 57:15.”²

“Jesus says, ‘Blessed are the poor in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven’ (Matt. 5:3). There is fullness of grace in God, and we may have His spirit and power in large measure. Do not feed on the husks of self-righteousness, but go to the Lord. He has the best robe to put upon you, and His arms are open to receive. Christ will say, ‘Take away the filthy garments from him, and clothe him with a change of raiment.’”³

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

2. *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 299, 300.

3. *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 328.

By Julie Scott, assistant professor of marketing, Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

The Kingdom of the Heart

EVIDENCE

Key Text: John 4:3-42

What is the kingdom of heaven? What is it that the poor in spirit have? The Greek helps us see. The word that is used is *estin*. Theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven. If Jesus had been talking about something in the future, He would have used the word *estai*. Theirs *will be* the kingdom of heaven. "It is important to note that Christ was speaking not so much of His future kingdom of glory as of the present kingdom of divine grace."¹ Jesus often spoke of this present kingdom of divine grace. An example of this is the parable he told in Matthew 13:33: "The kingdom of heaven is like yeast that a woman took and mixed in with three measures of flour until all of it was leavened" (NRSV). "The kingdom Christ came to establish was one that begins within men's hearts, permeates their lives and overflows into other men's hearts and lives with the dynamic and compelling power of love."²

The poor in spirit are blessed because they are the recipients of this kingdom of God that begins in the human heart. A striking example of this is found in John 4. Jesus is passing through Samaria and stops to rest by a well near the city of Sychar. A Samaritan woman comes to the well, and Jesus asks her for a drink. She is shocked that a Jewish man would ask her, a Samaritan woman, for a drink. Her

Jesus often spoke of this present kingdom of divine grace.

surprise gives Jesus the opportunity to tell her about the Water of Life. She is convinced, after listening to Him, that He is the promised Messiah. Leaving her water jar, she runs to the city to tell the people. The Bible tells us that "many Samaritans from that city believed in him because of the woman's testimony" (John 4:39). Ellen White says, "As soon as she had found the Saviour the Samaritan woman brought others to Him. She proved herself a more effective missionary than His own disciples."³ The Jews would certainly have viewed this Samaritan woman as being in dire spiritual poverty. Yet it was she and not they who received and shared the kingdom of heaven. Truly the poor in spirit are blessed. Truly theirs *is* the kingdom of heaven.

REACT

1. Whom do you consider to be poor in spirit?
2. Does their testimony of Jesus have anything to say to you?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 325.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 195.

By *Mardene Bartholomew*, a senior theology major at Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

A Mountain of Pride

HOW-TO

Key Text: Rev. 3:17

Shortly after graduating from academy, some friends and I attempted to hike around Mt. Ranier. For months we had boasted of how we would conquer nature alone. We planned to hike the 90-mile trail in eight to 10 days. For the first two days everything seemed perfect; then the trouble began. Blue sky turned to black, and soon we were soaked, along with all our belongings. That night we made camp and cooked in our tent. As I lay there huddled in one of the dry sleeping bags, I began to think for the first time that we might not accomplish our goal on our own. By the next day as I dragged my water-logged pack up the muddy trail, I was praying that I wouldn't have to spend another night on that miserable mountain. Later that day, sitting on the porch of the empty ranger station, knowing that my ride back to civilization would soon arrive, I realized the folly of attempting such a journey without God's help. I had placed my faith in myself and let my human pride come between me and God. It wasn't until I began to acknowledge my error and look to a higher source for help that our situation turned around. The process of turning from our prideful ways and becoming "poor in spirit" takes three steps:

I began to think for the first time that we might not accomplish our goal.

1. Become convinced of your spiritual poverty. Like the people of Laodicea, the lukewarm church, we were not aware of our true condition until we were humbled by nature. "You say, 'I am rich; I have acquired wealth and do not need a thing.' But you do not realize that you are wretched, pitiful, poor, blind and naked" (Rev. 3:17, NIV).

2. Realize your helplessness. Just as we needed God's help to get off the mountain and out of the rain, we cannot overcome our spiritual poverty alone, only God can do that. "Grace and truth came through Jesus Christ" (John 1:17).

3. Cry out to God for help. As we hiked toward the road, we removed all pride and prayed for assistance. We placed ourselves solely in His hands. "I am in pain and distress; may your salvation, O God, protect me" (Ps. 69:29). God will hear your prayer, and once you have given yourself to Him, you will truly be blessed.

REACT

In what ways has God tried to remind you of your need for Him?

By Jeremy Dietz, a senior history major, Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

The Poor Can Be Rich

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 5:3-12

Have you ever gone to bed hungry because there was nothing to eat for dinner? Have you ever had to patch your shoes with cardboard? In other words, have you every been poor?

If so, you may not have had many material possessions, but you may have had something that someone who has never gone without doesn't—a true understanding of need, and an appreciation for all you do have. When you say a mealtime blessing, you are really very thankful for every morsel of food. When you buy new shoes, you revel in their newness whenever you wear them.

This week's lesson is about a gift possessed by another kind of poor people, the "poor in spirit." These are the people who have a true understanding of their need for God and an appreciation for His grace. They know they need God.

When you have been a Christian all your life, you may take God for granted. I know I have. A lifetime of church sermons, Sabbath School lessons, church school, and Christian friends left me with a Christian lifestyle and an intellectual understanding of Bible doctrines. But in recent years, I am realizing it isn't

When you have been a Christian all your life, you may take God for granted.

enough! Or maybe I should say, it was too much. In the enormity of the thought that God loves me, I didn't see the first step. To be poor in spirit I just had to understand that I need God. In the true spirit of the success-oriented eighties in which I spent my college years, I was trying to achieve it, not merely accept it.

Of course, success, as well as the riches that come with it, is still valued today. I don't believe being rich is wrong; I'm just thankful that I now see the value in being poor too. Or, I should say, I see that we are all the same in what really counts. Money, power, and class may separate the rich and poor, but when it's all stripped away, I am the same as the most powerful ruler in the world.

I have always been fascinated by personal accounts of people who have survived airplane crashes, earthquakes, or other life-threatening disasters. They sometimes say, "We were all in it together." They had a true understanding of their need for one another. And many times, they saw their need for God too. If only it didn't take tragedy to bring us to this point.

It doesn't have to. We only have to believe it. Sounds too good to be true, doesn't it? I guess that is why they call it the "good news."

REACT

Why is it so difficult to acknowledge our need for God?

By Rosa Jimenez, director of the Office of College Relations, Walla Walla College, College Place, Washington.

LOOKING FOR A SILVER LINING



“Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted” (Matt. 5:4, NRSV).

It Makes No Sense!

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:4

It was one of those phone calls that instantly chills you to the bone. At 4:15 a.m., its ring filled our Andrews University apartment, rousing us from a deep sleep. It was my mother ringing from Australia, and she never miscalculates the 14 hours' time difference between Sydney and Michigan.

My 8-month-old nephew, James, had died. He had been having a nap before supper, but when my sister, Lorretta, went to fetch him, he wasn't breathing. As a trained nurse, Lorretta desperately tried to revive him. But he was gone, one of three healthy children to die that day in Sydney from the mysterious sudden-infant-death syndrome (SIDS).

That evening, I sat in a plane on the long journey home, my mind in a turmoil, the words of Jesus ringing in my ears, "Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted" (Matt. 5:4, NRSV). I know this verse refers primarily to those who mourn for their sins. But mourning is mourning, and nothing in the text limits its application to the spiritual sphere. In this world where more than 30,000 children die each day, my family's sorrow is just a drop in an ocean of pain. But nothing conveys the agony of grief until you experience it firsthand. I know that all the

It was one of those phone calls that instantly chills you to the bone.

Beatitudes dramatically turn our expectations upside down, but this one seems to do so more than the rest.

I understand why those who suffer for the sake of righteousness are called blessed (verse 10), for what greater privilege than to suffer with Christ and advance the cause of His kingdom? My nephew's loss, however, is not by choice, and I see nothing redemptive in it. There are some who have been roused by the shock of my nephew's passing to seek God, but I know as many others whose spirituality has been shaken profoundly by its unfairness. And think of how many people he might have drawn to God if his life had been spared.

Yet we have seen God's hand at work, even in this dark hour. There is the selection of baby photos the photographer was only hours from destroying, but which he freely gave to my sister and her husband. There is the fact that I was able to be on that plane when I couldn't see a vacant seat anywhere. And there is our aunty, who has a special gift of mercy and who was already traveling to Lorretta's place when the disaster struck.

Lord, Your kingdom has only just begun to dawn. We live between the ages. When we are truly home, then I know we will see the happiness in this sorrow that we cannot see now.

By Ross Cole, chair of the theology department, Pacific Adventist University, Boroko, NCD, Papua New Guinea.

Happy Are Those Who Mourn

LOGOS

Matt. 5:4; Luke 6:21; Jer. 6:19; 2 Cor. 1:3-5; 7:10; Luke 19:41; Matt. 26:36-38; Phil. 1:29, 30

We don't mourn when we are happy, do we? Mourning appears to be the natural human response to intense pain and deep loss. If that is the case, then why did Christ pronounce a blessing on those who mourn? Why is mourning a prerequisite for God's comfort and His kind of happiness? What did Christ mean when He said, "Happy are those who mourn"? (Matt. 5:4, TEV).

The Greek word *penthe* translated "mourn" "generally denotes intense mourning in contrast with *lupeomai*, a more general word meaning 'to grieve.'"¹ Christ was referring here to "a deep sense of spiritual need that leads men to 'mourn' for the imperfection they see in their own lives."²

The "deep sense of spiritual need" and the consequent mourning results only when we are drawn toward God. The closer we are drawn to God, the more we see of our helplessness and sinfulness. As the rays from the Sun of Righteousness penetrate the depths of our darkened souls, we realize that unless something happens, we are forever doomed.

This realization drives a needle deep into our souls, and in utter desperation our hearts cry out as did the tax collector's: "God, be merciful to me, a sinner!" (Luke 18:13, NRSV). That is the kind of mourning that touches the heart of God. Isaiah is a classic example of such a "mourner." As he caught a vision of God seated on His throne, he was filled with a deep sense of his own unworthiness.

Why is mourning a prerequisite for God's comfort and His kind of happiness?

In utter desperation, he mourned: "'Woe to me!' . . . 'I am ruined! For I am a man of unclean lips'" (Isa. 6:5, NIV).

The apostle Peter also had a similar experience when he came face to face with Jesus for the first time. Though he had fished all night, he had caught nothing. But when he let down his net again at the command of Jesus, the catch was such that his boat almost sank. As he realized who Jesus was, he became aware of his own unworthiness. In his desperation, he cried out: "Go away from me, Lord; I am a sinful man!" (Luke 5:8, NIV).

Just like Peter, Isaiah, and many others, we see our utter helplessness only in our moments of encounter with God. This new vision of ourselves causes our hearts to mourn and leads to true repentance and conversion.

"But it does not stop there. It continues throughout the life of the conscientious Christian. The greatest saints realize most keenly how far they fall short of perfect Christlikeness, and they mourn over it. Only the shallow Christian can feel complacent."³

Though our spiritual condition may be wretched and miserable, Christ cannot do anything unless we realize our need. Malaria is a killer disease in my country. In many cases, malaria-stricken children sometimes refuse to swallow the bitter

pills. In their desperation, parents and friends resort to all sorts of means to coerce their children to swallow the pills.

Despite the efforts of parents and friends, some children have died when healing was just inches away from their mouths. But happy were those who swallowed the bitter tablets; for they received healing.

To the children, malaria tablets were the bitterest thing they had to swallow. But if they wanted life and healing, there was no sweet way out. Christ said, "Happy are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4, TEV), for they will receive comfort, healing, and restoration.

Mourning will never be a sweet experience. It may even leave behind scars that time may never heal. But for the sin-sick people like you and me, mourning is the only way out.

The mourning experience may come to us each in different ways. Some may find theirs in experiences similar to that of Isaiah and Peter. Others may be through physical and emotional pain and heart-wrenching experiences. Christ never promised us a bed of roses. His own life here was filled with sorrow and grief. For our sakes, He drank the cup of pain and suffering even to its dregs.

To His disciples and all who would be His followers, Jesus said: "If you belonged to the world, then the world would love you as its own. But I chose you from this world, . . . that is why the world hates you. . . . If they persecuted me, they will persecute you too." "The world will make you suffer. But be brave! I have defeated the world" (John 15:18-20; 16:32, TEV).

Though the devil torments God's people with pain and suffering, God uses trials and hardships to fulfill His purposes. He draws His people to Himself "by close, testing trials, by showing them their own weakness and inability, and by teaching them to lean upon Him as their only help and safeguard. . . . God takes men upon trial; He proves them on the right hand and on the left, and thus they are educated, trained, disciplined."⁴

If we call ourselves Christians, there is no sweet way out for us. We have to swallow the bitter to find life and healing.

Jesus meant just what He said: "Happy are those who mourn" (Matt. 5:4).

REACT

1. When was the last time you had a mourning experience?
2. In what ways was your mourning experience a blessing?
3. What encouragement would you give to a fellow believer who may be having his or her mourning experience?
4. When faced with afflictions and sufferings, how can one maintain a relationship with Jesus?
5. Can we blame Jesus for the problems that affect our lives today? Explain your answer.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 325.

2. *Ibid.*

3. Earle Ralph, "Matthew," *Beacon Bible Commentary* (Kansas City, Mo.: Beacon Hill Press, 1964), p. 68.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 4, p. 86.

By Anderson Pala, theology student at Pacific Adventist University, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

Tears of Love

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Luke 19:41

“Amid the universal rejoicing of the triumphal entry, while palm branches waved, . . . the world’s Redeemer was overwhelmed with a sudden and mysterious sorrow. He, the Son of God, the Promised One of Israel, . . . was in tears, not of ordinary grief, but of intense, irrepressible agony.

“His tears were not for Himself. . . . He wept for the doomed thousands of Jerusalem—because of the blindness and impenitence of those whom He came to bless and to save.”¹

“The tears of Jesus were not in anticipation of His own suffering. . . . It was the sight of Jerusalem that pierced the heart of Jesus—Jerusalem that had rejected the Son of God and scorned His love, that refused to be convinced by His mighty miracles, and was about to take His life. He saw what she was in her guilt of rejecting her Redeemer, and what she might have been had she accepted Him who alone could heal her wound. He had come to save her; how could He give her up?”²

“Jesus wept over Jerusalem because of the guilt and obstinacy of His chosen people. He weeps also over the hardheartedness of those who, professing to be co-workers with Him, are content to do nothing.”³

“The tears of Jesus were not in anticipation of His own suffering.”

“As Christ was riding into Jerusalem, on the crest of Olivet He broke forth in uncontrollable grief, exclaiming in broken utterances as He looked upon Jerusalem: ‘If thou hadst known, even thou, at least in this thy day, the things which belong unto thy peace! but now they are hid from thine eyes’ [Luke 19:42]. He wept not for Himself, but for the despisers of His mercy, long-suffering, and forbearance. . . . They neglect His requirements and despise His forbearance. There is a form of godliness, there is ceremonial worship, there are complimentary prayers; but the real power is wanting. The heart is not softened by grace, but is cold and unimpressible.”⁴

REACT

In situations that the world considers major disasters, true happiness can be found, according to Jesus. Does one have to experience misfortune to be called blessed by Jesus?

1. *The Great Controversy*, p. 18.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 576.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 32.

4. *Ibid.*, vol. 5, p. 258.

By Tom Tupito, church pastor, Pacific Adventist University, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

The Unlucky Lucky

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 5:4

Tortured Rwandan refugees still haunt my mind. Homeless, hungry, and dying, they appear on the television as in deep mourning. Still, the power of the wicked continues to oppress them.

Who would think of calling them blessed, fortunate, or happy?

“How happy are those who know what sorrow means” (Matt 5:4, Phillips).

What a provocative statement. The Rwandans need to be comforted now! They immediately need a favorable change in the situation. Jesus’ words do not make sense, it seems.

Every word on the Sermon on the Mount was preceded by something else. Even the Beatitudes (5:1-12), while setting the tone for the whole sermon (chapters 5–7), bear a strong messianic utterance, which is clearly articulated in the preceding chapters.

Matthew’s main purpose is to prove to his Jewish readers that Jesus is their Messiah:

● “Of whom was born Jesus, who is called Christ” (1:16, NIV).

Who would think of calling Rwandans blessed, fortunate, or happy?

● “You are to give him the name Jesus, because he will save his people from their sins” (verse 21).

● “They will call him Immanuel—which means, ‘God with us’” (verse 23).

The messages of both John the Baptist and Jesus clearly confirms: The old aeon is passing away; the new aeon of God has arrived.

● “Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near” (3:2)

● “The people living in darkness have seen a great light; . . . a light has dawned” (4:16).

● “Jesus went throughout Galilee, teaching in their synagogues, preaching the good news of the kingdom” (verse 23).

Thus Matthew 5:4, when examined by these preceding verses, may be expressed with a touch of exaggeration. Because of Christ, your sins are forgiven. Now you are transferred into the new aeon of God; a member of His kingdom.

This is what life is like when you belong to this new era: the power of the evil one will continue to oppress you. You will mourn. But, because of Christ, you will be blessed, will be fully satisfied. Since you “have tasted the heavenly gift, . . . the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the coming age” (Heb. 6:4, 5, NIV).

In the biblical sense, a blessed person is one whose satisfaction comes from God and not from favorable circumstances. Therefore, we are blessed because in our mourning we are eager to accept what God wants to give us.

By Usaia Baravi, theology lecturer, Pacific Adventist University, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

The Mourners

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 5:4

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted (Matt. 5:4, NKJV)."

These words of Christ are worth restudying to understand how mourning is to be regarded as a positive Christian attitude. As His servants, we need to relate to mourning in an acceptable manner physically, emotionally, and spiritually.

Physically. A person displays notable signs in mourning. One who mourns shows explicitly the emotional state through tears and facial characteristics. In certain cultures people cry out aloud and cut their bodies according to the depth of their agony. In the highlands of New Guinea, mourning is manifested by the rubbing of ashes and mud on one's skin when weeping over a death. Some people even chop off their fingers. The New Testament's views of the body as a temple of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 6:19) and as a daily sacrifice (Rom. 12:1) rejects all except for tears. "Jesus wept" (John 11:35), but this reference does not specify His attitude.

Emotionally. We involve our emotions by sharing the feelings and the general state of sorrow in which we find ourselves. Paul urges us to "mourn with those who mourn" (Rom. 12:15, NIV). But dangers are involved in giving way to emotions—when mourning is excessive; or when one over-sympathizes with the sorrowful.

Dangers are involved in giving way to emotions.

In the first case, a health risk is involved. Inspiration warns that grief and sorrow can disturb the digestion process and interfere with the body's nutrition* if the soul mourns excessively. In the second, more sympathy does more bad than good to the distressed. Like Job and his friends, the victim becomes more depressed than he or she first was.

Spiritually. The Bible describes two facets of the experience. On one hand, it is the sinner's genuine sorrow for sin. The apostle wrote: "Godly sorrow [mourning] brings repentance that leads to salvation" (2 Cor. 7:10). Sorrow leads a sinner to Christ. Then, further, the forgiven sinner with a heart warmed by the love of God will sorrow over the sins of others. Sorrow for them causes him or her to love them, pray for them, be kind and sympathetic toward them and care for them unconditionally until they see Christ lifted up for them on the cross for their waywardness. This is the gospel commission. We need a commitment to the gospel cause like that of Paul's when he testified, "I have become all things to all men so that by all possible means I might save some" (1 Cor. 9:22). The assurance for those who dare to mourn is that they will receive comfort. Souls will be won, adding to the joy of their labor here and in the kingdom to share in the comforts of the eternal home.

* *The Adventist Home*, p. 431.

By Terry Koin, a theology student at Pacific Adventist University, Boroko, NCD, Papua New Guinea.

Jesus Is the Only Way

OPINION

Key Texts: 1 Thess. 3:7; Isa. 49:13

Lord! Why my sister? This was my reaction when I received the call that she had died. For days I lost interest in the things around me, and the impact of my emotional trauma was affecting my family. People brought gifts and flowers, but these acts of love did not ease the pain in my heart.

How many times we are faced with trials of life and immediately seek answers from God. It is typical of human beings to blame God when terrible things happen to us and those we love. Yet, these experiences do not originate from God.

God has provided a way, however, for His children to cope with misfortune. First, we have to focus on Jesus, who understands our worries. Second, people will surround us with their love in whatever way they can. Those who mourn are not alone in their time of sorrow, for many others are around to share such times with us. Last, the Word of God is like a fountain of pure water to quench the thirsting spirit.

The death of my sister has opened my eyes. I realize that only Jesus can erase the pain and instill peace in my troubled heart. Although human eyes can not

These acts of love did not ease the pain in my heart.

comprehend reasons for trials and sadness, Jesus knows what is best for us.

In addition, sad experiences can be a stepping stone in our relationship with Jesus. What appears to be a tragedy turns out to be a blessing, perhaps renewed commitment to the faith or the assurance that others care about you.

Likewise, Paul grieved for the church members in Thessalonica. He was anxious to find out the condition of the church there. So he sent Timothy on a fact-finding mission. When Timothy returned, he had good news. The members—in spite of persecutions and afflictions—remained faithful to God. This report put Paul's anxieties at ease. He was blessed by Timothy's report.

Like Paul, we weary ourselves with worries and problems that are beyond our reach. Yet we need to take a step forward and claim the promises of God. Only Jesus can give us peace and hope to face the future.

Today we live in a time of heartache and sorrow. As God's people, we can emerge victorious through Jesus alone. We cannot carry our burdens on our shoulders—we need power from above. Again we are fortunate to have people around us to uphold us in times of trial and sorrow.

By Maranata Titimanu, an English major at Pacific Adventist University, Boroko, Papua New Guinea.

IS MEEKNESS WEAKNESS?



**“Blessed are the meek, for they will inherit the earth”
(Matt. 5:5, NIV).**

The Meek Are Not Weak

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:5

Common beliefs tend to associate meekness with weakness. What did Jesus mean when He declared this beatitude? Did He think of people who are polite and timid to a point that they never discuss things? Did Jesus think of Christians, that is His disciples, as people who always agree with everybody?

Christ loves the meek. This is why He blesses them. He also knows that the world needs meek people. We live in a society in which there seems to be less gentleness and kindness but more violence and aggressiveness. People are used to this situation, and that is why they are sometimes surprised to see that there is still some kindness in this world.

Meekness is the antithesis of arrogance. Too many people are arrogant today, and we Christians, in accordance with gospel teachings, ought to offer meekness, this virtue that God treasures, for it reveals that we are truly His children.

Meekness is a daily challenge. At home, college, workplace, each of us has, at least once, been in a situation in which meekness was the best answer to the challenge.

“Blessed are the meek” (Matt. 5:5). This is one of the characteristics of the citizens of the kingdom of God. Jesus points to meekness because Christians must

Meekness is the antithesis of arrogance.

live in this spirit that, beginning here on earth, must imbue all those who hope, one day, to live in the kingdom of heaven.

The meek are not weak. Rather, they are strong. Wherever there is hatred, violence, or injustice, our society appeals to meek people to stand up and tell the world that love is the basis of strong human relationships.

This week’s lesson will remind us of our Saviour’s teachings on meekness. He gave us an example, and He asks us to practice this virtue in spite of whatever problems we meet every day.

Meekness is the skeleton of Christian life. If it is strong, the whole body will be able to stand firmly. Scripture study will lead us on the path in which God wants us to walk. Let us discover love, humility, kindness, courtesy, tenderness, and mercy. These are characteristics of those who wish to overcome evil with good.

Ellen White says: “Our precious Saviour invites us to join ourselves to Him, to unite our weakness to His strength, our ignorance to His wisdom, our unworthiness to His merits. God’s providence is the school in which we are to learn the meekness and lowliness of Jesus.”*

May God help us through this week’s lesson to learn meekness at His side. We have a divine model; all we have to do is to follow Him.

* *The Great Controversy*, p. 623.

The Triumph of Gentleness

LOGOS

Matt. 5:5; 11:28, 29; Num. 12:3; 1 Pet. 3:3, 4; Phil. 2:5; 4:5; Col. 3:12; Eph. 4:1, 2

“Blessed are the gentle, for they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5, NASB). When Jesus declares this beatitude, He quotes the Old Testament: “The meek shall inherit the land, and delight themselves in abundant prosperity” (Ps. 37:11, NRSV). He repeats and emphasizes an already known truth to His audience. This truth concerns gentlemen and gentlewomen.

The Hebrew word *‘anaw* we translate as “gentle” points first to the poor, the deprived of material possessions, who must be helped by others’ generosity (Deut. 15:11). Then, by extension, it designates the one with limited resources who is unable to avoid being exploited, oppressed by those who are better off (Amos 2:7), the one who is despised (Ps. 119:141).

The promise of Psalm 37 and the beatitude of Jesus are first of all announcing a social revolution: the poor, the exploited, the small become heirs of the land. In God’s kingdom, or, stated in another way, where God is truly king, even the poorest benefit from the earth.

Use of this word brings us farther on. It describes those whom God saves (76:10), walking with them along their path leading to righteousness and teaching them His way of life (25:9). It points to those who are despised or threatened because of their just behavior and their trust in God (37:14; 69:33). It is the

Everything in the usual life seems to indicate the opposite.

opposite of pride (138:6). It designates the one who takes refuge in God (14:6). Therefore God invites humankind to seek and to grow this quality (2.3).

The Greek word *praüs*, used by the translator of the LXX for the Hebrew *‘anaw*, is used in the New Testament to describe a nonaggressive, harmless person, and nonpretentious, gentle, and amiable behavior.

Jesus, Model of Gentleness

Jesus introduces Himself as having this trait of character (Matt. 12:19), and it’s not because of environment or genetics. It results from His desire to fulfill the Scriptures announcing the true king, who would demonstrate this gentleness (Zech. 9:9, cf. Matt. 21:5). He is a model of gentleness (2 Cor. 10:1).

Even if Paul does not use the word *gentleness*, but the word *humility*, which frequently goes with it, the way in which he describes Jesus clearly includes this quality (Phil. 2:3-9). He is the God who casts aside His wealth, His power, His honor, to live a human life, a life of limitation, of obedience, which leads only to death. He does not defend Himself; He gives priority to the interest of others instead of His own. This is exactly what the Hebrew and Greek words mean.

But Is Gentleness Efficient?

The gentle, as Jesus says, will inherit the earth. This is not easy to accept!

Everything in the usual life seems to indicate the opposite. The rich, the ambitious, the bold who do not fear to tread on others, possess the earth. When we try to be gentle, even to yield our own rights to avoid harming anyone, we are run over by others.

Is Jesus proposing impractical behavior for everyday life? Is He asking us to wait and be trodden upon until we at last happily possess the earth in His kingdom?

Certainly not. He says blessed are the gentle. He does not say the gentle, though miserable today, will be happy tomorrow. The happiness He proclaims is for the present.

A Human Example

It is possible for a human to be gentle without being weak. The example of Moses shows it clearly. The Bible says that he was very gentle, more than any other human being (Num. 12:3). The context of that statement is especially interesting. Read the whole of chapter 12. Moses is criticized by Aaron and Miriam, and his authority is contested, especially in matters of religion. According to the text, Moses does not defend himself. God takes his defense. And when God punishes those who are being critical, Moses intercedes in their behalf. This story shows that gentleness is not linked to a person's income. Moses refuses to defend himself when he is attacked. He is aware of his fallibility, thus he does not wish to defend imperfect behavior. He is certain of his motivation. He is not seeking his own interests, and he can trust in God for his defense. He does not wish for revenge, because he lives for the sake of others, even those who harm him.

In practice, when we need to be encouraged we turn to persons who have this kind of gentleness. We may rely on them. They give priority to our needs over their own. Finally, we are disposed, in spite of our human limitations, to wish that such persons inherit the earth and be ruling over it. It is only from them that peace and well meaning have the best chance.

How to Get That Quality

Jesus invites everyone to live that gentleness. He wants us to be happy. But how can we attain it? Only through real conversion. In this way we would consider our life as a gift of grace given by God at the cost of His own Son's life. Then His Holy Spirit will lead us into service to others. In this way God takes charge of our lives, and our only concern is then to obey Him and work for the good of others. The Spirit bears His fruit in our lives, and one of the facets of this fruit is gentleness (Gal. 5:23).

REACT

1. What are the obstacles in my conscious and unconscious thinking to the development of gentleness? How can these obstacles be overcome?
2. In what specific respects do the lives of Jesus and Moses exemplify meekness?
3. Is meekness a species of cowardice or a virtue? Explain your answer.
4. In what way could meekness be an inward adorning?

By Bernard Sauvagnat, Sabbath School director of the Franco-Belgian Union, Le Mee sur Seine, France.

The Unmistakable Evidence

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Num. 12:3

“Meekness is a fruit of the Spirit, and an evidence that we are branches of the living God. The abiding presence of meekness is an unmistakable evidence that we are branches of the True Vine, and are bearing much fruit. It is an evidence that we are by faith beholding the King in his beauty and becoming changed into his likeness. Where meekness exists, the natural tendencies are under the control of the Holy Spirit. Meekness is not a species of cowardice. It is the spirit which Christ manifested when suffering injury, when enduring insult and abuse. To be meek is not to surrender our rights; but it is the preservation of self-control under provocation to give way to anger or to the spirit of retaliation. Meekness will not allow passion to take the lines.”¹

Samson was the strongest man on earth, Solomon the wisest, and Moses the meekest. And Moses was the greater of the three.

“Moses was the greatest man who ever stood as leader of the people of God. He was greatly honored by God, not for the experience which he had gained in the Egyptian court, but because he was the meekest of men. God talked with him face to face, as a man talks with a friend. If men desire to be honored by God, let

“[Meekness] is the spirit which Christ manifested when suffering injury, when enduring insult and abuse.”

them be humble. Those who carry forward God’s work should be distinguished from all others by their humility. Of the man who is noted for his meekness, Christ says, He can be trusted. Through him I can reveal Myself to the world. He will not weave into the web any threads of selfishness. I will manifest Myself to him as I do not to the world.”²

“Meekness is the inward adorning, which God estimates as of great price. The apostle speaks of this as more excellent and valuable than gold, or pearls, or costly array. While the outward adorning beautifies only the mortal body, the ornament of meekness adorns the soul and connects finite man with infinite God. This is the ornament of God’s own choice. He who garnished the heavens with the orbs of light, has by the same Spirit promised that ‘he will beautify the meek with salvation.’ Angels of heaven will register as best adorned those who put on the Lord Jesus Christ and walk with Him in meekness and lowliness of mind.”³

1. *The Signs of the Times*, Aug. 22, 1895.

2. Ellen G. White Comments, *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 1, p. 1113.

3. *Review and Herald*, Jan. 18, 1881.

By Bernard Denéchaud, editor-in-chief, Life and Health Publishing House, Dammarieles-Lys, France.

The Promise of the Earth

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Gen. 12:1-7

“For they shall inherit the earth” (Matt. 5:5). Jesus promises the earth as an inheritance. The earth is the oldest of God’s promises given to His people, in the person of Abraham: “Leave your country, your people and your father’s household and go to the land I will show you. . . . To your offspring I will give this land” (Gen. 12:1-7, NIV). The Hebrew text indicates this land, this promised land, with the word *eretz* (“earth”), which the state of Israel proudly carries today: *eretz yisrael*.

But, in the time of Jesus, the land on which Abraham’s descendants lived no longer belonged to them. For almost a century (63 B.C.), Judea had been part of the Roman Empire. For the Jews this dispossession was very painful. There was constant unrest. The people often broke out in revolt.

The Gospels bear witness to this tension. We read of a census in the Empire (Luke 2:1-3), of the taxes due to Caesar (Matt. 22:15-22), of contempt and hatred for the publicans, who collaborated with the usurping power. In order to bring about Jesus’ condemnation, the priests, the elders, and the scribes falsely accused Him before Pilate of stirring up rebellion. “We found this man perverting our nation, forbidding us to pay taxes to the emperor, and saying that he himself is

The land on which Abraham’s descendants lived no longer belonged to them.

the Messiah, a king” (Luke 23:2, NRSV). Jesus was crucified instead of Barabbas, who “had been put in prison for an insurrection that had taken place in the city, and for murder” (23:19). From these incidents, we glimpse the kinds of problems created by the Roman occupation.

History teaches us that the longing to regain the land that they believed was their inheritance drove the most determined of the Jews to desperate conflict with Rome. Rome was never gentle with the rebels. In A.D. 70 Titus’ troops invaded Jerusalem and destroyed the temple. In A.D. 135, after a rebellion was quelled, Jerusalem became Aelia Capitolina. A temple to Jupiter Capitolin was erected on the site of Herod’s temple, and the Jews were banished from their town, the land that they had hoped to inherit by violence.

As Jesus spoke, those who possessed the land had “inherited” it by the violence of a war of conquest, or by base, lucrative collaboration. Those who dreamed of inheriting it fell in with the Zealots and their terrorist methods. The others, probably the majority, had submitted and no longer hoped for anything. In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said something incredible: God’s great and ancient promise, the earth, is an inheritance. One cannot conquer it by personal effort. The only way is to become a child and heir of the owner.

By Corinne Egasse, a secretary at Salève Adventist University, Collonges-sous-Salève, France.

Change of Point of View

HOW-TO

Key Text: Phil. 4:5

Here we are at the crucial point of our week of study. We can see and admire the beauty of meekness in the lives of saints of ages past; we can even understand the logic behind the meekness. But to incorporate this virtue in our own lives is the problem. Here are some ideas about how to achieve this:

1. We need a total change in point of view. With our human glasses, we consider everything in the light of power balance, of struggle for life. We assume that we must be strong to survive, that we can count only on ourselves. So we are violent with the violent, strong with the strong. Our foes are the other people, and contrary circumstances, and we must react and resist with our hands, with our words, with energy—and sometimes violence.

From the divine point of view, the one thing to master is myself, my inclinations, my passions, my weaknesses. The aim of life is to resist, not evil ones, but evil itself. If I react with violence against violence, violence has won. If I meet violence with meekness, good surpasses evil. God Himself has not tried to be the stronger in His battle against the devil, but to be the better.

We consider everything in the light of power balance, of struggle for life.

2. We must stop the entry of violence into the soul. What I see (movies), what I read (books, newspapers), what I hear (music, speech), must be screened. As the Bible says, “Make no friends with those given to anger, and do not associate with hotheads, or you may learn their ways and entangle yourself in a snare” (Prov. 22:24, 25, NRSV). Then I can fill my mind with the life of the meek Jesus and meditate on all sorts of acts of meekness found in the Bible. By contemplation I’ll be transformed. Meekness is a fruit of the spirit, so it belongs to the kind of things I can ask from God. Jesus was a meek man; He was also a man of prayer. Could there be a strong relation between the two?

In fact, we learn as we do. Enter into the school of life and consider each day, each hour, as an occasion for cultivating this virtue. Family is the ideal circle in which to test this new way of living. People around you will surely appreciate your new meekness.

By Bernard Denéchaud, editor-in-chief, Life and Health Publishing House, Dammaries-Lys, France.

Blessed Are the Meek

OPINION

Key Text: 1 Kings 12:6-11

Honestly, Jesus, you never cease to amaze me! There You are praising the meek, the feeble, and exhorting me to be dull, maybe even sugary sweet. In a world where—You know better than anyone—good and evil are in desperate confrontation for the final conflict, how can Your servants be a gentle light, a gentle slope, sweet music; how can they live in such gentleness? Leave that to the old, the tired and worn out, who confuse senility and virtue, and advocate good behavior because of the asthenia of disillusion! Vigor, frankness, firmness—leave all that to the young.

Excuse me? Brutality must not be confused with strength, hardness with solidity, feebleness with humility.

You ask me to reread 1 Kings 12? Where the elders counsel King Rehoboam to exercise justice and mercy, not weakness, generous and peaceful firmness, not spinelessness? And then there are the young people who feel they have every right to impose violent, unjust, and weighty authority.

Encouraged by Abraham's insistence, however, I would like to follow through my idea right to the end. You must agree, Lord, that, under the pretext of meek-

Honestly, Jesus, You never cease to amaze me!

ness, You are not expecting us to be doormats or chameleons, are You? You do not want us to tolerate absolutely everything, such as blasphemy.

Yes, Jesus, You who are meek and lowly of heart, You knew what it was to be angry with the tradesmen in the temple and to call certain Pharisees hypocrites and whitened sepulchers! I can see that You showed great confidence there.

What? I'm betraying You again? I only heard the words without listening to the tone of voice? The deep sadness of Your soul in Your voice, the strong, tender desire taking everything into account, to open eyes that could still be opened, to refuse to condone anything that might be a stumbling block or a cause for contempt? Excuse me, Jesus, for not knowing You very well.

So, for You, that meekness is the control of one's inner violence. It is to refuse to take sides with anything either within us or outside of us that could be of the enemy?

You are very demanding, Lord!

Gently? Yes, but demanding all the same. Like a silversmith, like a boss, like a real friend? Yes, like a real friend! Thank You! I'm happy for that and driven forward. Let's go!

By Philippe Augendre, a Seventh-day Adventist pastor in Dammarie-les-Lys, France.

THE QUEST FOR WATER



“Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled” (Matt. 5:6, NRSV).

Can You Make Him Drink?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:6

There is an old saying: "You can take the horse to the water, but you can't make him drink."

Our key text for this week assures us there will be a blessing of being satisfied *if* there is a hunger and thirst for righteousness.

The questions to ask are: Are you hungry and thirsty? For what?

In this world of achievement, progress, and education, what are your true priorities?

In this world of achievement, progress, and education, what are your true priorities?

As we study this week, let us *not be* as the horse in the old saying, but let us pray ardently so God can fill our hearts with a deep and sincere desire to drink of that "spring of water gushing up to eternal life" (John 4:14, NRSV).

By Ruth Humphreys, math and music teacher at Escuela e Instituto Adventista de Guanaja, Guanaja, Islas de la Bahía, Honduras.

Righteousness

LOGOS

Matt. 5:6, 20; 6:33; Luke 15:3-7, 11-32; Rom. 3:21-24

On this planet there is only one universal hope for every human being, and that is called salvation. “They are now justified by his grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:24, NRSV).

Right now there are people somewhere in this world who are going to their beds (if they have such) without eating supper or having had a good meal for the day. One can see on TV the faces of children, adults, senior citizens, showing the need of a good nutritional plate of food. Wake up, people! There is someone just like you and me longing for a piece of bread. Who will feed them?

Have you ever felt hungry? Have you ever longed for something to drink? We may hunger for the best positions in life (which are not necessarily bad). We may hunger for success, and success could be defined in thousands of ways: having enough money, a Ph.D., a luxurious apartment downtown. It may mean having the latest speed boat.

However, the reality is that not everybody, not each soul born on this blue planet, is able to attain worldly success. The reality is that most of us—the majority of us who live in this world—do not have all the commodities. There is a probability that we will be going to our graves without having reached our goals in this short existence.

Let us think for a minute. How much have we gone through in our careers in

There is someone just like you and me longing for a piece of bread.

order to be where we are?

Jesus said that human beings are blessed when we hunger and thirst for righteousness. Notice, He does not specify in this verse what type of righteousness we all should feel hunger and thirst for. As we continue reading the text and reach verse 19, Jesus has not mentioned directly what type of righteousness He referred to in verse 6. He has given us a hint, however, that He means divine righteousness. He used the word *heaven* more than twice, as well as the phrase *children of God*.

Now we reach verse 20. Brace yourself, for now Jesus goes on to explain that the righteousness that He means is not manmade righteousness. Our righteousness has to surpass that of the Pharisees and scribes.

Who were the Pharisees and scribes of those days?

Commenting on Jewish sects and their beliefs, George H. Sandison tells us that “the Pharisees were, in many respects, the most important”¹ group of people in those days. They “attached themselves to the tribe of Levi, the priesthood being the centre of the new national life.”²

The scribes believed “that unless the nation returned to the Lord, and to the faithful observance of the statutes of Moses and the prophets, the glory and grandeur of the Jewish race could not be rehabilitated, and its destiny would remain forever unfulfilled. It was their mission to revitalize the religious life of the nation.”³

So the sects mentioned above were the best available in those days. I would like to think that today they would be represented by the clergy of this world. But Jesus is telling us that the righteousness that we should have must be superior to the one that your own pastor owns. Not until Matthew 6:33 does Jesus clearly state that we should look for God's, for Jehovah's, righteousness.

I am happy for this because all the inhabitants of this earth will not be able to live in a mansion with a swimming pool, or drive the best car in this world, or have a Ph.D. in religion. But one thing is *very sure*: All of us born on this earth can really get hold of his or her own salvation, and this salvation is Jesus, the person of Jesus.

So what are you waiting for? Though we look like losers, and it might seem that we won't achieve our goals and dreams in this life, yet we are more than conquerors in Jesus Christ. The righteousness of Jesus, once understood, believed, and accepted, fulfills more than what a charity foundation can do. It does not insult another person, but forgives (Matt. 5:22-24); it makes friends with an adversary (verse 25); it does not lust (verses 27, 28); but resists evil (verse 39) and it gives love (verses 44-46).

The gift of God was portrayed by Jesus in the parables of the lost sheep and the prodigal son. In both instances there is a party, there is joy, there is happiness because what was lost is found.

We are happy and blessed, not because we hunger and thirst, but because God provided a way out of this famine. Our souls won't die of hunger and thirst for something better. There is already Someone who will give us rest and food. That person is Jesus. We are happy and blessed because we are satisfied in Jesus Christ. Remember, the time is very short. Jesus is at the door, even though it may not look so. Read Luke 21:34-36.

REACT

1. How do you approach a situation in which someone is in need and wants something to satisfy that need?
2. Why do we feel a need?
3. What can I do to reach someone in need?
4. What plans do I have to accept the food and water offered by Jesus?
5. How can I generate a craving for God's righteousness?
6. How will I know the craving for righteousness has been satisfied?

1. George H. Sandison, "Jewish Sects and Their Beliefs," Authorized King James Version/*Bible Readers' Aids*, p. 10.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*

Thinking as Jesus Thought

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Phil. 2:1-3

Our greatest need today is to maintain a constant relationship with our Fountain of Righteousness, Jesus Christ. Once we sway even just a little in either direction away from Christ, we have permitted Satan to sneak into our lives. It is of utmost importance to remain continuously in God's presence by always directing our thoughts heavenward no matter what we do, where we go, what we say, or to whom we speak.

"No human agent can supply that which will satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul. But Jesus says, 'Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.' 'I am the bread of life: he that cometh to me shall never hunger; and he that believeth on me shall never thirst.' Revelation 3:20; John 6:35.

"As we need food to sustain our physical strength, so do we need Christ, the Bread from heaven, to sustain spiritual life and impart strength to work the works of God. As the body is continually receiving the nourishment that sustains life and vigor, so the soul must be constantly communing with Christ, submitting to Him and depending wholly upon Him.

"No human agent can supply that which will satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul."

"As the weary traveler seeks the spring in the desert and, finding it, quenches his burning thirst, so will the Christian thirst for and obtain the pure water of life, of which Christ is the fountain."¹

"The mind must be educated and disciplined to love purity. A love for spiritual things should be encouraged; yea, must be encouraged, if you would grow in grace and in the knowledge of the truth. Desires for goodness and true holiness are right so far as they go; but if you stop here, they will avail nothing. Good purposes are right, but will prove of no avail unless resolutely carried out. Many will be lost while hoping and desiring to be Christians; but they made no earnest effort, therefore they will be weighed in the balances and found wanting. The will must be exercised in the right direction. I *will* be a wholehearted Christian. I *will* know the length and breadth, the height and depth, of perfect love. Listen to the words of Jesus: 'Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled.' Ample provisions are made by Christ to satisfy the soul that hungers and thirsts for righteousness."²

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 18, 19.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, pp. 265, 266.

By Sheena Elsie Dixon, teacher and registrar at Escuela e Instituto Adventista de Guanaja, Guanaja, Islas de la Bahía, Honduras.

Happy When Hungry and Thirsty

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 5:6

As Jesus invitingly makes Himself comfortable on the green grassy slopes of the Mount of the Beatitudes overlooking Galilee, His disciples and the crowds follow His example. Jesus is so compassionately moved by their eager facial expressions that He uses a strong metaphor to redirect their thinking: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6, NIV).

What Jesus sees moves Him to turn the minds of His listeners from worldly greatness to focus on their real inner-soul need: His righteousness. This means to be in good standing with God, to be Christlike; to experience holiness.

It was probably late summer in the Galilean towns bordered by large desert areas. The multitudes that followed Jesus consisted largely of fishermen and peasants, along with scribes and Pharisees, and some middle-class farmers who owned or labored in the Galilean semi-arid lands, where average annual rainfall is less than 26 inches.*

These poor fishermen and peasants had experienced hunger and thirst. They could easily remember the agonizing thirst when they missed one of the few

These poor fishermen and peasants had experienced hunger and thirst.

springs as they traveled the dusty roads in the heat of summer. Some could recall being lost in the desert, experiencing the same hopelessness as Hagar and Ishmael, wandering in the wilderness with her empty water bottle (Gen. 21:14-16). Others knew the despair of not having enough to satisfy a hungry family.

And now, drawing conclusions from their uneven education about the kingdom of God, they listened, expectant. Some hungered for the slightest assurance that Jesus was there to deliver them from the hardships of a toilsome life, meager food supply, fear, and oppression. Eager eyes revealed their thirst for Jesus to reverse their misfortunes and return to them the riches and glory of their conquerors. Though the scribes and Pharisees stood poised, they too revealed in body language their hunger for power over the hated Romans and their thirst for Jerusalem to be exalted to universal glory.

Just then Jesus introduced His listeners to a strange, new, thought-provoking concept: "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6). Jesus was saying that the only way you will ever experience real joy and true satisfaction is to crave to be in good standing with God, to crave righteousness as one famishing for food or thirsting for water.

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 326.

Join the Party

HOW-TO

Key Text: Amos 8:11

She says, “Sir, could you help me?” He pretends not to hear her and does not look back. The song of Phil Collins portrays the degradation of sin in humanity in its apathy toward the needs of others. This song pictures the experience of the whole earth.

Thousands of people are crying the same plea, “Please, could somebody help us?” They want guidance. They need a Shepherd. They need Jesus in their lives even though they do not realize that He is the One who could supply their need.

Through the prophet Amos, God declared, “Behold, days are coming . . . when I will send a famine on the land, not a famine for bread or a thirst for water, but rather for hearing the words of the Lord” (Amos 8:11, NASB). Who will guide them? Who will teach them?

As a church that feeds constantly from Jesus and drinks of Him every day, we have what the world needs.

Make Jesus First. As the church of God, we should plan carefully our devotions and studies about our friend Jesus. We should always be learning of Him and always be ready to share His life with others. Let us make Jesus the priority in our lives.

Jesus’ church is the instrument to reach those who are lost.

Seek the Lost. Once we have made Jesus number one in our lives, then we will go and look for those who are lost. There are many who are lost and cannot make their way back. While they are lost, they are an easy prey for the dragon that walks about seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet. 5:8). It should be our great concern to go out after those who are lost, to show them the way. Remember, Jesus is the way, Jesus is the life (John 14:6).

Bring Them In. When children of God have fallen from the way to heaven, let us seek to restore, heal, and save them in humility. “If someone is caught in a sin, you who are spiritual should restore him gently” (Gal. 6:1, NIV). We are God’s hands on earth. We have the responsibility to make the feast on this planet for a saint who has been redeemed.

Jesus’ church is the instrument to reach those who are lost—in the church and out of the church. Put your will in God’s hand, and He will direct your paths.

REACT

1. How can I feed and satisfy my hunger in Jesus?
2. How can I become a blessing for those to whom I come in contact?

By Carlos Estrada, principal of Escuela e Instituto Adventista de Guanaja, Guanaja, Islas de la Bahía, Honduras.

Solutions Given but Not Seen

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 5:6

The world of our day faces great moral, spiritual, and physical needs. And beyond these needs, even many of the solutions with which we try to satisfy them become problems of their own because those solutions are only momentary.

The media today are flooding the market with momentary solutions, influencing people's tastes to fulfill their objectives. It may be that their appetites have been enhanced, but their stomachs are empty. These solutions are short-lived because they satisfy only for the moment, but they do not cure the problem. People find themselves in a predicament, knowing what must be done to overcome a problem but not doing so, because it is too painful. Instead, they try other ways that they know are futile.

All the solutions to our problems are at the door. God is a God of love, of mercy, and of patience. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, for they will be filled" (Matt. 5:6, NRSV). One does not have to search very far.

Their appetites have been enhanced, but their stomachs are empty.

Place your life under His leading entirely, and you will be filled with His immense love and protection. "Here I am! I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and eat with him, and he with me" (Rev. 3:20, NIV). May God bless you all.

By Luis Alberto García Feldman, a business teacher at Escuela e Instituto Adventista de Guanaja, Guanaja, Islas de la Bahía, Honduras.

MERCY ME!



**“Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy”
(Matt. 5:7).**

By Giving We Receive

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Exod. 34:6

Have you ever wondered how it is that you can receive something by giving it first? Have you ever felt lonely, depressed, or just blue, and tried smiling at someone or saying something cheerful or doing a small favor anyway? What was the other person's reaction? Did it make you feel a little happier? One of the interesting paradoxes of our lives is that we often receive back in abundance that which we freely give to others.

This week's lesson is about mercy. According to Webster's dictionary, mercy is "kind and compassionate treatment of an offender, enemy, prisoner, or other person under one's power." It derives from the late Latin word *merces*, which literally means "reward, God's gratuitous compassion." "God is Himself the source of all mercy. His name is 'merciful and gracious.'"* In Exodus 34:6 God Himself describes the Lord God as "compassionate and gracious, slow to anger, and abounding in lovingkindness and truth" (NASB).

God wants us to show mercy to others just as He shows mercy to us. We are prisoners of sin, yet He has compassion toward us and delivers us from our despair. As human beings, we are on a course of self-destruction, yet He rescues us

We often receive back in abundance that which we freely give to others.

from ourselves. In turn, He commands us to give freely that which we have received (Matt. 10:8). The paradox is that, when we give freely, we also receive. What a loving God we have!

There are many ways, large and small, that we are able to show mercy to our fellow human beings. A courteous word, a random act of kindness, a spontaneous smile, a listening ear, or a pick-me-up bouquet are all examples of how we can show a caring and merciful attitude toward others. Acts of mercy and kindness are like small deposits in a savings account. The more deposits we make to that account, the bigger our dividend payments become. It has been said that even Albert Einstein, recognized as one of the brilliant geniuses of our history, could not fully comprehend the power of compound interest. That is, he could not fully grasp the "multiplier effect" of regular, small deposits of money, compounding over time, to grow to large sums of money, as interest is earned on interest. This principle can be applied in our lives as Christians today. The way we obtain mercy (our dividend) is by showing small acts of mercy (making our deposits). Jesus, our banker and our Saviour, guarantees it with His Word.

**Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 22.

By David P. Howell, director, progress reports and statistics, U. S. Navy Bureau of Medicine and Surgery, Washington, D.C.

Why Bad Things Don't Happen to Bad People . . .

LOGOS

Matt. 5:7; 6:12, 14, 15; Exod. 34:6, 7; Luke 6:36; John 3:16; Heb. 2:17; James 2:12, 13

Some time ago a television ad had a punch line with a financial company's name, claiming that when this company "spoke," everybody listened. Centuries before the ad, when Eve conversed with the serpent, the entire universe stopped to listen. All created beings watched to see whether Lucifer was right. Would God strike swiftly, punishing these impudent creatures of earth? Who were they to defy the eternal God? Was God between the proverbial rock and hard place with justice and mercy as irreconcilable differences?

When Jesus said, "Blessed are the merciful," He was speaking from experience. Bad things don't happen to bad people, because God is happy to exercise mercy (Lam. 3:18-26), even though the behavior saddens Him greatly. As He called for Adam and Eve, He was not coming to them as a wrathful judge (what Satan hoped for and the pair feared), but as a loving Creator, ready to exercise His nature of mercy. He knew what it would cost the Trinity to make things crystal clear. Unlike the watching universe in Eden, He could see down the ages to the crucial moment on the cross, when Jesus' "labored breath grew quick and deep, as His soul panted under the burden of the sins of the world."¹ Where sin demanded a swift and just end, mercy stepped in, providing forgiveness, reconciliation, and a fresh beginning.

John 3:16; Exodus 34:6, 7

"God so loved" is an awesome statement, one that may be easily memorized but not so easily accepted. It forms the foundation and source for God's mercy and also gives a hint of where our mercy and compassion can begin. Divine love does not look for merit in the receiver; instead, it looks for ways to show mercy even before the objects of mercy realize their need (Rom. 5:6-8). Jesus even hints that mercy is shown to those who seem indifferent to their need and God's solution to it (Matt. 5:45).

The story of Moses and God on Sinai is a crucial moment, for it appears to Moses and the people that the God who brought them out of Egypt is not prepared to travel with them any farther. In response to Moses' intercession, the Lord reveals His willingness to forgive. Some translators include the word *generations*, after *thousands*, making the contrast even greater between the Lord's love and His punishments to "the third and fourth generation." It is not too surprising that a "compassionate and gracious God, slow to anger, abounding in love and faithfulness," allows the children of the first generation of the rebels to enter the Promised Land (2 Pet. 3:9).

Luke 6:36; Matthew 5:7; 6:12, 14, 15

The Lord certainly knew the challenge His hearers faced in the call to be merciful. Several of His hearers were more than willing to call down fire on a Samaritan village. Today, innumerable individuals and groups are ready to call down judg-

ment on those deemed different or evil. Maybe this is why the Lord uses several persuasive principles to illustrate His command. One is the like-parent-like-child paradigm. Followers of Christ will manifest in their lives the principles of their Lord, who gives abundant illustrations of His mercy toward humanity. The second principle is freely-received-freely-give. As the Holy Spirit reminds me of the multitude of mercies I have been given, my heart is moved with compassion toward even the most undeserving within my sphere of influence.

When I do not act from these principles, I show that I have understood neither the mercy shown me, nor the depths of mercy in the heart of God. The consequences are plainly revealed by Jesus in the parable of the unmerciful servant (Matt. 18:21-35). Conversely, the benefits are “sweet peace for the compassionate spirit, a blessed satisfaction in the life of self-forgotten service for the good of others.”²

Hebrews 2:17; James 2:12, 13

In the wonderful plan of salvation, God provides Jesus as one “made like” (Heb. 2:17, KJV) us in every way, yet without sin. We can rejoice that the antitype of Moses’ intercession is now performing a merciful and faithful ministry for every repentant soul. In Christ is also found the atonement, the drawing together of mercy and justice at the cross, closing the gulf created through Adam and Eve’s transgression.

Our mercy and compassion toward others will arise from a deepening acquaintance with mercies given to us. We will realize that the “law of liberty” (James 2:12)

When Eve conversed with the serpent, the entire universe stopped to listen.

frees us to exercise a liberating ministry to others; together with them, we receive ever greater portions of mercy from Christ. We understand that the joy God has in being merciful (Micah 7:18) can be an integral part of who we are and what we do or say.

I once heard this meaningful phrase on a radio broadcast: “Mercy means that we don’t get what we deserve; we get what God wants us to have” (see Rom. 2:4; Eph. 2:4-10).

REACT

1. Do you agree with the author that “bad things don’t happen to bad people” because of God’s mercy and compassion? Explain your answer.

2. What specific ways can you, as a receiver of mercy, show compassion today?

3. Read Micah 6:8. Recall some biblical examples of this passage; compare current events and come up with some possible ways you can “act justly and . . . love mercy” (NIV).

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 760.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 23.

By Edwin E. Bowen, an Army chaplain at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C.

Crossing the Uncrossable

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 85:10

Some of the most sublime of Ellen White's literary style is found in her comments on the relationship of divine justice and mercy. She makes it clear that one of Satan's sharpest attacks comes on this very point. "It had been Satan's purpose to divorce mercy from truth and justice. He sought to prove that the righteousness of God's law is an enemy to peace."¹ Satan tries to catch God between the proverbial rock and a hard place, hoping to confuse all who attempt to understand the depths of God's salvation plan.

Over against this demonic scheme, "[Christ's] object was to reconcile the prerogatives of Justice and Mercy, and let each stand separate in its dignity, yet united. His mercy was not weakness, but a terrible power to punish sin because it is sin; yet a power to draw to it the love of humanity. Through Christ, Justice is enabled to forgive without sacrificing one jot of its exalted holiness."²

Sin had created a chasm between justice and mercy, a division that appeared to be uncrossable. But, in a passage worthy of putting to memory, the inspired author paints a picture of inexpressible beauty:

"Justice and Mercy stood apart, in opposition to each other, separated by a wide

One of Satan's sharpest attacks comes on this very point.

gulf. The Lord our Redeemer clothed His divinity with humanity, and wrought out in behalf of man a character that was without spot or blemish. He planted His cross midway between heaven and earth, and made it the object of attraction which reached both ways, drawing both Justice and Mercy across the gulf. *Justice* moved from its exalted throne, and with all the armies of heaven approached the cross. There it saw One equal with God bearing the penalty for all injustice and sin. With perfect satisfaction Justice bowed in reverence at the cross, saying, It is enough."³

REACT

1. What are some ways Satan has succeeded in creating a gulf between justice and mercy in your life, your family, and your church?
2. How does a realization of Christ's reconciling ministry affect the church's outreach and mission? What practical life situations come to mind, and what is your part in reconciliation?
3. In the last quotation of today's portion of the lesson, who, or what, is "justice"?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 762.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, pp. 935, 936.

3. *Ibid.*, vol. 7-A, p. 469.

By Joan Bowen, a medical transcriptionist from Silver Spring, Maryland.

Mercy in Action

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 5:7

“Blessed are the merciful” (Matt. 5:7). Some scholars believe that Matthew, with a knowledge of some kind of shorthand, took down the discourses of Christ verbatim. The Greek word for mercy, *eleeo*, in this verse can be translated as “kindness,” “beneficence,” “compassion.” Mercy involves demonstration of these qualities. Christ employed the word in His appeals to the Pharisees, exhorting them to abandon their legalism, to have mercy (Matt. 9:13; 12:7, 23:23).

The Jews were familiar with the concept of mercy. For generations they had recounted stories of God’s beneficent activities to deliver their nation. The heart of their lifestyle and economy was the ark, with its Ten Commandments and its mercy seat.

By the time of Christ, the ark had been lost for centuries, but the public understood the meaning of mercy. Christ drew it out from the lawyer who came to ask what he should do to inherit eternal life (Luke 10:25-37). In Socratic fashion, Christ returned the question and asked this intelligent official what the law said. The lawyer reiterated the two great principles of the law, supreme love to God and

Convicted and embarrassed to have answered his own question, the attorney sought clarification.

love to one’s neighbor as to oneself. Christ commended the lawyer on his reply. The proud barrister had come to the right conclusions by his study of God’s law. He had discovered mercy and not sacrifice.

Convicted and embarrassed to have answered his own question, the attorney sought clarification of the meaning of *neighbor*. So Jesus defined *neighborliness* with a vivid illustration. When asked who “was neighbor unto him that fell among the thieves” (Luke 10:36), the lawyer avoided the name of the hated immigrant. Yet His answer indicates how Jews of the day perceived what kindness should be. It was active, demonstrative: “He that showeth mercy.”

A perusal of the gospels reveals the word *mercy* most often used by supplicants who approached Christ for healing. Matthew 20:30-34 describes one such instance with an unusual parallelism. Two blind men hailed Jesus as they heard His entourage pass by. With perceptive faith they cried out “Have mercy [*eleeo*] on us, O Lord, thou Son of David” (verse 30). Matthew utilizes a similar-but-different Greek word to describe Christ’s reaction to their persevering plea. “So Jesus had compassion on them, and touched their eyes” (verse 34). *Compassion* in Greek (*splagchinzomai*) literally means to have the bowels yearn. Mercy is equated with an internal, physiologic response. Perhaps our contemporary English equivalent would read “his heart went out to them.” The humble entreaty for mercy touched the heart of the Great Physician, and He was moved to action.

By MAJ Sondra Shields, pain-clinic director and anesthesiologist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D.C.

More Than Trappings

HOW-TO

Key Text: Luke 6:36

Just when we think we have a handle on our spiritual life, we have to commute to work, or relate to our in-laws, or stand next to a homeless person at the bus stop, or explain a project to a difficult boss, or talk to a child who has disobeyed for the umpteenth time. We realize that the real test of Sabbath-morning promises to be good will now come in the arena of relationships and situations. We sigh, and speed up to merge into the fast lane of life.

The Lord was referring to this reality when He spoke His challenge from the rolling hills of Galilee. Being somebody, often a more difficult request than doing works or knowing information, is where the gem of mercy shines the brightest. As I learn the demands of an emergency medical technician, I realize that mercy is at its best when I exercise compassion in real-time circumstances.

I recently helped care for a woman who was a victim of an auto accident. She received only minor cuts and bruises, while her child, who had not been in a child's seat, had died in the accident. My sense of justice brought out angry feelings; how could she be so careless for the life of this infant? Yet my sense of mercy and compassion helped me to stay focused on the mother's immediate needs.

Mercy, compassion, and pity are not trappings I put on to complement my

Mercy, compassion, and pity are not trappings I put on to complement my wardrobe.

wardrobe, but attitudes that lie deep within my developing character and come out in "random acts of kindness and senseless acts of beauty." I read somewhere that Mother Teresa, of Calcutta, put it this way: "If you have a question at the end of the day whether you have done anything for the Lord, simply look at your hands." Consider the following ideas as possibilities that can spark your own Spirit-led creative and practical ways to exercise mercy.

1. Compassion is when a young person studies the life of an older church member, then takes personal time to encourage and lift through acts of kindness.

2. Mercy is when I am willing to say even to my most ardent opponent, "You just might be right; tell me more so I can understand your position."

3. Compassion is when I actively intercede for the political powers of the world, lifting them up in prayer as if they were my closest friends and family.

4. Pity is giving my coat to someone who is cold, even when I wonder whether he or she might be abusing the welfare system.

5. Compassion is giving emotional and physical hugs to the lepers of our society, even though I may not approve of their lifestyle or attitudes.

6. There is an apparent intrinsic tension between mercy and judgment (Exod. 34:6, 7; James 2:13) in Scripture. How is this resolved in the life of Jesus?

By Jodi Bowen, who is training to become an emergency medical technician, Washington, D.C.

The Quality of Mercy

OPINION

Key Text: Psalm 136

As society plunges on toward the twenty-first century, one of the virtues left swirling in the rear-view mirror is mercy. It is tumbling in our wake, along with honor, peace, love, and justice. We have had enough of these impediments. Mistaken in our belief that we have fully paid our societal obligations, we are now earnest to starve welfare, strangle Medicaid and Medicare, cut back foreign aid, and expunge affirmative action. We have paid for enough free riders, and mercy is a burden we no longer carry lightly.

In popular culture there is very little demand for mercy, save for the occasional mercy killing enjoined during sports events. Hollywood sells us our favorite brand of justice, and we pay to see our heroes grimly set their jaw and dispatch the deserving victim with a summary gesture. Audiences appreciate a hearty helping of that fool's gold of justice—vengeance, a crowd favorite for millennia. Mercy is clearly on the Terminators hit list. Yet we are enjoined to love mercy (Micah 6:8) and to "be merciful, just as your father is merciful" (Luke 6:36, NIV).

William Shakespeare penned an illuminating portrayal of mercy in *The Merchant of Venice*. Portia's speech in rebuke of the conniving Shylock stands as one

In popular culture there is very little demand for mercy.

of the most beautiful recitals of this virtue in Western literature:

"The quality of mercy is not strain'd;
It droppeth as the gentle rain from heaven
upon the place beneath: it is twice bless'd;
It blesseth him that gives and him that takes: . . .
It is an attribute to God himself;
And earthy power doth then show likest God's
When mercy seasons justice."

But Shylock will soon be meted out a vengeful justice for his lack of mercy. This and the undertones of anti-Semitism within the text reveal humanity's limited capacity to emulate divine attributes.

The quality of God's mercy was demonstrated throughout the life of Jesus, and it contrasts sharply with man's conceptions and practices. In the kind treatment of the woman taken in adultery, in the gentle reproof of her accusers (John 8:3-11), the tender admonishment to a distraught Peter (21:15-17), the washing of Judas' feet, the healing of the severed ear (Luke 22:51), and in the forgiveness offered to His executioners at the cross, the infinite scope of God's mercy is illustrated for all the universe to witness. While humankind's capacity to exercise mercy is limited, we can be sure that God's mercy endureth forever (Psalm 136).

By MAJ David Shields, a pathologist at Walter Reed Army Medical Center, Washington, D. C.

GETTING WHAT YOU ASK FOR



**“Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God”
(Matt. 5:8).**

The Abundance of the Heart

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 12:34

Edward Everett Hale tells the story of Philip Nolan, a young soldier on the American frontier in 1805. Although Nolan had sworn to defend his country, his heart was not faithful to his duty. Nolan felt no loyalty to the United States. When Aaron Burr, a wily eastern politician, came along with a treasonous proposition to establish an empire in the West, Nolan quickly joined him. Burr's conspiracy fell apart, and Nolan was among the apprehended traitors. At his trial, Nolan was unremorseful and when asked whether he had anything to say, he replied, "I wish I may never hear of the United States again!"

Nolan's wish became his sentence. He was banished to a naval ship and was never again allowed even to see American soil. All books, letters, and maps were censored and references to the United States were cut out before any item was given to Nolan. Sailors and other passengers were not allowed to speak of the United States when Nolan was present.

Nolan lived to be an old man and greatly regretted his rash words. As a young man his heart and thoughts had not been in the right place. Nolan had been focused

"I wish I may never hear of the United States again!"

on his own selfish desires, which made up "the abundance of . . . [his] heart" (Matt. 12:34, NKJV). This was the source of Nolan's thoughtless words, and the result was lifelong separation from his native country. How much more serious are the consequences of an impure heart when it leads to eternal separation from God.

Many of us are like young Philip Nolan. We follow our own rebellious course, heedless of the results. We become preoccupied with our own desires, pleasures, and activities. We forget the need to keep our hearts pure by staying close to God and following His will. Our hearts become impure, and, like Philip Nolan, the abundance of our hearts causes us to speak and act in ways that we may come to regret. This week we will learn how to keep our hearts pure and how to experience the eternal reward of seeing God face to face.

By Sabrina Pusey, a graduate student at the University of Michigan's School of Information, Ann Arbor.

Holy Heart Surgery

LOGOS

Matt. 5:8; 15:18-20; Heb. 4:12, 13; 8:10; Prov. 4:23; 1 Kings 8:39; Ps. 51:3, 4, 6, 10, 17

Heart Disease (Matt. 15:19; Jer. 17:9; 1 Kings 8:39)

This week's key text tells us, "Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God" (Matt. 5:8). The flip-side of this beatitude is the implication that the impure in heart shall *not* see God! On the surface, this observation will not come as a surprise to most of us. But think about it for a moment: who among us could lay claim actually to *having* a pure heart?

One of the basic teachings of Scripture is that the human heart is anything but pure! In the Gospel of Matthew, Jesus tells us that "out of the heart come evil thoughts, murders, adulteries, fornications, thefts, false witness, slanders. These are the things which defile the man" (Matt. 15:19, 20, NASB). The prophet Jeremiah mourns that "the heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick; who can understand it?" (Jer. 17:9). And we have no hope of deceiving God on this matter, for "Thou alone dost know the hearts of all the sons of men" (1 Kings 8:39), and "There is no creature hidden from His sight, but all things are open and laid bare to the eyes of Him with whom we have to do" (Heb. 4:13).

From the above texts, we seem to be in a hopeless situation. And that's the whole point. We are! We need to be pure of heart, but we are not, nor can we make

The parallels to our spiritual heart disease are striking.

ourselves so. Popular teachings about the innate goodness of humanity, as well as ascetic teachings that emphasize how we must perfect our character, are both alien to the gospel! The former denies the need for a change of heart; the latter implies that we can perform the necessary work ourselves. Both are deceptive. Both are destructive. Both take our eyes away from the Cross.

Enter the Surgeon (Heb. 8:10)

The central theme of the gospel is that God, through Christ, will do *for* us that which we cannot do for ourselves. Though we cannot change our sinful nature, our Creator promises, "I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit within you; and I will remove the heart of stone from your flesh and give you a heart of flesh" (Ezek. 36:26). He also promises, "I will put My laws into their minds, and I will write them upon their hearts" (Heb. 8:10). If we wish to be counted among the pure in heart, this "holy heart surgery" is our only hope—and it is ours for the asking!

The Patient's Role (Ps. 51:10)

Patients who have been diagnosed with physical heart disease must do certain things if they hope to improve: they must admit that they are sick, they must cooperate with their doctors, and they must follow the doctors' prescribed treat-

ment plans. And although they must take their illnesses very seriously, they must not focus on them or become obsessed with them.

The parallels to our spiritual heart disease are striking: we must admit that we are sick by confessing our sins. We must acknowledge our need for outside help. We must cooperate with God by accepting His prescribed treatment plan: the shed blood of Christ. And although we must take our situation seriously, we must not shift our focus from Christ to our problems, lest we either become discouraged and give up, or, worse yet, undertake to perform the necessary transformation in our own strength. The image of a patient performing open-heart surgery on himself is ludicrous; the image of a Christian cleaning up his own life without Christ, equally so.

King David understood the situation when he cried, "Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me" (Ps. 51:10). He realized his desperate situation and his utter inability to do anything about it. His only hope lay in complete surrender to the One who is able to "save . . . to the uttermost" (Heb. 7:25, KJV) those who follow Him.

As with King David, so with us. Our only hope for a pure heart lies in our relationship with Jesus Christ. At times, as we seek to follow Him, we will be overwhelmed by our seemingly limitless capacity for failure. Nonetheless, we can take comfort in the promise that "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6, NASB).

When Jesus returns, every eye will see Him. But only the pure in heart will see Him in the sense of knowing Him, loving Him, and spending all eternity in fellowship with Him. Let us place ourselves under the care of the Great Physician now, so that when that day comes our hearts will be ready!

REACT

1. Is belief in our fallen human nature destructive to our self-esteem? Why or why not?
2. When does God remove the "heart of stone and give . . . a heart of flesh"? (Ezek. 11:19, NIV). At conversion? At translation? Somewhere in between? Explain your answer.
3. Is the transformation of our hearts the same thing as the transformation of our characters? What part, if any, do our works play in this process?
4. What does it mean to be pure in heart?
5. How is a pure heart related to what is depicted in Matthew 12:34?

By Lorin Christensen, a junior computer-science major at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

What Is Purity?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 5:8

“Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God” (Matt. 5:8, NIV). This verse appears in two segments: (1) the pure in heart will be blessed, and (2) they will see God. Look at just the first part. Common sense suggests that this means pure from sexual sin. But what else does it mean? Thumb through the pages of Leviticus and you will see specific rules governing every imaginable event. But even these rules with all of their ritualistic cleansing do not make a pure heart. “Every impure thought defiles the soul, impairs the moral sense, and tends to obliterate the impressions of the Holy Spirit. . . . All impurity of speech or of thought must be shunned.”¹

Notice that qualifier—*all*. Not merely sexual impurity and not merely lust. These also, certainly, but there is more. What about the selfishness, self-seeking, and pride that keeps us from searching His holy face? These sins of the heart cannot be undermined. Turn now to the famous love chapter—1 Corinthians 13:4-7. Here is an entire list of ways the heart can be impure—by not being patient, by being envious, or easily angered, and the list goes on. These statements tell us what love is, which brings us to the second part of the verse: “For they will see

Even these rules with all of their ritualistic cleansing do not make a pure heart.

God.” “Only like can appreciate like. Unless you accept in your own life the principle of self-sacrificing love, which is the principle of His character, you cannot know God.”² If you do not know Him, then neither can you see Him. So how can we fully know God? Only through the purification of our hearts brought about by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. “Now we see but a poor reflection; then we shall see [God] face to face” (1 Cor. 13:12).

There is the complete picture. Now reread the verse, filling in the spaces and elaborating on the meaning of the words: “Those whose hearts have been purified through the indwelling of the Holy Spirit will be blessed *by* being allowed to see God face to face in heaven!”

What better blessing could there be?

REACT

Realizing that your Creator knows your true hearting and your every thought, are there any changes in your thinking and lifestyle that need to be made so that you, too, will be able to see God face to face? If so, how are you going to go about doing so?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 302.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 25.

By Jill Boggs, a therapeutic-recreation major, Eastern Michigan University at Ypsilanti.

Incredible Image

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 7:14–8:17

“Image is everything” according to the slogan of Canon, Inc., and I suppose they are right when you’re speaking of photography. Canon wasn’t the first to believe that image is everything. The scribes and Pharisees had mastered the concept.

The scribes’ and Pharisees’ image has tarnished over the years, but imagine what it must have been like. They were the deacons, elders, ministers, treasurers, and missionaries of the church. They were the ones who supported the building fund, returned their tithe, and said yes to the nominating committee. They were the pillars in the church. In short, they were the good guys.

Yet, note what Jesus said to them: “Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you are like whitewashed tombs, which on the outside look beautiful, but inside they are full of the bones of the dead and of all kinds of filth” (Matt. 23:27, 28, NRSV).

There is an old-fashioned word called *integrity*. Integrity is consistency between thoughts and actions. Jesus acknowledged the incredible image of the religious leaders, but charged that they lacked integrity. Purity of heart is a matter

There is an old-fashioned word called *integrity*.

of integrity. “You brood of vipers! How can you speak good things, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks” (Matt. 12:34).

Read Romans 7:14–8:17. In these verses, Paul explains our condition before and after the spirit of life in Christ Jesus. Notice: “I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do” (7:15, NIV). Paul mourns over his lack of integrity. The great news is that he didn’t stop with chapter 7, and neither do we. “You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you. And if anyone does not have the Spirit of Christ, he does not belong to Christ” (8:9).

It is this Spirit living in us that allows us to live without condemnation—because without the Spirit we lack the righteous integrity needed to have a pure heart. We can have image (looking righteous), and we can have integrity (consistency with thought and action); but righteous integrity comes only as a gift from God through the Spirit. Truly happy are those who have a pure heart, for they shall see God.

REACT

1. Can you help a fellow believer or leader who lacks righteous integrity? If so, how? If not, why not?

2. Are we in danger of becoming like the chief priests and elders while embezzlers and child molesters enter in before us? (Matt. 21:31, 32). Explain your answer.

By James Stringham, an engineer from Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Just Believe It

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 51:1-14

Is it possible to be pure in heart? Because our world is little more than a bottomless pit of selfishness, it is sometimes hard to believe that any person can become pure through his or her own actions.

The good news is that we, as human beings, do not have to rely on ourselves to become pure. God, in the Bible and through E. G. White's writings, has given several ingredients of how to become pure in heart. David, a man chosen by God to become king of Israel, committed a great sin that made him impure. However, God through His mercy allowed David to repent of his sins and to ask forgiveness. Just by asking and having faith, David became pure in heart. If David, a man with such a great sin, was able to be renewed and made pure, should that not give hope for us today? Just as David did in biblical times, we, too, can follow four simple God-directed steps to become pure in heart.

1. Acknowledge that you have sinned. In Psalm 51:3 David says, "I acknowledge my transgressions." If you want to lose weight, the first action you have to take is to acknowledge your problem with overeating. It is the same with our impurity. If you want God to take the transgression out of your heart and make you pure, you must first admit that you are sinful.

Our world is little more than a bottomless pit of selfishness.

2. Ask God to wash your sins away. Prayerfulness is the link between you and God. He will hear your petitions. In practical terms, if you have hurt your friend's feelings, it will be hard to maintain that friendship unless you ask for forgiveness. It is no different with God, your best Friend. If you transgress His law, you need to ask Him to forgive and forget.

3. Take hold of God's strength so you can remain pure. This requires faith and the belief that God can renew your life and make you pure. In our daily lives, we rarely tackle a problem alone. Alcoholics seek help from support groups. God wants us to seek His strength during the times sin surrounds us.

4. Believe there is nothing that you can humanly do to become pure in heart. Good works won't make you pure in heart. We can become pure only through God's grace. Believing is a test of faith. Do we know God as our personal Friend and understand Him to be the only one who can make us pure in heart?

By Carita Stenfors-Berglund, a second-year dental student, and Michael R. Berglund, a history education student at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.

The Purity of the Pharisees

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 23:23-26

By some standards, the Pharisees were the most pure, obedient, sin-free examples of the Jewish life. They adhered strictly to a rigorous set of rules and regulations, maintaining an image of piety. But the Pharisees' obedience was only outward. They did not act with a pure heart. The Pharisees thought that simply by following a restrictive set of rules they could earn a place in heaven. They followed the law for the law's sake, but there was no room in their equation for God's grace and love.

In contrast, Jesus was an apparent lawbreaker and rebel. With His disciples He traveled, healed, and even plucked heads of grain on the Sabbath. But Jesus did not need to follow the letter of the Pharisaical law, because He understood the greater principles of God's law. Rather than follow arbitrary rules restricting designated activities on the Sabbath, Jesus knew first that it is good to do good on the Sabbath (Mark 3:4) and second that the Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath (2:27).

Following a stringent set of rules is safe and easy. Everyone knows exactly what is needed to be good, and there is no danger that different people will have different interpretations of the same law. Interpreting and applying a set of prin-

In contrast, Jesus was an apparent lawbreaker and rebel.

ciples is more difficult because it requires thought and discussion to discover the meaning and message of the underlying laws.

By focusing on the "can't's" of their own arbitrary rules and regulations, the Pharisees missed the many blessings that flow from the "dos" of God's law, such as love, mercy, and faithfulness. The Pharisees ignored the deeper message of God's law, a message that they couldn't—or didn't want to—understand. Although determining the principle behind a law can be difficult, Jesus summed up God's law perfectly for us with these two commandments:

- "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind" (Matt. 22:37, NIV).
- "Love your neighbor as yourself" (verse 39).

When we follow these two commands with a pure heart and love for God, we will be living that consistency between heart and action that was demonstrated to us by our perfect example, Jesus.

By Heather Burror, a student at the University of Michigan Law School at Ann Arbor.

AN OVERTURE OF PEACE



“Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God” (Matt. 5:9).

A Simple Scenario

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Rev. 22:14

Jan. 20, 1998, Dear Diary: She irritated me today, but I'm going to keep calm.

Jan. 24, 1998, Dear Diary: She did it again! I could not turn the other cheek, so I retaliated.

Feb. 14, 1998, Dear Diary: Things are getting out of hand now. She has really let me down, and I can see that there is no peace between us. It would be good if we could restore the relationship we once had, because, for the life of me, I cannot remember what our initial argument was about!

As Christians we should be at peace with one another. First Thessalonians 5:13 says that there should be no divisions within the church, no disagreements among members. We should all be able to live with one another in one accord, as it was in the day of Pentecost (Acts 2:1).

Satan is the arch troublemaker who likes strife, arguing, fighting, and back-biting. He initiates the hostility and hatred we see all around us; and we, with the love of God inside us, should see those who fall prey to his schemes as victims and,

As Christians we should be at peace with one another.

as such, do our part to become peacemakers. As Christians, we cannot expect that all will be peace. If peace is broken, however, we should try to ensure that it is not our fault. We should pray for peace, work for peace, and show interest in activities that contribute to a peaceful state of society.

He saw her practicing love in every community,
 He saw her keeping company with forgiveness, unity,
 happiness and beauty. . . .
 He saw her fighting—not against man,
 But against destructive agents in every land;
 Agents of dishonesty, racism, fear and envy;
 Agents of pride, anxiety, promiscuity, doubt and jealousy;
 Agents of guilt, hostility, ignorance, superstition,
 Greed, selfishness, hatred and aggression.
 He saw her conquering wars and strife,
 And offering man a better life.
 He saw peace falling prostrate before troubled man,
 But man still did not understand.*

*Aphaeus Soleyn, *A Guiding Light* (St. Kitts, West Indies: East Caribbean Printers, 1993), p. 62.

By Anna-Lee Crystal Phillip, a social-policy and administration major, Roehampton Institute, University of Surrey, London; and Jamie Joy Gittens, a secondary-education student, St. Martin-in-the-Fields High School for Girls, Tulse Hill, England.

Peace in the Midst of the Storm

LOGOS

Matt. 5:9, 43, 44; Col. 1:19-21; 2:13, 14; Eph. 2:3, 14; 1 Cor. 14:33; Rom. 8:2, 6; 12:18; 15:33; 16:20

From the time we became aware of self, we discovered that there were things that were not all right with ourselves and our circumstances. From our earliest memories, we have not been at peace. Something was always present or lurking to destroy our equilibrium. Colossians 2:13 tells us we were dead in trespasses and sins. This condition spells confusion, upheaval, unhappiness, dissatisfaction, and emptiness. This is the experience of everyone before the encounter with Christ. But thanks be to God that verse 14 of the same chapter brings the glorious news of what Christ has done to change our condition dramatically. Phillips puts it this way: Christ has utterly wiped out the damning evidence of broken laws and commandments which always hung over our heads. You cannot be at peace with something that heavy hanging over your head.

This is not a passing statement. This great thing that Christ has done is the center, the very basis of the journey from upheaval to peace. Colossians 1:19, 20 speaks about the cross, Christ's death, His sacrifice through which He has made possible our reconciliation. This is what brings peace, our reconciliation to the Prince of Peace. We were estranged, hostile toward Him in our thoughts, intent only on wickedness. Yet now He has brought us back as His friends—His *friends!*

We were estranged, hostile toward Him in our thoughts, intent only on wickedness.

Not just acquaintances, not simply servants, but friends. The more we take this in, the more we marvel at what Christ has done for us.

Reconciliation is only the beginning. Romans 8:2 speaks about the new spiritual principle of life that is set in motion. One law was operating when we were dead in trespasses and sins. Another law, a new law, is operating now that we are reconciled. By this new principle, Christ lifts us out of the pit of sin, the quicksand of bad habits, and frees us from "the old vicious circle of sin and death" (Phillips). Romans 8:6 refers to the old principle when it talks about our minds being set on the flesh, that is, on satisfying our own natural feelings, inclinations, going with the flow, that brings only death at the end of the road. But to set our minds on the Spirit brings life and peace.

When we have come to Christ and accepted what He has done for us at the cross, when He has reconciled us, made us His friends, and we begin to enjoy this new lease on life, when He has rescued us from the vicious cycle of slavish, sinful habits, and we are basking in the sunshine of His peace, then He expects us in turn to become peacemakers. In fact, if we truly experience His peace, then we cannot help being peacemakers ourselves (Matt. 5:9). What comes to peacemakers? They will be spiritually prosperous with God's favor regardless of their outward condition. That says it all. The peace that Christ offers is abundantly more than the peace folk talk about when they talk about wanting peace. The peace Christ

offers is something that goes deeper than outward circumstances, for that can be easily shattered. It is more than everything going according to plan. It is peace in the midst of the storm. That is the miracle of this peace that Christ offers. It is peace in spite of the storm, a peace so deep down inside that no outward circumstance can trouble it.

In Matthew 5:9 Christ is referring particularly to bringing men and women into harmony with God, assisting people in the reconciliation process, helping them to see that Christ came to show humankind that God is not their enemy. So the call is to be peacemakers. Be a facilitator in the coming together between God and His other estranged creatures. Such people will be truly children of God because "they are at peace with Him themselves, and are devoted to the cause of leading their fellow men to be at peace with Him."

What, then, do we do about people with whom it is difficult to make peace, those who seem to thrive on conflict? Romans 12:18 says in essence, so far as it depends on you, to be at peace with everyone. You cannot control the actions, thinking, or behavior of another person. You can, however, use your godly influence to defuse a tense situation. You can refuse to be party to the continuing estrangement. Do all that is in your power to do, and when you know you have done that, you will be at peace with yourself and at peace with God.

In reading Ephesians 2:14, the wall that existed between the Jews and the Gentiles immediately comes to mind. This wall represents all the differences that are used today. Christ has made peace between us. Christ has made us all one. The wall is broken down; we can be at peace with one another. There is no reason to fight anymore, no reason to be strangers.

Romans 16:20 promises that soon God will crush Satan, the instigator of all the strife, the separation, the enmity, the constant warfare between right and wrong, light and dark. It is so comforting to know that one day not only will we have peace in our hearts, but we will be taken out of a hostile environment into the peaceful atmosphere and surroundings of the throne of the Prince of Peace Himself.

**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 328.

Perfect Peace

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Eph. 4:2, 3

Peace: A Prophetic Testimony

“Whoever consents to renounce sin and open his heart to the love of Christ, becomes a partaker of this heavenly peace. There is no other ground of peace than this. The grace of Christ received into the heart, subdues enmity; it allays strife and fills the soul with love. He who is at peace with God and his fellow men cannot be made miserable. Envy will not be in his heart; evil surmisings will find no room there; hatred cannot exist. The heart that is in harmony with God is a partaker of the peace of heaven and will diffuse its blessed influence on all around. . . .

“Christ’s followers are sent to the world with the message of peace. Whoever, by the quiet, unconscious influence of a holy life, shall reveal the love of Christ; whoever, by word or deed, shall lead another to renounce sin and yield his heart to God, is a peacemaker.”¹

Peace: A Lyrical Testimony

Peace, perfect peace, in this dark world of sin?

The blood of Jesus whispers peace within.

Peace, perfect peace, by thronging duties pressed?

There have been times when I have had no strength to carry on.

To do the will of Jesus: this is rest.

Peace, perfect peace, with loved ones far away?

In Jesus’ keeping we are safe, and they.

Peace, perfect peace, our future all unknown?

Jesus we know, and He is on the throne.

—Edward H. Bickersteth²

Peace: A Personal Testimony

I can testify that my dreams were shattered, all hope gone. There have been times when I have had no strength to carry on. But I always hear this voice that has become so sweet to me—bringing real peace. I know His name is Jesus. He is everything I need. He is life and breath to me, providing me with strength, hope, and eternal dreams. Indeed, He satisfies my needs of life. It is in Him, through Him, and with Him, that I have found perfect peace.

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, pp. 27, 28.

2. *Seventh-day Adventist Hymnal*, No. 463.

By Shanda Phillip, chemistry and business-administration major, Kingston University, Kingston-upon-Thames, Surrey, England; and Anna Francis, secretary at Coutts & Co. Bank, London.

From Peace Breakers to Peacemakers

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Rom. 15:33

The Maccabean Wars against the Greeks in 167 B.C. brought political and religious independence for the Jews in 142 B.C., for the first time since the exile 400 years before. This independence, however, was short lived, for 80 years later the Jews found themselves once again under new slave masters, the Romans. Wearing their yoke of oppression, the Jews continued to foster a spirit of rebellion and hatred, and like the Maccabaeans earlier, attempted many unsuccessful revolts in the hope of setting their nation free again.

“Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David’s throne and over his kingdom” (Isa. 9:7, NIV). These words inspired hope for the Jews to the point that they were prepared to set up that kingdom by force and crown their Messiah. It was in this climate, one in which the Jewish nationalistic spirit was most intense, most volatile, that Christ began His ministry and announced the prophetic kingdom of God. The principles upon which the kingdom was based, as presented by Christ throughout His ministry, were to be values that were totally at variance with those of the world. Christ’s kingdom was not to be founded upon nationalistic sentiments, but upon a spiritual and moral foundation, one in which the enemy was the devil, not the Romans. “Jesus said,

The Jews continued to foster a spirit of rebellion and hatred.

‘My kingdom is not of this world. If it were, my servants would fight to prevent my arrest by the Jews’” (John 18:36). The location of Christ’s kingdom (“the kingdom of God is within you” [Luke 17:21]) is a heart surrendered to God.

One of the most frequent causes of conflict between individuals or nations is intrigue, because it is conceived and nurtured in a heart of dissension, hatred, and mistrust. It was, therefore, not accidental that the blessing given to peacemakers should follow on from a blessing imparted to the “pure in heart”—hearts that are sincere and open, qualities important in the process of peacemaking. This suggests that the process of peacemaking begins within the heart. This was one of the most misunderstood principles of Christ’s ministry, for when the Jews envisioned the kingdom of God, a lot of emphasis was placed upon an *earthly* kingdom, and very little upon *God*. When the kingdom of God is established within us, it follows that peace abides with us, also. May the God of peace be with you.

REACT

Peacekeeping and reconciliation are mandates of the U.S., yet many of their attempts to secure lasting peace are unsuccessful. Discuss.

By Deborah Rutherford, a cancer-research scientist, and Richard Dimpleby, of the Department of cancer research, St. Thomas’ Hospital, London, England.

Here's Peace

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 133:1

Paul, to me, was a peacemaker. He wrote many letters to the various churches that he visited, and the advice contained therein, I believe, is still relevant to us today—in 1998.

First Corinthians 6:9-11 is part of one such letter in which Paul told the church in Corinth not to be deceivers, fornicators, idolaters, and much more. Why? Because “the wicked will not inherit the kingdom of God” (verse 9, NIV). The church in that day was riddled with dissension, legal disputes among members, doctrinal error, lack of tithing, etc. Paul highlighted these conditions in the hope that the church would remember their holy calling and seek to renew their commitment with God. Some of the members were at peace and remained faithful to God.

God told us that He leaves His peace with us, that we should not be troubled or afraid (John 14:27). These words reassure us of God's love. First John 1:9 tells us that we should confess our sins because God is faithful and just to forgive our sins. That is the first step to peace. First Thessalonians 5:13 says that we will be at peace.

Gossip and rumors should not be a part of our lives.

In 1 Thessalonians 4:11, Paul gives the church in Thessalonica recommendations to which they should aspire in order to be peacemakers. These are:

- 1. Lead a quiet life.** Gossip and rumors should not be a part of our lives.
- 2. Be about God's business.** If we sincerely work, act, speak, and think on God's work and salvation plan, meddling in other peoples' affairs will no longer have priority.
- 3. Work with our hands.** A well-known saying is “the devil finds work for idle hands.” By helping others, maybe to guide a blind person across the street, or to help someone who is ill to become better, or to write a note to that person you haven't seen at church for ages will further the Lord's work. Additionally, this simple act will bring peace to your soul and peace to the one who receives, and in turn this will facilitate other fruits of the Spirit to be brought forth. All this, however, is based on the greatest and sincere gift from our Maker—love (1 Cor. 13:13).

By doing as God commands, we will find His love will work within our hearts and minds to establish peace. Thus we become peacemakers, having experienced God's peace for ourselves.

By Anna Francis, a secretary at Coutts & Co. Bank, London, England.

Peace in Diverse Measure

OPINION

Key Text: Phil. 4:6, 7

Philippians 4:6, 7 tells us not to worry about anything. Why? Because 1 Peter 5:7 says, "Cast all your anxiety on him because he cares for you" (NIV). So there is nothing for you to worry about. God also tells us in Matthew 11:28, "Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest." In order to do this we need to pray and ask God for help in our particular needs, with thanksgiving. We must always remember to say Thank You. It is very important in our everyday livelihood, and so it should be with God. But how many of us remember to say Thank You when our prayers have been answered? In the book, *The ABCs of Bible Prayer*, we are admonished to Ask, Believe, and Claim.

Once we have given our cares to God and have asked Him to deal with them for us, and have thanked Him for His mercies and goodness, then we have God's peace—the peace experienced when one lives a prayer-filled life. As Christians, we may not always be at peace with men, but that does not interfere with our relationship with God. Knowing God and understanding His goodness enables us to excel all human thought, keeping our hearts and minds against the world's troubles through Jesus Christ. The peace of God keeps the believer in union with Christ.¹

How many of us remember to say thank You when our prayers have been answered?

Three Christian brothers met one day to speak of things divine.

They had so much of Christ to say with joy their faces shine.

The first one said, "My brothers, dear, by virtue of Christ's blood,

My heart retains no guilty fear, I now have 'Peace with God.'"

The second brother answered bold, "You lag on heaven's road;

I grasp the truth with higher hold, I have the 'Peace of God.'"

The third dear brother drew up tall, he laughed and scarce could cease,

"My brothers, dear, I beat you all, I have the 'God of Peace.'"

They all had peace, they all were right, but peace in diverse measure.

The third has scaled the highest height, of heaven's exalted treasure.²

—T. Baird

REACT

Discuss the "diverse measure" of peace available with your close friends, family, or lesson-study group. Consider the poem by Baird above and reflect on what measure of peace you have and how you can improve it.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7, p. 176.

2. A. Naismith, *1200 Notes, Quotes and Anecdotes* (London: Pickering and Inglis, 1963), p. 147.

By Anna Francis, a secretary at Coutts & Co. Bank, London, England.

POPULARITY VS. PERSECUTION



“Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven” (Matt. 5:10, NRSV).

Which Is Better?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:10

During World War II, Kaj Munk, a minister of the Lutheran Church in Denmark, became one of the best-known individuals in his country. In a bold way, he opposed the German occupation of both Norway and Denmark, and whenever he had the chance, he encouraged his fellow citizens to join the underground-resistance movement. Even the pulpit was used to promote this kind of involvement.

Munk was pastoring a small village church, which Sunday after Sunday was filled to the last pew. On some Sundays churchgoers were even standing in the aisles. News spread all over the country, and even more showed up to listen to the man who had decided to dedicate his life to this crusade. Even German spies began to show up, so Munk always had to judge his congregation before deciding what to say on any given Sunday.

On one particular Sunday, he realized that he had to be very careful. Secret agents from the resistance movement had told him that Gestapo members were trying to catch him off guard, kill him, and in this way silence the voice that was all the time speaking against them. Munk entered the pulpit as usual, opened the Bible, and read aloud the chosen text. Then he added: "So says the Word of God."

Even German spies began to show up.

Kaj Munk has nothing more to add!" Then he stepped down and the closing hymn was introduced.

Popularity for him promoted persecution. Though cautious, unfortunately he was not able to escape his destiny for long. Soon Gestapo soldiers showed up in the vicarage, snapped him away, and shot him at a roadside, where his dead body was found the next morning.

Before his death, Kaj Munk had contributed to a paraphrase of the New Testament in Danish. He paraphrased the Gospel of Luke, and this week's beatitude in his version reads: "What a happiness if you, because of the Son of Man, will be hated by men who will have nothing to do with you or speak evil things about you or even disgust you. Rejoice, when such happens to you—yea, jump for joy—for your reward shall be great in Heaven."

Popularity or persecution—which is to be preferred?

By Walder Hartmann, an editor at Dansk Bogforlag and director of communication, Danish Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Nærum, Denmark.

Values in Conflict

LOGOS

**Matt. 10:34-36; John 15:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:12; 1 Pet. 4:14-16;
Luke 21:12, 13; Matt. 5:10; 2 Thess. 1:5**

Persecution is a historical fact of the Christian church. It may be that you personally have suffered no hardships because of your Christian life. Actually you may have lived in an environment where it has proved a blessing to confess the Christian faith. Yet the New Testament authors never hesitated to describe the tribulations in store for the saints. Thus Luke warns the Christians facing the Roman destruction of Jerusalem (Luke 21:12, 13), and by comparison, the other gospel writers prepare the generations at the end of time for the final conflict. Luke 21, Matthew 24 and Mark 13 depict Jesus' prophecies regarding Jerusalem and the church until the end of the world.

Of the above-mentioned three texts, that in Matthew cleverly places the theme of persecution in context. The teaching of John the Baptist and later of Jesus is presented through seven major sermons. Numbers 1 and 7 (Matt. 3:7-12; 28:18-20) touch the common theme of baptism. Numbers 2 and 6 (Matthew 5-7; 23-25) focus on true righteousness and the principles and fate of God's kingdom. Numbers 3 and 5 (Matthew 10; 18) describe the authorization to gain followers of Christ, then the life among these followers. In the center we find the sermon on the parables of the kingdom (Matthew 13).

Not only Christians experience hardships.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus introduces through the beatitudes the principles of God's kingdom. The motives contrast markedly with the attitude of the world in general. When the last beatitude therefore suddenly turns into a description of the persecution of the righteous (5:10), we realize that this is a conflict of values. And when the parallel sermon on the Mount of Olives prophesies the coming tribulations (24:21), we understand that these historical events result from the same conflict.

Values in Conflict (John 15:18-20; 2 Tim. 3:12)

In 2 Timothy 3, Paul lists vices, characterizing people who are outwardly confessing Christians. We tend to think that it must be easy to detect such people, but Paul is speaking of their deceiving power (verse 13). Because of this deceit, true godly people will be persecuted (verse 12). Genuine godliness, therefore, has to be understood as more than just outward behavior.

These deeper values of the Christian life are important elements of the prayer of Jesus in the garden (John 17). As we analyze the prayer, we find principles by which the values of the world are differentiated from the values of Christ. Compare the traits of Jesus with your knowledge of our present-day culture: Jesus reflects a boundless willingness to share His riches (verses 4, 6-8).

The glory of Jesus is revealed not in majesty and power, but in His death on the cross for the salvation of others (17:5, cf. John 12:23, 32, 33). His love is not

just emotional sensationalism, but a totally unselfish life, in which Jesus, by praying for His friends (17:9) and working for their salvation (verse 12), sacrifices His own life, wanting to die rather than live without them (verses 24, 26).

For Christ's Sake (1 Pet. 4:14-16; 2 Thess. 1:5)

Not only Christians experience hardships. People are persecuted for a variety of reasons. Some are so zealous in their religious expression that they tend to get into major conflicts for minor reasons. Others may be treated by society like criminals, but they claim to be religious martyrs in order to get attention and status in the eyes of their particular religious community.

It was important to members of the early church that they not become public outcasts because of their own failures, but only because of their relationship to Christ. Their sufferings thus resulted from the conflict between good and evil and were considered a foretaste of the kingdom of God (2 Thess. 1:5). They would be sharing with Christ in His sufferings and feel His presence in the midst of tribulation (1 Pet. 4:12-16, cf. 2:18-25).

Sharing in Christ (The Book of Revelation)

Like a science-fiction movie, the last book of the Bible tells a story in futuristic images. The message is victory through suffering. The major conflict presents the viewer with a paradox, as a stricken lamb and its followers fight monstrous creatures. The enemies of the lamb shun no means to gain the victory. But the lamb uses only the sword of its mouth, the Word of God (Rev. 1:16; 19:13). Thus with all odds against it, bleeding to death, the lamb wins the battle. The Word of God and the testimony of Jesus (6:9; 12:11) are the strange weapons of the people of God in His conflict with evil. They may look like losers in the power-battle. But in the end love is the conqueror, and they stand on the winning side.

By turning the other cheek, you may lose this world, but gain eternal life. You may suffer persecution, but experience Christ. You may share the cross, but wear a crown. You may be hated by the enemies of Christ (John 15:18-20), but as you desire their salvation and pray that God may forgive them (Luke 23:34; Acts 7:60), the love of Christ has become the victor.

REACT

1. Will a true Christian life always lead to persecution? Explain your answer.
2. Should one conclude that a person who is not persecuted is not a Christian?
3. What values of the Christian life are most likely to cause a collision course with the world?
4. Which values from your particular culture are most likely to lead into a conflict with your Christian faith and lifestyle?
5. What types of persecution have you personally met?
6. When you consider the persecution that will come upon God's people during the closing events of earth's history, are you then sometimes afraid—or can you rejoice and be glad? Explain your answer.

By Paul Birch Petersen, Bible teacher and pastor of the campus church at Vejlebjergsskolen, Daugård, Denmark.

It Is Possible to Go Through Fire!

TESTIMONY

Scripture: Luke 21:12-19

“Christ said of Himself, ‘Think not that I am come to send peace to the earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword.’ Matthew 10:34. The Prince of Peace, He was yet the cause of division. He who came to proclaim glad tidings and to create hope and joy in the hearts of the children of men, opened a controversy that burns deep and arouses intense passion in the human heart. And He warns His followers, ‘In the world ye shall have tribulation.’ ‘They shall lay their hands on you, and persecute you, delivering you up to the synagogues, and into prisons, being brought before kings and rulers for My name’s sake.’ ‘Ye shall be betrayed both by parents, and brethren, and kinsfolks, and friends; and some of you shall they cause to be put to death.’ John 16:33; Luke 21:12, 16.”¹

“Between righteousness and sin, love and hatred, truth and falsehood, there is an irrepressible conflict. When one presents the love of Christ and the beauty of holiness, he is drawing away the subjects of Satan’s kingdom, and the prince of evil is aroused to resist it. Persecution and reproach await all who are imbued with the Spirit of Christ. The character of the persecution changes with the times, but the principle—the spirit that underlies it—is the same that has slain the chosen of

“While the Lord has not promised His people exemption from trials, He has promised that which is far better.”

the Lord ever since the days of Abel.”²

“While the Lord has not promised His people exemption from trials, He has promised that which is far better. He has said ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Deuteronomy 33:25; 2 Corinthians 12:9. If you are called to go through the fiery furnace for His sake, Jesus will be by your side even as He was with the faithful three in Babylon. Those who love their Redeemer will rejoice at every opportunity of sharing with Him humiliation and reproach. The love they bear their Lord makes suffering for His sake sweet.”³

“Ye are the salt of the earth,’ Jesus said. Do not withdraw yourselves from the world in order to escape persecution. You are to abide among men, that the savor of the divine love may be as salt to preserve the world from corruption.”⁴

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 84.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 29.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 30.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 306.

By Lisbeth Krage, a pastor of two Seventh-day Adventist churches in Denmark.

A Great Reward

EVIDENCE

Scripture: Matt 5:10

The word *persecute* (Greek: *diogo*) is found only seven times in Matthew. Four of these occurrences are in the fifth chapter. Why is it that Jesus speaks so much about persecution in this great sermon of His? Could it be that He includes these remarks about persecution in this proclamation of the basics of Christianity because He is aware that this is to be the experience of His followers throughout history?

Persecution certainly always has been the destiny of those who have maintained truth. Church history is filled with evidence of this.

What does Jesus say about persecution? Here we are being confronted with a paradox. Jesus actually spoke of this evil in positive terms. "Blessed are those who are persecuted" (Matt. 5:10, NIV). "Blessed are you when people . . . persecute you" (verse 11). "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (verse 12). What happiness could there be in being persecuted? How could persecution cause one to "rejoice and be glad"? Jesus gives us a reason. Joy comes because of the reward that the persecuted are to receive.

Jesus actually spoke of this evil in positive terms.

- Theirs is the kingdom of heaven (verse 10).
- Great is their reward in heaven (verse 12).
- They will be the sons of their Father in heaven (verse 45).

So it is the promise of the great future awaiting the persecuted that makes them rejoice. They are blessed because their future holds a reward beyond earthly measure. Throughout history, the church has had a promise of hope for thousands of faithful Christians. These words of Jesus have been of immeasurable value, especially in times of severe persecution.

Before Christ's return, this earth will be thrown into a great final conflict in which persecution will prevail. In this final conflict, God's remnant people will need to keep their reward in mind in order to persevere.

REACT

1. Study how Jesus uses the terms *righteousness* and *kingdom of heaven* in the Sermon on the Mount.
2. What would you say to a person who feels, correctly, that he or she is suffering persecution?
3. What would you say to a person who feels, incorrectly, that he or she is suffering persecution?
4. How does Jesus' teaching about persecution relate to the other things taught in the Sermon on the Mount?

By Lasse Bech, a youth pastor at Vejlebjergskolen, Daugård, Denmark.

Don't Worry; Be a Witness

HOW TO

Key Text: Luke 21: 12-14

Have you ever wondered what it is like to be persecuted? I have. I often wonder whether I am really ready to die for my religion, my beliefs. And I have often thought that it would be nice to die before the end of time, so that I do not have to go through those terrible times of persecution and suffering, because I doubt that I will come out all right.

Read Luke 21:12-14 and reflect on how those verses can come true in your life—today.

I often pray in the morning that God will lead me to someone to whom I can witness during the day. I do not request persecution in my prayers, but Jesus says that when we are persecuted and put in front of influential people, we have an excellent opportunity to witness. Maybe my prayers will become answered in a way that I do not feel comfortable about, but I will remember the text in Luke and witness all I can by God's power under difficult circumstances.

Jesus tells us to do two things if we are persecuted and brought to trial. And I am sure that you can use these two principles in the aspects of life you find difficult.

First, if we are brought to trial, we can witness about what Jesus Christ did for

We have to make up our minds beforehand not to worry.

us. It is an opportunity that we have never had before, to witness to a judge, the press, a jury, the king, the president, etc. Jesus says that these situations will result in witness. It is nothing we can plan on doing, or can do in our own power, but the situation will result in witnessing.

Second, we should not worry. We have to make up our minds beforehand not to worry. As Jesus said earlier in the Sermon on the Mount, "Who of you by worrying can add a single hour to his life?" (Matt. 6:27, NIV). Worrying does not do us any good. The Spirit will guide us through and will inspire our words, so that no one can contradict our witness.

I find it very encouraging to know that I don't have to worry about coming (or present) persecutions. I don't have to worry about problems with witnessing in my life at all. I just have to give my life to God, and then He will use me as a witness for Him. What a great God we serve!

REACT

How can I be sure that I will be able to keep my faith during persecutions?

By Anne-May Müller, youth ministries director of the Danish Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Nærum, Denmark.

One for All . . .

OPINION

Key Text: John 14:1-3

Sometimes history repeats itself. We share experiences with generations before us. Said the prophet Isaiah: “Disaster will come upon you, and you will not know how to conjure it away. A calamity will fall upon you that you cannot ward off with a ransom; a catastrophe you cannot foresee will suddenly come upon you” (Isa. 47:11, NIV). Using this text, Robert Short in *The Gospel According to the Peanuts* claims: “Even the impenetrable Pig Pen with the dust of countless ages caked upon him an inch thick is not able to escape these frightening attacks that rise from within:

Charlie Brown: I think everyone admires your independent spirit, Pig Pen. You have remained dirty when everyone else was clean.

Pig Pen: Oh, I’ve been dirty all right. But lately it’s been difficult. . . . Times change . . . We all grow a little older each day. I’ll tell you frankly, Charlie Brown . . . I’m scared.”

Christians were being persecuted through the Middle Ages because they did not want to compromise their convictions. Christians meet opposition today when they decide to go against common practices and traditions because of personal convictions. This week’s lesson study has shown us that the future holds no golden

History repeats itself. We share experiences with generations before us.

promises that it will be any different during the last days of earth’s history.

Sometimes there is reason to regret that our behavior was provoking opposition, but just as often the opposite is true: we are compromising to avoid it. In between we are quarrelling as to the details or the nature of trials that we expect in the future, because they have become so much an integral part of our whole mindset that we forget to rejoice in the promises of our Lord.

We are all in this mess together. But thanks be to God, we can still look to Him who went through the same experience and did it once for all.

The time has come for only one choice. We are no longer free if we want to be with Jesus! He also had only one choice. He had to choose the appointed course, whether it would be considered wise or foolish. He was compelled by the truth that dwelled in Him. Nothing around Him could force Him, but the truth did.

Our generation has developed a sense of self-sufficiency. If we can manage—or get around things—we think that we are able to manipulate the future in such a way that it might be less painful. If we continue to act like this, we are acting as though we neither will nor can see. We are not facing the future alone! The future holds us responsible for fellow humanity—but also contains promises of fellowship with Him who went through it all—one for all.

By Walder Hartmann, an editor at Dansk Bogforlag and director of communication for the Danish Union of Seventh-day Adventist Churches, Nærum, Denmark.

LOOK FOR THE HAPPY ENDING



“Rejoice, and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you” (Matt. 5:12, NASB).

Like a Movie Plot

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:12

In Matthew 5, Jesus preached His first sermon, “The Beatitudes,” which depicts the blessings, the sufferings, and the glories of the subjects of His kingdom. We are told from the sermon that once we identify with the kingdom of Christ, we share its blessings, partake of His suffering, and, above all, are given the promise of its eternal reward.

Elsewhere, He said, “In the world you face persecution. But take courage; I have conquered the world!” (John 16:33, NRSV). It is promised, and Jesus Himself will deliver.

Life, like a movie plot, may become uglier and more tragic just before the end, but hold on for a little longer; there will be a happy ending. The plot of our own lives may thicken just before the end, but the Star of the movie of our lives, Jesus, says to us:

Don't give up,
 Don't give in,
 Don't give way to disappointment, discouragement, and despair.
 “Rejoice, for great is your reward in Heaven.”

The plot of our own lives may thicken just before the end.

Rejoice, for a happy ending shall be yours.
 Rejoice, for you are in good company;
 Rejoice, for the kingdom of Heaven belongs to you.
 Rejoice, for Satan, sin, and sinners shall be no more forever.

The beginning might have seemed bleak, because our first father sold out his birthright, and the middle might have seemed dark, because our Saviour had to give up His own life. But Jesus' resurrection made Satan's victory short-lived. And that is what is going to happen to those who disturb our peace. In fact, the end is in sight, a happy ending. Jesus is alive forevermore. And because He lives, we can face tomorrow. We can smile in the face of suffering, rejoice in the midst of persecution, be happy in the time of trouble, because we have the assurance that there will be a happy ending.

When others revile you, cause you sadness, and bring tears to your eyes, remember that there shall be a happy ending and rejoice! God Himself will be with His people. God “will wipe every tear from their eyes. There will be no more death or mourning or crying or pain, for the old order of things has passed away” (Rev. 21: 4, NIV)—a happy ending!

By Sednak Kojo-Duffu Yankson, associate pastor-intern at the Bronx (New York) Washington Seventh-day Adventist Church and the Mount of Blessing SDA Mission.

No Sweetness Here?

LOGOS

**Matt. 5:11, 12; 21:35, 38; 1 Tim. 1:13; 2 Cor. 4:4; John 16:2;
Dan. 7:21, 22, 25; 12:1; Rev. 7:13-15**

The word *revile* denotes physical, psychological, or verbal abuse, among others. This happens everywhere—home, church, school, and work. The frequency of this malicious display, without regard to the feelings of those who are hurt in the process, is cause for great concern. According to the Webster's Dictionary, *to revile* means, "to reproach; to be reproachful; to use abusive language in speaking to or about." Certainly, no one wants to be abused in any way.

However, here is a divine posture that is contrary to human logical reasoning. It is totally incomprehensible. Our nature does not lend itself to the concept of rejoicing in unpleasantness, much less in being reviled. Normally, this is not a blessing, nor is it a comfort zone; no joy springs from such an experience, which invites a physical response in the interest of saving face.

God does not cause the bad things that happen to us, or what others do, and neither is He sadistic in His prescription for heaven-bound saints. He does not gloat over the suffering of His children. Why? Because, first, He loves them (John 3:16); second, He has experienced the same pain—He suffered at Calvary for us; third, He has provided the strength to be victorious in the face of such physical, emotional, and verbal abuses; and fourth, He has promised that He will give us

Our nature does not lend itself to the concept of rejoicing in unpleasantness.

the power to overcome such tribulations in the end (Rev. 7:13-15). Therefore, in spite of the severity and frequency of the devil's attacks on God's children, He has not left them alone; He is with them.

The reckless disregard for human life and for the Giver of it makes for a sad commentary on our times. Greed and status are no deterrents; no one is immune to the satanic onslaughts. In defiance of authority, servants turn against their masters; the heir is killed to demonstrate the strength of the people's resolve (Matt. 21:35, 38). As the master architect behind those who revile Christ's followers, Satan uses his emissaries as puppets on strings to accomplish his tasks. They grope in intense darkness because he has "blinded the minds of unbelievers, so that they cannot see the light of the gospel of the glory of Christ, who is the image of God" (2 Cor. 4:4, NIV).

The believer is expected to maintain his spiritual composure under adverse circumstances. In some cases, those in authority over us do not share our views about the world, and thus do not listen to us for fear of losing or diminishing their acceptance and popularity. Therefore, religious faith and practice, if they are not in the political mainstream, are relegated to the fringes. We may find ourselves out of favor, but thank God for His assurances that He will send heavenly beings to aid those who are mistreated for His name's sake.

Reviled on the Home Front

The story is told of a young woman who faced her greatest challenge to become a Christian from within her own home. Gillian was attracted to the church in her hometown, and made several visits. She sat in the Bible class for many months. She then decided to be baptized. Her mother, though not a Christian herself, encouraged her, but her father was dead against any such decision and threatened violence to her and the preacher. In fact, Gillian's father had completely ostracized her; she could go nowhere with her friends, except to school and to return home. Nevertheless, she stood firm in her belief in the saving grace of our Lord. On that sunny morning of her baptism, her father stood by the beach with a machete to strike those he considered his adversaries at an opportune time. God, however, sent angels who, temporarily, blinded him. Gillian was baptized without incident. This was a witness to those who had gone to see what her father would do. Such are the ways of God. He may not always work like that, but we can be assured of His presence all the time (Dan. 3:17, 18).

REACT

1. If God does not enjoy our suffering, why should we endure it?
2. Are there saving qualities in being reviled for one's faith? Explain your answer.
3. Next time someone is reviled for his or her faith, will you be bold enough to go to his or her defense?
4. Reexamine yourself. Could you honestly say you are ready to be taunted, maligned, and even persecuted for Christ's sake?

By Mattahais E. Patrick, pastor of the Hempstead (New York) Seventh-day Adventist Church.

Patient Endurance

TESTIMONY

Key Texts: John 16:2; Heb. 11:35, 36

“While the Lord has not promised His people exemption from trials, He has promised that which is far better. He has said, ‘As thy days, so shall thy strength be.’ ‘My grace is sufficient for thee: for my strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Deuteronomy 33:25; 2 Corinthians 12:9. If you are called to go through the fiery furnace for His sake, Jesus will be by your side even as He was with the faithful three in Babylon. Those who love their Redeemer will rejoice at every opportunity of sharing with Him humiliation and reproach. The love they bear their Lord makes suffering for His sake sweet.”¹

“There was never one who walked among men more cruelly slandered than the Son of man. He was derided and mocked because of His unswerving obedience to the principles of God’s holy law. They hated Him without a cause. Yet He stood calmly before His enemies, declaring that reproach is a part of the Christian’s legacy, counseling His followers how to meet the arrows of malice, bidding them not to faint under persecution.

“While slander may blacken the reputation, it cannot stain the character. That is in God’s keeping. So long as we do not consent to sin, there is no power, whether human or satanic, that can bring a stain upon the soul. A man whose heart is stayed

“There was never one who walked among men more cruelly slandered than the Son of man.”

upon God is just the same in the hour of his most afflicting trials and most discouraging surroundings as when he was in prosperity, when the light and favor of God seemed to be upon him.”²

“In every age God’s chosen messengers have been reviled and persecuted, yet through their affliction the knowledge of God has been spread abroad. Every disciple of Christ is to step into the ranks and carry forward the same work, knowing that its foes can do nothing against the truth, but for the truth.”³

“Christ is acquainted with all that is misunderstood and misrepresented by men. His children can afford to wait in calm patience and trust, no matter how much maligned and despised; for nothing is secret that shall not be made manifest, and those who honor God shall be honored by Him in the presence of men and angels.”⁴

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 30.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 33.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 32.

By Sammy R. Browne, a professor of English from Long Island, New York.

I Forgive You

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Dan. 12:1

To be happy in suffering is not an easy proposition. Christ's counsel that you should rejoice flies in the face of human nature. But Jesus says that if the suffering is for His sake, we should count ourselves happy. Does it mean we could bring suffering on ourselves? Yes, we could when we provoke others to bring reproach on us. But there are times when the Christian suffers just because of his or her faith in Jesus. But how should we respond?

The natural tendency of the unconverted heart is to respond in anger. The story of Daniel illustrates the proper Christian attitude toward others who intend to do us harm. He prayed for his enemies. Again in the Old Testament, Hosea shows the proper response to those who make us look stupid. In human terms, Gomer brought reproach on Hosea, time and again. We can only imagine what mental torture and agony he might have experienced. But what was Hosea's response? He forgave her over and over. In the Beatitudes, Jesus shows us the way to respond to how people treat us. Instead of scheming and paying back what others have done to us, He says, "Rejoice and be glad, because great is your reward in heaven, for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you" (Matt. 5:12, NIV). Therefore, as followers of Christ, the question of "pay-back time" is

Hosea shows the proper response to those who make us look stupid.

out of our hands. As Paul puts it, "Don't insist on getting even; that's not for you to do. 'I'll do the judging,' says God. 'I'll take care of it'" (Rom. 12:19, *The Message*).

In the face of criticism or persecution from any source, be it siblings, friends, co-workers, within or without the church, our Christian attitude should always be that it is not our place to retaliate. How easy it is to hit back at those who revile and persecute us. But we are assured that all the pain and suffering we may go through will soon end if we can endure a little longer.

We should emulate Christ at all times. It isn't easy to do so when everyone is looking on to see what we will do. But that is probably the finest opportunity to showcase God and His transforming power in the heart of the converted Christian.

REACT

1. Why is it necessary to exercise restraint when we are being ridiculed?
2. List some practical approaches to reacting to what others say or do.
3. What kinds of suffering could we endure in the Lord's name?

By Dionne Hawthorne, an English major at York College, City University of New York; and Oswyn Montoute, who writes from Hempstead, New York.

Dare to Be Different

HOW-TO

Key Texts: Rev. 7:13-15; Ps. 1:1

Everyone knows that it isn't easy to be a Christian young adult in these days and times. The pressure to conform is so strong that many choose the easier way out. The devil has made the world so alluring and attractive that, as young Christians, we need all the help we can get to make it. Standing out isn't a nice idea anymore, because one becomes the object of ridicule, even among so-called Christian brothers and sisters. And so, for fear of being rejected, we compromise our standards.

Having friends is not a bad thing, but friends sometimes make it more difficult to make decisions without being wrongly influenced. We can kid ourselves into thinking that we do not rely on our friends to make decisions, but surely we must admit that we put some stock in their opinions about us. And so we come into situations in which, without a closeness to the Lord, we may cave in under pressure. It happens everywhere, but even more so for some of us who attend public universities and colleges. We have to contend with not only classmates and friends, but professors, who can belittle our beliefs, making the gospel seem non-sensical. "How could any intelligent person believe in that?" But Jesus has promised an

The pressure to conform is so strong that many choose the easier way out.

end to this ridicule. See how the following suggestions work for you; they have for me:

1. Keep away from those who tend to make you uncomfortable. The writer of the Psalms admonishes, "Happy are those who do not follow the advice of the wicked, or take the path that sinners tread, or sit in the seat of scoffers" (Ps. 1:1, NRSV).

2. Hold firm to your beliefs. It isn't easy to do so in the face of overwhelming pressure, when the line of least resistance seems to be the only way. But we must remember that we are not in this alone; we wouldn't be the only people who have gone through this. We have a crowd of witnesses on our side (Heb. 12:1).

3. Don't stop doing what is right. What others say has great weight to most of us, and it's important that we listen. But would we rather listen to the voice of God or all the competing voices in the world? We don't want to be whimsical in our thinking—not having our own minds. We have to be settled in our faith to withstand the onslaught of the evil one.

4. Pray daily for courage. Prayer works. I've seen the miracles that the Lord has performed on my behalf when I committed things to Him. So pray. More prayer, more power. The Lord has promised it.

By Ellen E. Browne, a freshman premed student at the University of Alabama at Birmingham.

Ridiculous Happiness

OPINION

Key Texts: John 16:2; 1 Cor. 3:19

Perhaps one of the greatest difficulties for the Christian is the appropriate response to what others say or do to him or her. It seems rather absurd, but what Jesus said appears, in all practical terms, to be out of sync with the conventional wisdom of our time and place in history. That Jesus said it at all is somewhat baffling. You should be happy to be persecuted, maligned, reviled?

But Jesus has not left us in darkness about how to react in the face of emotional, mental, or physical stress imposed on us by others. He said, "In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world" (John 16:33, NIV). So what should be your response? Christ wants you to become assertive, not aggressive. The Beatitudes offer us a study in contrasts. In addressing these issues, Jesus presented, in no uncertain terms, that when you become a Christian you've taken a high road. Your response to everything around you should be different.

So you thought people were making fun of you? So you're being persecuted, maligned, vilified? Well, that's the lot of the Christian. What happened to turning the other cheek? It doesn't become any easier, does it? But the Christian can be confident that all these will be a thing of the past when he or she overcomes the

It doesn't appear to make sense to yield to those who make our lives miserable.

propensity in all of us to respond in a typical human way. You're a child of the King of heaven. So don't demean your status by acting like a commoner.

It doesn't appear to make sense to yield to those who make our lives miserable, but it does. What purpose does it serve to contribute to an already intolerable condition in the world? What purpose would it serve to make everybody's life miserable before the end comes? In other words, if everyone is crazy, why become crazy with them?

Although the unconverted person's solution to persecution is some form of retribution on the tormentor, you are enjoined to wait awhile, bear it awhile, for soon your relief will come.

REACT

1. Look around you. Does it seem that the course you've taken is lonely? Aren't others in this together with you?

2. How long could you stand being teased, made fun of, and perhaps physically abused because of your belief? Have you come to that point in your life when you can honestly admit that the Lord needs to do more work on you to prepare you for that time?

By Sammy R. Browne, a professor of English from Long Island, New York.

BEING WORTH YOUR SALT



“You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again? It is no longer good for anything, except to be thrown out and trampled by men” (Matt. 5:13, NIV).

Flavorless Salt

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 5:13

Salt is a necessity of life;
To bake with, to cook with, and to preserve with.
Food without salt is tasteless and boring.
When salt is not used, it is no longer good.
It becomes hard like rock
In order to prevent that, you can add rice.
There are only two choices with salt;
Use it and share it,
Or, Keep it, and lose it.

We are the salt of the earth.
We are examples for billions of people.
When we mix with them, we leave behind a flavor.
But, what kind of flavor?
With our God-given gifts,
We lead observers to Christ.
Then the salt is being used and shared,
While it is still good.

If we only sit around and do nothing,
Not even smile,
If we put forth no effort,
The salt has then lost its flavor,
With no hope of regaining it.
What is salt without flavor?
When something valuable is wasted,
We tend to feel guilty.
Nobody likes that feeling.
Our gifts are lost, and our talents are wasted,
But even God cannot make up lost time.
There is no longer a way to add flavor.

All need salt for flavor in their lives.
Salt can always be shared, and will be used by some.
For those who choose to be selfish,
They will later regret their decision.

If we choose to share,
We will help to add flavor.
If we choose to keep,
We will lose the flavor.
What good is salt, without flavor?

By Sabrina A. Jacques, a senior at Calvin High School, Winnipeg, Manitoba.

The Cost of Being a Disciple

LOGOS

Col. 4:6; Luke 14:34, 35; Matt. 5:13, 44, 47; 1 John 4:8; John 17:18; Num. 18:19

As disciples, we are expected to follow Christ and His message of hope. There is a pragmatic side to being a disciple, in which we sacrifice self and take on the robe of righteousness that Christ so generously gives. We follow the Ten Commandments that God gave to us in love, and continue to reach out in faith to Jesus Christ. There is also a joyous side to being a disciple, which is full of thanksgiving and praise. We combine faith and works to live a healthy Christian life so that we will go with Christ, someday soon, to heaven to live with Him forever! We will enjoy the benefits of the saints and remember that the cost was great for Christ to lay down His life for us, but our payment for being a disciple is in our acceptance of the gift of Christ's sacrifice for our salvation.

Luke 14:34, 35

When Christ was speaking to the interested multitudes on the mountain, He knew they were seeking something to make their life "tastier" and more fulfilling. He also knew that a substitute for the gospel would not satisfy; they wanted the real thing, the real gospel. For many people on the mountain, this was the first time they had heard about the cost of being a disciple. The price was denial of self,

The greatest gift of God is His love for us.

unselfishness, and the acceptance of a kind and loving Saviour.

Do you remember Christ's mandate that "any of you who does not give up everything cannot be my disciple"? If a person is so full of his or her own problems and concentrates only on the unsavory flavors of life, there is no room for the flavor of salvation through Jesus Christ. If your life is full of the sadness and heartache that a sinful world guarantees, then there is no room for the gift of forgiveness that Christ so willingly gives (1 John 1:9). There is no way a person can receive the salt that Christ has to give. "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can it be made salty again?" (Luke 14:34, NIV). It is only fit to be thrown away. We must accept no substitutes for the salt of the gospel, or our salt will be thrown away. Because it is not used for the glory of God, its worth has become nothing.

1 John 4:8

An important part of the gospel, the most important part, is to love. In Matthew 22:36-39, we read that the greatest commandment of all is to love your God with all your heart, your soul, and your mind. The second commandment is to love your neighbor as yourself. As you can see, love is the foundation of the greatest two commandments Christ has ever given. He had us in mind when He gave us these helpful guidelines to a happy life.

We read in 1 John 4:8, that if we do not love, we cannot know God, because "God is love." Part of the mystery of the salt given by God is contained in God's

love. The love of God massages our hearts so that we are ready to receive the salt that flavors our lives. The greatest gift of God is His love for us. John 3:16 says: “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life” (NIV). This should give you comfort in knowing that God is always on your side.

Matthew 5:16

Christ encourages us that we can make a difference in the lives of people around us. He says: “Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven” (Matt. 5:16). As Christians, we are blessed with a light of hope in our hearts. The light shines for the benefit of our neighbors and companions by what we do and say. Where does the energy come from that sparks the light to shine? By praising our Father in heaven, we are beginning the cycle that ignites the light to shine in our hearts and lives. When we praise our Father in heaven, it is like a wildfire that catches the hearts of our community on fire for Christ. Being an example for God is a joy! In the office, at home, or at school, our joy can spread to the lives we touch by just a simple smile, a word of encouragement, or some form of positive interaction.

As a Christian, accept no substitutes for the gospel. Accept the salt Christ has to offer, and use it to flavor the world with the joy of Christ’s soon return. We are saved and we should be praising Christ’s name and sharing the gift with all those with whom we come in contact.

REACT

1. How does the phrase “that they may see your good deeds” (Matt. 5:16) related to the issue of faith and works?

2. Explain how each of the following images contributes something unique to an understanding of the role of the Christian in society: (a) light; (b) salt.

3. In what ways can you employ the characteristics of light and salt more effectively in your world? Be specific.

4. How do Galatians 5:22, 23, John 17:18, 1 John 4:3, and Matthew 28:19, 20 relate to flavor and function?

5. Would those with whom you interact daily identify your flavor and function with words or action? Is our action based on true flavor, or on salving our conscience?

By Stephanie Yamniuk, a master-of-English student at the University of Manitoba at Winnipeg.

The Not-So-Secret Flavoring in Christianity

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Col. 4:6

As Christians we hope to show others through our lifestyle what it means to be happy. Can you imagine a great chef cooking a delicious meal without adding any seasoning? She would not think of doing such a thing. It is because of the seasonings that the chef gets the fantastic results we taste. Christianity is flavored the same way. If we as Christians really want to share our Christianity with others, we must add the seasonings that help us get the results we want, to share God's love with those around us. The salt God gives to us is to be used for His glory, not for ours. Once people digest this salt, they shall be preserved in His glorious kingdom.

In Colossians 4:6 we read: "Let your conversation be always full of grace, seasoned with salt, so that you may know how to answer everyone" (NIV). In this verse, Paul is giving instructions to the Colossians on how to live a productive Christian life through friendship ministries. If we look at Colossians 4:2-5, we read other instructions that enhance and season the understanding of our key text.

Paul is giving instructions on how to live a productive Christian life.

1. Devote yourselves to prayer, being watchful and thankful.
2. Pray for our ministers of the gospel, that they may carry God's message to all who hear.
3. Be wise in the way you act toward those who aren't in the church, and make the most of every opportunity.
4. Let your conversations be full of grace and seasoned with salt so that God's love can be heard in all you say and do.

In Matthew 5:13 we read about what happens to salt that has lost its flavor—lost its effectiveness. It is thrown away! God doesn't keep things around that aren't a part of fulfilling the gospel and revealing His saving grace. This is not to say that once a Christian stops being effective, then that Christian should be summarily thrown out of the church; that is not what this verse is saying at all. That's what God's grace is all about. It is only by His grace that our sins are forgiven and we are accepted as God's saints.

Our conversations should be seasoned with God's grace. This fact should be revealed in all our daily interactions. "Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate and infuse in order to preserve. So it is through personal contact and association that men are reached by the saving power of the gospel."*

**Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 36.

By Stephanie Yamniuk, a master-of-English student at the University of Manitoba at Winnipeg.

Equipped for the Quest?

EVIDENCE

Key Texts: Luke 14:34–35, 2 Kings 2:20–22, James 3:12

Flavor and function: these are to salt its very existence. Without flavor, salt is nothing more than a tiny grain of worthless mineral. Even with flavor, if salt is not used, if its flavor does not permeate that with which it is blended, its flavor might as well be nonexistent. Likewise, flavor is humanity's worth, and the functioning of that flavor is its purpose. Yet on our own, do we have either? Can we have either?

As Christians, we must continuously address three essential truths:

1. Christians must have both flavor and function. Throughout the history of God's chosen people, Israel shifted between two basic states: flavorful and flavorless. Yet gradually they absorbed from those around them rather than flavoring them, and the Israelites completely rejected and even forgot God for generations at a time. As much as God tried to restore flavor and function to them, He would not force them, and they would not be led. Thus hardship and disaster were the seasonings of their lives; both as natural results from their action and as discipline from God.

He would not force them, and they would not be led.

2. If we as Christians lose either flavor or function, we endanger not only ourselves, but the world. Often when we look at this imperfect example that Israel left us, our myopic view allows us to see only the danger to ourselves. It is a valid warning to us, but what of the danger to the world? If the salt is worthless, what about the food? Without flavor, not only is the salt worthless, but the food as well.

3. We have neither flavor nor function within us. We are the salt, but we are not the flavor. Both the Christian and the non-Christian need the flavor of God as given by the Holy Spirit. "If the character is not under the molding influence of the Holy Spirit, if we have not that faith which works by love and purifies the life from all hereditary and cultivated tendencies to wrong, what does our profession avail?"* If on our own we try to change the world, we ourselves will be corrupted as were the Israelites.

**The Watchman*, Dec. 19, 1905.

By Pastor Wesley Szamko, youth pastor of the Henderson Highway SDA Church, Winnipeg, Manitoba, Canada.

How to Remain Flavorful

HOW-TO

Key Text: Matt. 5:13

When we look around our world today, we see a lot of violence, anger, and hatred and often wonder what difference one individual can make. In His Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said that “you are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13, NIV). Jesus knew that a group of believers had something that would flavor and preserve our world.

The flavor to which He made reference is God’s love. Without God’s love we have nothing of value to offer our sin-filled world. In order to share love with those around us, we individually have to be connected to the Source of such love, and we do that in three ways:

1. We daily ask for the Holy Spirit to enrich our lives. He is constantly on hold just waiting to be part of our daily activities if we let Him.

2. Prayer. This is how we keep in touch with God, our mode of conversation with Him.

3. Bible study. Daily reading of the Word allows us to read and hear what God is saying to us in response to what we have said to Him.

When we continually do these three things, our knowledge of God increases and with this knowledge our love grows for Him. It is human nature to talk about

Jesus knew that a group of believers had something that would flavor and preserve our world.

what we love most, and when we love God, we share that with people around us.

When a church community is filled with individuals daily taking time to know God and His love, that amounts to a lot of preservation power for our world. With this type of preservation in mind, we have to make ourselves aware of the various needs in and around our community and be willing to do our share to meet those needs.

REACT

1. How would you rate the “flavor” of your church community? Does it have much value?

2. How do you contribute to its “flavor”? Be specific.

3. In what respects, if any, are salt’s qualities of preservation relevant to calling God’s people the salt of the earth?

By Dacia Rowe, a psychiatric nurse in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

A Simple Mission: the Salt of the Earth

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 5:13

The emotional climate in this world is becoming steadily angrier. This is evident with the increase in killings that are occurring each day. What does all of this mean to you and to me? If you look back at Sodom and Gomorah, you can see a place in time where people had lost hope. Why is this? Maybe they had denied the existence of God.

What does God do to our lives?

God is hope, love, and forgiveness! A world without these qualities evidences the fact of sin. Just think of a world in which God is missing. What do you have left? Anger, hatred, and resentment toward one's fellow man.

Why did God disown the Israelites?

In the past, throughout the Bible, we see a God who is constantly frustrated with the children of Abraham. They were expected to be the salt of the earth. Instead, they wanted to be the earth. Wasn't God's plan to make them a model of what God's people should be like? But as they prospered, they lost sight of why they were prospering and wanted everything that they didn't have, resulting in hatred, deceit, and hopelessness.

As God's people, we have chosen to be the salt of the earth—the light, the

Separately we are a spark; together we are a burning fire!

example and the inspiration. We are to give hope, love, and forgiveness to the world. We are to show others that there is a better way and that God is real and He does care.

How can we show the people of this world that God cares?

How can we make a difference in this world?

These are both good questions and to find out how you can make a difference, just read the New Testament, about a simple Man with a simple mission! He was commissioned to save this world and to make a difference, one person at a time. If we join together, we can set the whole world on fire. Separately we are a spark; together we are a burning fire! So go out and start a fire for God!

By Harry Yamniuk, a telephone technician and computer specialist in Winnipeg, Manitoba.

LIGHT SHOW



**“In him was life, and that life was the light of men”
(John 1:4, NIV).**

Better Than Dreams

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 5:8

Last night I had an incredible dream. It seems I was driving with my parents through some beautiful countryside. The sun was bright, and the air was clear. As we drove, we passed a mansion that was gorgeous. It was monumental in size, and the landscaping was like nothing I'd ever seen. There were flowering trees on a lush, green lawn with flowers everywhere. Roses trailed along the fences, and ivy climbed the walls of the building. The ivy had been trimmed so as not to interfere with the cut-glass windows that seemed to be everywhere on this lovely structure. My breath was taken away, and I could only stare as we drove around the mansion and parked in the driveway.

I looked at Dad and Mom and asked, "What are we doing here?"

Their simple reply was "We live here." To my amazement, Dad produced the key that opened the door. Inside were even more glorious things than I could have imagined. Plush carpets and beautifully designed hardwood floors were only the beginning. There were ornate furnishings in regal colors. Then . . . I woke up.

In my half-awake condition, I allowed my mind to continue with the feeling of the dream. The amazement of finding myself an inherent part of such surround-

Their simple reply was "We live here."

ings was inspiring. The unbelief and happiness trickled down into my waking consciousness, and for a while I felt as if the dream were true.

If my dream had been reality, there is no way I could or would want to keep it a secret. The exciting thing is that it is true. We have as an inheritance a mansion and life more wonderful than we can imagine. We have to challenge ourselves to allow this knowledge to be a reality in our lives. If it were, we would be on fire for Him, not because of the material aspect of mansions above, but because of the realization that we have a Father who loves us extravagantly.

As Adventist Christians, we have a wonderful dream to share. We have the opportunity to choose to be heirs of the kingdom of heaven. We are called out of darkness to His great light of acceptance, as His sons and daughters. As soon as we accept this, we become a part of Christ's dream and His ultimate goal—to see us in His beautiful kingdom. Why not "walk as children of the Light," and share your joy with others? You have a parent with the key to a new world better than dreams.

By Matthew Segebartt, a theology major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

The Light of Humility

LOGOS

John 3:19; 2 Cor. 4:6; Eph. 5:8; Matt. 5:14-16; John 17:4; Luke 11:13

In this lesson we are asked to make connections between cities on hills, lamps on lampstands, good works, and humility—and all of that in the ever-present context of darkness. It is a darkness that remains in the background, watchful and waiting, that does not descend like banshees out of hell, shrieking into the wind, but simply waits for the light to falter and fail before moving in inexorably.

“This is the verdict,” says John 3:19, “Light has come into the world, but men loved darkness instead of light because their deeds were evil” (NIV). That is the verdict: not so much that we try to extinguish the light, but that we avoid it.

Can we hear the pathos and the head-shaking sadness in those words? On the one hand there are those who bring the light, carry the light, and live in the light. On the other hand are those who cannot be confronted, who will not even stand in the light long enough to receive a word, but slink silently away into darkness. Behind the darkness lies, not an active and vigorous malice, but a mute and resentful shame. And shame, though lame, is a heavy burden.

Psychologist Samuel Osherson, author of *Wrestling With Love*, notes that “Guilt and shame are often confused. Guilt refers to the uncomfortable feeling of *violating* an inner standard or taboo. Shame means the *failure to live up* to one’s

In both cases action cannot be separated from being.

inner ideals.” When we understand the difference between guilt and shame, it casts light (no pun intended) upon the situation described here.

Guilt comes as a result of violating standards or requirements imposed on us from outside ourselves. While we may usually fulfill the requirements gladly, when we don’t we feel accountable to someone or something else. We fall short and feel angry and defensive; we may lash out and try to make excuses or project our guilt onto others.

Shame comes as a result of not living up to *our* ideals and thus cuts much closer to our sense of self-identity. We have no one to blame but ourselves when we let ourselves down. We have disappointed ourselves and we simply want to hide. The darkness becomes a convenient cover, and we move furtively about, hoping no one will notice. We cannot look anyone else or ourselves in the eye; we have given ourselves a wound that, if left untended, can be fatal to the spirit.

How can we move from this quiet desperation to the full light of God’s love? Paul speaks confidently to us, “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Eph. 5:8, NIV) and Jesus says, “You are the light of the world. A city on a hill cannot be hidden” (Matt. 5:14). How can they be so sure? What makes them think we could ever be that bold or courageous as to overcome our shame and move out into the light? Furthermore, both Paul and Jesus say that we don’t just *stand* in the light, we *are* the light!

Perhaps that confidence comes from experiencing humility. But how do you

talk about showing humility without appearing boastful? Can we ever say we have achieved humility? Should we strive for humility or simply let it happen? Is it a virtue or a gift?

If we're looking for humility, we will not find it, and if we're striving to be humble we will never achieve it, because being humble is not the point for a Christian any more than plugging a lightbulb into a socket is the point of being a lightbulb. In both cases action cannot be separated from being: lightbulbs are made to give light, yet they cannot give light unless they are plugged into a socket. One does not set about to *be* humble in order to be a Christian—in the process of being a Christian one *becomes* humble.

Some biblical scholars believe that the Sermon on the Mount is meant to be analogous to the Ten Commandments, also given from a mountain. Thus, while Jesus might very well have sat down on a hill and spoken with the crowds, the symbolic value of seeing Him as a new kind of lawgiver with a new kind of law for a new age would not have been lost on later audiences acquainted with the Old Testament.

But these words do not point us to a new law that must be kept. The Beatitudes, at least, are not *prescriptive*. They do not command us to be sorrowful in order to find consolation; they do not ask us to have a gentle spirit in order that we might possess the earth—they describe those who already *are* sorrowful as being consoled and those who already *are* of a gentle spirit as inheriting the earth.

These are people, Christian or not, who have recognized their guilt and shame and moved out from darkness to light. In their need, they have left the darkness and now stand in the freedom of humility. Since humility is something that comes from within, it is something they have chosen. Humility is shame without the fear and self-loathing—it is the power and the freedom to recognize our limitations and thus to transcend them. That is why Jesus can say with all confidence that we are the light of the world because we have become clear lenses through which He can shine, candles that stand tall in the wind, people who do not have to fight for themselves, because they know who they are.

REACT

1. What is the difference between humility and humiliation?
2. Am I free to be the light of the world?
3. What are two practical ways I could share my faith this week while maintaining my own personality?
4. How does sharing my faith and being a light to others bring joy to my own spiritual journey?
5. How can I make Christ's message "user-friendly"?

*Samuel Osherson, *Wrestling With Love: How Men Struggle With Intimacy* (New York: Fawcett Columbine, 1992), p. 33.

“This Little Light of Mine”

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Matt. 5:14-16

Have you ever wondered why it seems so difficult to share your faith with others? Have you felt guilty because you don't take advantage of faith-sharing opportunities? Do you feel that perhaps you don't have the right answers or tactful proof to back up your points? Would your one little light make any difference anyway?

This summer we tried an experiment. The chaplain's office at Columbia Union College developed a special Friday night venue called “Rediscovering Jesus,” which specifically targeted young adults who have drifted from the church. Our plan was to love them back into the church and show them how relevant Christianity is. We wanted to show them how to apply the story of Jesus in their lives right now. We also hoped that they would invite their friends and co-workers after their own lives were changed. They did. It grew from four people to 46 within a 10-week period!

“True Christianity is a religion of progress. It is ever giving light and blessing, and has in reserve still greater light and blessing to bestow on those who receive its truths.”¹

God tells us not to be self-conscious about our age, or worried about knowing

“True Christianity is a religion of progress.”

all the proof needed to convince somebody of the rightness of Christianity. He reminds us that the best way to witness is by being an example for the others in speech, in life, in love, in faith, and in purity (1 Timothy 12). Now that seems like an easy way to share my light. How rewarding it is to see people receive the light and the true blessing that comes from accepting Jesus.

“Church members . . . are to be ever ready to spring into action in obedience to the Master's commands. Wherever we see work waiting to be done we are to take it up and do it, constantly looking unto Jesus. . . . If every church member were a living missionary, the gospel would speedily be proclaimed in all countries, to all peoples, nations, and tongues.”²

It is time for us all to rediscover Jesus. Making a new commitment again and sharing our love and devotion to God will make our light show on the hill for all to see.

“This little light of mine, I'm gonna let it shine, let it shine, let it shine, let it shine . . .”

1. *Sketches From the Life of Paul*, p. 124.

2. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 32.

Imitators of Light

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Eph. 5:1, 2, 8-10

The gospel calls all Christians to be imitators of Jesus Christ, to walk in love and light as He did two thousand years ago. In His ministry, Christ taught and exemplified the love of God. Christ came not only to offer all humanity salvation from sin but also to reveal the love of God to all who see the light. He embraced the sick and suffering and illuminated their lives with the beauty of God's love. This is the social nature of the gospel, to move throughout the world shedding the light of Jesus Christ on those who live in darkness.

In their book, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon argue that the gospel of Jesus Christ is both social and political in nature. Christianity is not only an action, but a lifestyle. The question that arises then is "Should Christians live in the world or separated from the world?" According to Hauerwas and Willimon, the Christian church should remain separated from the world but continue to be an example to the world. For many Christians, this is a difficult distinction to make. However, when read in alliance with Ephesians 5, Christians find that God has called us to be imitators of the gospel. God has called all who hear Him to come out of the world and live

The gospel of Jesus Christ is both social and political in nature.

with Him. In Matthew 5:14-16 Jesus says, "You are the light of the world. A city that is set on a hill cannot be hidden. . . . Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven" (NKJV).

Therefore, to be shining lights for God, Christians must lead a life of example. Following the life of Christ accomplishes this. Christians are called not only to preach and teach the gospel, but, more important, to *live* the gospel. "We already have too many people who know something *about* Jesus, *about* the church. What we need is people who will follow Jesus, who will be the church."^{*}

God has called His followers to shine the light of His love throughout the world. We are His children, His beacons to a world craving the Light.

REACT

1. What does it mean to be *examples* of the gospel? Does this correspond with Christian witness? Explain your answer.

2. What does separation from the world signify or require according to the mission of God's church?

^{*}Stanley Hauerwas and William H. Willimon, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony* (Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon Press, 1989), p. 104.

By Melissa J. Bartlett, a senior majoring in history and minoring in philosophy and religion at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Illumination Recipe

HOW-TO

Key Text: Isa. 9:2

We haven't been asked to be the light of the world so that we can place ourselves one notch higher than our neighbors, classmates, work partners, friends, or family. Still it is easy to fall into this erroneous thinking, especially when we realize the great responsibility that underlies this commission.

When Paul says, "What fellowship can light have with darkness?" (2 Cor. 6:14, NIV), he does not say that a non-Christian is a *persona non grata*. Moreover, we cannot expect to witness and finish evangelizing the world with such an exclusive attitude. Therefore it is necessary to evaluate rightly our differences and view those who are different from us as friends.

Achieving a receptive and inclusive relationship with our peers, it is paramount that we learn to live lives that reflect Christ at and away from home.

1. Pray regularly. The best way to establish a bond between those we seek to illuminate and ourselves is fervent prayer. Talk to God any time you like. Remember that you don't pay for the number of minutes you stay on the line. Also, prayers need not be forms of art. Ask God to help that person overcome a certain problem, or to allow you to establish an honest relationship with him or her. Pray also that

You don't pay for the number of minutes you stay on the line.

this individual will become more open and receptive to God and to what you have to say.

2. Foster friendships. Establishing a friendship is the first step in witnessing. Find something that is meaningful to him or her and find ways to bring your message to the person's level—not yours. Make it a point to develop trust in your relationship before anything else. People are more likely to listen to you or be your friend if they notice that you are a genuine and trustworthy individual.

3. Share Christ. As your friendship becomes stronger and closer, the person will probably inquire what makes you so different. This is your chance. Take it! If no such opportunity ever arises or if the individual believes differently from you, then don't throw your friendship away. Remember that friends are crucial and that they also have the right to think differently.

4. Act consistently. Just because you aren't around your friends, it doesn't mean you should act any differently. People have eyes and mouths, and they will observe you and then talk about you. Watch that your actions match your words. Don't confuse your new friend by saying one thing and then doing something totally opposite.

So why expect God to perform extraordinary miracles on our behalf when all we have to do is be a little more human, to be a friend?

By Hearly G. Mayr, a junior communication-journalism major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Stickers and Cans

OPINION

Key Text: Matt. 5:14-16

Does letting my light shine mean giving someone a caring smile, or do I need to go door to door to be spreading God's love? Can I spread the light as a business major, or is that privilege reserved for theology and education majors? Am I a better person than my non-SDA roommate?

I once thought that I wasn't a true Christian unless I brought a friend to Sabbath School and received my happy-face sticker. I once believed that if my Ingathering can wasn't full, I wasn't doing my part. I once thought that SDA's were all going to heaven because they had the stickers and the full cans. The stickers and full cans were proof that we were God's 100-percent supporters. Soon I noticed that my friends who got to play on Sabbath also had stickers and full cans. Did the stickers and full cans really prove that we were 100-percent supporters of God or were they just stickers and cans?

As time went on, I grew up. Career options arose, as did advice. A respected older friend summarized what she believed I should do: "If you're not going to be a preacher, at least you should teach. Teachers and preachers are the only ones truly serving God in their jobs."

We aren't set aside in a special SDA bucket.

This mentality and the measurements of stickers and cans brought me to a conclusion. God has given us all different talents, just as we all have different ears, noses, and hands. He made you the way you are on purpose. He doesn't say, "I love Billy because he's 6'2" while Matt falls a little short of 5'11". He also doesn't say, "Suzie goes to church on Sabbath, so I'll use her to witness today. But that Greg, he went to church on Sunday, so I don't think that I'll be able to use him after all."

Just as God doesn't measure our talents, He doesn't measure us by what we do. We aren't set aside in a special SDA bucket while all of the other religions surround us like a sea, trying to drown us. It is what we do with our talents that is important.

Perhaps your talent is in math, gardening, or English. God gave you that gift for a reason. Likewise, maybe you're a good conversationalist, or you have a really great smile. God can use smiles, voices, math problems, and fishing to spread His light and love to others. I may not be a theology or education major, but God gave me my talents in order to spread His love. Be yourself; you may think you're playing a small and meaningless part, but God has other plans.

"We realize that what we are accomplishing is a drop in the ocean. But if this drop were not in the ocean, it would be missed."—Mother Teresa.

By Summer E. Porter, a sophomore majoring in business and communication at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

STAY ON THE FAIRWAY



“Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat” (Matt. 7:13).

Finding the Green

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Matt. 7:13, 14

As a keen golfer, I have learned that although it looks easy to get from tee to cup—particularly when watching the professionals—it is very easy to lose one's way. Think of the hazards a golfer will face in his journey around a golf course. There are often lots of trees lining either side of the fairway, while bunkers of sand and water hazards (lakes or streams) dot various parts of the fairway to ensnare any wayward balls. Then there is the wind to take into account, as well as minor divots (which my ball seems to find quite regularly!).

As a “hacker,” I have often found myself in the trees, water, or sandtraps. The fortunate part is, if I refocus on the pin, take my time, and concentrate on where I should be going, I can usually find my way back onto the fairway and into the cup. My way may have a few detours, but I do get to my goal eventually. Sometimes, however, I can hit the ball and it lands in the middle of the lake or 20 rows back into the trees, never to be seen again. I can search for what seems like hours, but if I search in the wrong place it is impossible to find.

There are many people in our world who are searching for truth and for direction in their lives. These people are all too often misguided, looking for the quick fix. Their focus is not on Christ, and the path they are following leads to destruc-

Sometimes I can hit the ball and it lands in the middle of the lake.

tion. However, like the golfer, if we reach out to Christ and focus on Him with our heart, soul, and mind, He will guide us through the hazards of this world. Even though we may stumble and fall along the way, Jesus will be there for us and will guide us through to the end of our journey.

Often my golf partner and I go down to the local course and search for balls that people have lost or given up on. On one particular day, we found about 130 balls—40 in one small area alone. As Christians, we must not concentrate only on ourselves in maintaining a path to redemption. Rather, we need to help others who are lost in the hazards, and refocus their lives on our wonderful Redeemer. If we have our focus on God, He can help us to help others through the golf course of life and onto the straight and narrow path that leads into the gate of eternal life.

By Phillip McKay, a pediatric nurse in Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Touring or Going Home?

LOGOS

**Matt. 7:13; Prov. 14:12; 25:28; John 17:3; Luke 13:24; Gal. 2:20;
Matt. 11:28; Heb. 12:2, 3**

“Go in through the narrow gate, because the gate to hell is wide and the road that leads to it is easy, and there are many who travel it” (Matt. 7:13, TEV).

“Narrow” has connotations of smallness, different, apparent insignificance. In a world that applauds the big, the powerful, and the dramatic, Jesus’ imperative “Go in” does not appear to leave other options. When it comes to the kingdom of God, the obvious, from our perspective, may not be the way to go. “Human wisdom is so tiny, so impotent, next to the seeming absurdity of God” (1 Cor. 1:25, *The Message*). There is a kind of antithetical challenge in the contrast between what is important as seen by people and how it is perceived by God. A boy with an ordinary boy’s lunch, mustard seeds, yeast, and narrow gates hardly appear to be of sufficient significance to hang pictures of God. (See John 6:9; Matt. 13:31-33; 7:13.)

“Jesus continually threw odd stories down alongside ordinary lives . . . and walked away without explanation or altar call. Then listeners started seeing connections: God connections, life connections, eternity connections. The very lack

“Even the best Christian that ever lived is not acting on his own steam.”

of obviousness, the unlikeness, was the stimulus to perceiving likeness: God likeness, life likeness, eternity likeness.”¹

In the Beatitudes, the listening crowd have been challenged by the principles of the kingdom of God and are asked to rise from their “squat” and journey with focus, with specific direction, a road less traveled. Perhaps Matthew’s placement of the “ask . . . seek . . . knock” (7:7) has some influence on his comment later that “few people . . . find” (verse 14) the narrow gate. It’s not obvious. Permission is given to make enquiry and to own ignorance of the way. Ownership of our need of God’s direction in our lives is elementary to experiencing the presence of God in our journey.

“Let us keep our eyes fixed on Jesus, on whom our faith depends from beginning to end. He did not give up because of the cross! . . . So do not let yourselves become discouraged and give up” (Heb. 12:2, 3, TEV).

The imagery the author of Hebrews draws on is that of a race—a disciplined journey. The admonition to keep our eyes fixed on Jesus is easy to talk about, for it has a solid Christian ring to it. Whereas the focus here on Jesus is His experience at Calvary—a very specific, different, and painful journey. We are made aware that the prize grows out of a direction normally avoided, a way of being not usually recognized, creating tension between the narrowness of the journey—maybe even bringing ill treatment—and the joy of the arrival. The way of mercy, humility, purity, righteousness (Matt. 5:3-11) are not really noted for grabbing the imagi-

nation of the masses. But then a cross never really engendered much joy until One changed its brutal significance.

The encouragement is to remain focused in an old direction—on Jesus. The One who stopped to convulse in *grief* with friends over the death of Lazarus. The One who fended off prosecutors of a morally lax lady, giving her a *mercy* start. The One *persecuted* to death to give us life. He has become the focal Person for all who seek God. Salvation as with all meaningful relational paths, is narrow in that it is focused, intense, rewarding.

“It is no longer I who live, but it is Christ who lives in me. This life that I live now, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave his life for me” (Gal. 2:20, TEV).

The use of the noun and pronoun in Galatians 2:19, 20, suggests a highly relational and personal life journey with Jesus. As personal as mercy, mourning, humility. Yet “even the best Christian that ever lived is not acting on his own steam—he is only nourishing or protecting a life he could never have acquired by his own efforts.”² There is now a new focus of identity—the journey is Christ’s path, a path I have never traveled before. My Companion is known, the destination is clear, the route is unpredictable—of a totally new orientation—yet gathering together a sense of daring anticipation.

The “narrow gate” would seem to be exclusive by definition; yet that narrowness gives a personally inclusive and relationally dynamic touch to our life’s journey.

REACT

1. What are your mental pictures of the word *narrow*? In what ways might Jesus’ mental pictures have been similar to yours?

2. If you were Jesus, how would you get the idea in Matthew 7:13, 14 across to your friends? What response would you expect from them?

3. What could you do today to help your relationship with God to grow?

4. What sorts of things would help your “faith continually increase”?

5. How does Christ bring about change in our lives? In what way do we contribute?

6. Do you agree or disagree that there is only one way to be a Christian? Explain your answer.

1. Eugene H. Peterson, *The Contemplative Pastor* (Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989), p. 42.

2. C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (London: Harper Collins, 1955), pp. 60, 61.

The Key to the Kingdom

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Rom. 8:9

The characteristics of those who will one day live in the kingdom of heaven are portrayed in the Beatitudes, the first part of Jesus' Sermon on the Mount. "Here He specified who should be the subjects of His heavenly kingdom. . . . He presents before all the traits of character which must be possessed by the peculiar people who will compose the royal family in the kingdom of heaven. . . . Those who possess the character specified, will share with Him in the blessing and the glory and the honor that will ever come to Him."¹

That's a big task, to have to display all those qualities in order to join Jesus and the Father in heaven. How is it that we can shape our characters to fit this mold? Ellen White says: "If we ever attain unto holiness, it will be through the renunciation of self and the reception of the mind of Christ."² But how do we give up self and receive the mind of Christ? Romans 8:9 holds the key to this: "You, however, are controlled not by the sinful nature but by the Spirit, if the Spirit of God lives in you" (NIV). By inviting the Spirit to live in us, the barrier of sin that separated us from God is removed, allowing us to focus on our relationship with Him.

This concept is exemplified in the life of Enoch. Ellen White writes that

The important part of Enoch's story is that He walked with God.

"Enoch's life and character, which were so holy that he was translated to heaven without seeing death, represent what the lives and characters of all must be, if, like Enoch, they are to be translated when Christ shall come."³ The important part of Enoch's story is that He walked with God (Gen. 5:24). He journeyed on the narrow road, but not alone. He traveled *with God*. The narrow path is not one that we are expected to travel alone. We have a constant Companion on our journey toward the narrow gate. However, we need to stay focused in order not to lose our way. We need to focus on God and our relationship with Him, through the spirit of God within us, in order to stay on the track. Then the qualities given in the Beatitudes will come out in us. We are not expected to develop them all fully while we are journeying toward the kingdom of heaven. That will happen when we enter the gate. May you be guided onto the narrow path and enjoy a closer walk with God today.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 1084.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p.143.

3. *Our High Calling*, p. 278.

By Tony Voss and Janelle Walker, members of the Rosny Seventh-day Adventist Church, Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Stairway to Heaven or Highway to Hell

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Deut. 30:19

The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:1-7:29) contains some of Jesus' most loved teachings. Jesus commences with the Beatitudes, follows up with a discussion on righteousness, and then in Matthew 7:13, 14, comes to the heart of the matter—enter the narrow gate and find eternal life or enter the broad gate to destruction. There is no third option.

The fact that Jesus uses the word *enter* when referring to both the narrow and wide gates implies that each traveler on the two roads has made a specific decision as to which gate he or she passes through. Jesus also states that “only a few” find the road leading to life. No one enters the narrow gate by accident. It must be deliberately and diligently sought out.

That the wide gate and road is the way of worldliness, sin, and eventual destruction is indisputable. However, the words *broad gate* and *broad road* conjure up images of ease and freedom; enjoying life while cruising the fast lane. Is a journey on the broad road a more pleasant experience than on the narrow? According to Psalm 7:14, Isaiah 48:22, and John 8:34, the answer is an emphatic No.

Alternatively, this does not mean that the narrow road is a carefree stroll away

The narrow gate must be deliberately and diligently sought out.

from difficulties. “It was not thought easy to be a Christian in the heroic days of persecution; it is not really any easier to-day, when the difficulty comes rather from the all-pervading atmosphere of worldliness.”¹ The implied confined nature of the narrow path allows no room for worldly luggage. On the other hand, the broad way “is the road of tolerance and permissiveness. It has no curbs, no boundaries of either thought or conduct.”²

Choosing to travel the narrow road is not a once-in-a-lifetime decision. The struggle to remain on the “straight and narrow” continues daily. Yet, however hard the journey may be, the result is happiness. “The only way to get our values right is to see, not the beginning, but the end of the way, to see things, not in the light of time, but in the light of eternity.”³

Entering through the narrow gate culminates in entering the pearly gate. Choose the narrow gate. Choose life.

1. H. D. M. Spence and J. S. Exell (ed.), *The Pulpit Commentary* (New York: Funk & Wagnalls Company, 1907), p. 296.

2. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of the Sermon on the Mount* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1978), p. 194.

3. William Barclay, *The Gospel of Matthew* (Edinburgh: The Saint Andrew Press, 1977), p. 280.

By Lyndon Hawke, a physiotherapist in Melbourne, Victoria, Australia.

Give Up?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Heb. 12:2, 3

Have you ever felt discouraged by the fact that you do not seem to be changing? As Christians, we are asked to “not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV). We are not just to be forgiven and justified, but also sanctified. We are to be different from the world, displaying the characteristics of a follower of Christ.

The Beatitudes outline some of these character traits that we are to develop. But what happens when it doesn't seem to be working? How do you cope when the “narrow gate” seems impassable?

1. Forget about the past. It is easy to become discouraged if we focus on our previous mistakes and failures. Yes, we need to acknowledge them and remember enough not to repeat them. But our focus must be on the future. Paul strove to reach his goal by “forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead” (Phil. 3:13). We must do the same.

2. Allow Christ to live in you. Using the illustration of a vine and branches, Jesus said that “If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). We must develop our relationship with

We are not just to be forgiven and justified, but also sanctified.

Him, and allow Him to work His will in us. In that way, it doesn't matter whether we are capable or not. He has promised that “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness” (2 Cor. 12:9).

3. Don't give up. In Hebrews 12:2, 3, we are encouraged to “fix our eyes on Jesus,” our perfect example and role model. He endured the pain and shame of the crucifixion, because He was focused on the future and what His sacrifice would mean for us. “Look at Jesus' example so that you will not get tired and stop trying” (Heb. 12:3, NCV).

It is hard to be different. It's difficult to be made holy when your natural sinful self leans in the opposite direction. But we have been promised the power to change. Paul said, “I have been crucified with Christ and I no longer live, but Christ lives in me. The life I live in the body, I live by faith in the Son of God, who loved me and gave himself for me” (Gal. 2:20, NIV).

So forget about yourself and your past mistakes. Focus on Christ and His sacrifice for you. Concentrate on developing your relationship with Him. He will give you the strength you need to walk the narrow path. Give up? Never.

REACT

Which other biblical characters are good examples of perseverance? How can you learn from them?

By Julie Douglas, a physiotherapist from Hobart, Tasmania, Australia.

Wide Enough for All

OPINION

Key Text: Jer. 27:12, 13

Have you ever come across a Christian who sees nothing wrong in doing things that you would never do? Have you ever found yourself saying something like “How can they do that? Christians don’t do that!”? Or “Real Christians don’t believe that”? I know that I’ve thought these things before.

It is tempting. I had this idea that there was only one right way to be a Christian. I assumed that I had found the narrow path. If they didn’t agree with me, then they were wrong. They couldn’t be walking the narrow path. How did I know that I was on it? I knew because I believed and acted as I’d been taught all my life.

I had a very judgmental attitude. The idea of two paths—one right and the other wrong—led me to believe that we all had to believe and do the same things to be saved. But I don’t think that the narrow path is like that at all.

The narrow path is not about believing and acting the way any church wants you to. This sort of belief meant that I had a fairly narrow view of life, but I wasn’t really walking the narrow path of this week’s text. I think that the narrow path is best described by today’s verse. It is a search for God. Walking this path means that we have to search for God with all our hearts.

I had this idea that there was only one right way to be a Christian.

This does not mean that we all have to be the same. God will accept us from wherever we are. And if we search with all our hearts, then we will find Him, just as He promised. If we want Him to, He will lead us and teach us for the rest of our lives.

It makes it a little hard to judge other people, don’t you think? If someone is truly seeking God, then He will be leading them. We will all come to an understanding of the truth at different times and in different ways. Walking with God means that we will all change our beliefs on certain issues as God reveals Himself to us.

Walking the narrow path with God is an adventure. I’m learning more about myself and about Him every day. I may not understand why other people do or believe the things they do, but I believe that even though we are different, we are still walking the same path. The narrow path is wide enough for everyone who wants to walk it. Do you?

REACT

1. How can we search for God with all our hearts?
2. Can we know whether someone is walking the narrow path? What are the signs?

By Jonathon Lee, a computer-science student at the University of Tasmania, Australia.

Next Quarter's Lessons

2 Corinthians

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for third quarter 1998, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: 2 Corinthians: A Ministry Manual

Scripture: 2 Cor. 1:1-2:4. Also, read all of 2 Corinthians through in one sitting. As you do, look for its major themes.

Theme: God does not give us His Spirit for selfish use. We are not to enjoy this blessing privately. We are to pass it along to others.

Lesson 2: The Ministry of Forgiveness

Scripture: 2 Cor. 2:5-17.

Theme: When we extend and receive forgiveness, we play a major part in the plan of redemption. When we extend and receive forgiveness, we live daily in a way that shows we stand in God's presence.

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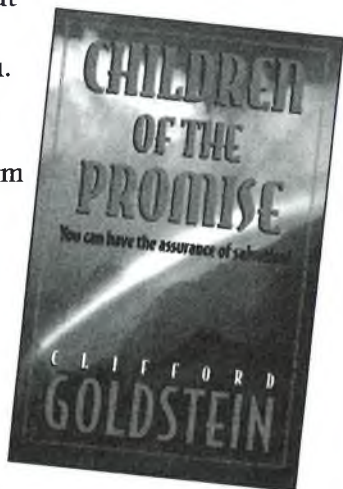
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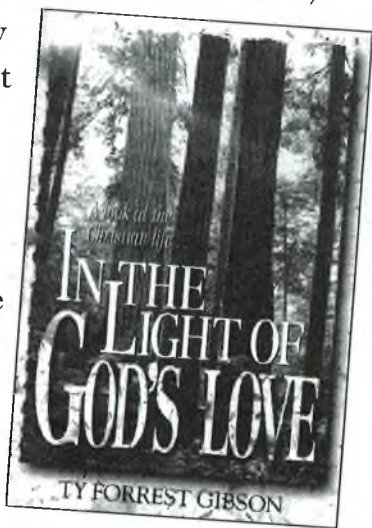
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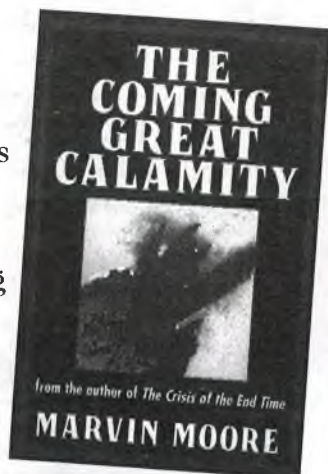
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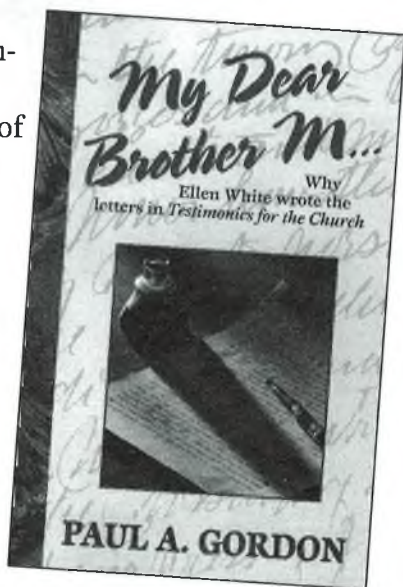
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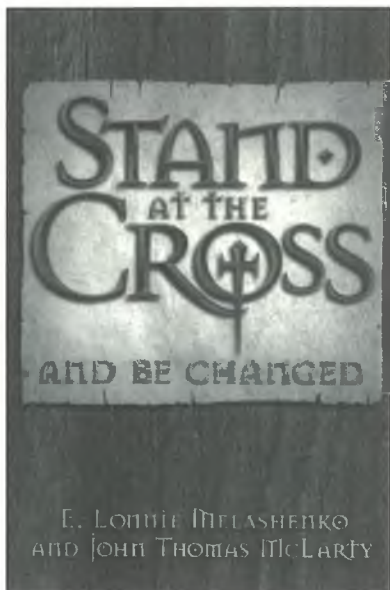
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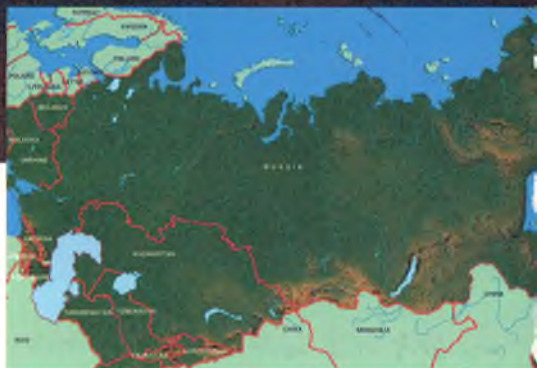
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MISSION PROFILE



NAME:

Tamaz Mamoyan

COUNTRY:

Tbilisi, Georgia, C.I.S

BACKGROUND:

Tamaz was raised as a Muslim in a close-knit Kurdish family.

CURRENTLY:

After hearing the story of Jesus and reading it for himself from a Bible which was given to him, Tamaz has become the first baptized Kurdish Adventist. Now he is attending the seminary in Zaoksky, Russia, preparing to become a pastor to his people. The special mission offering this quarter will go to construct more evangelistic centers in the Euro-Asia Division.

EURO-ASIA DIVISION