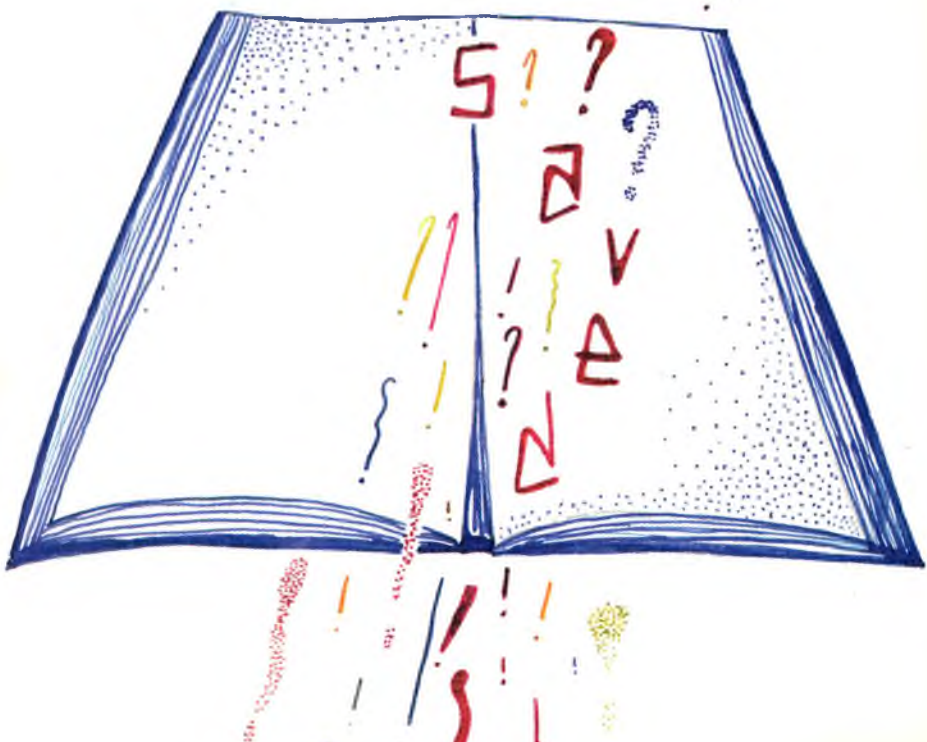


JANUARY-MARCH 2000

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**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.

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*CQ* (ISSN 0744-2939). Volume 23, No. 1. 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., \$14.99; single copy, \$6.29. One-year subscription in countries outside U.S.A., \$17.99; single copy, \$6.29. 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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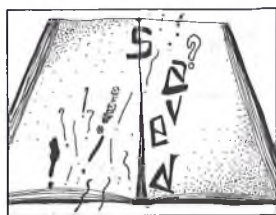
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# OUR LIFE ASSURANCE POLICY



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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 writers who 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.

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## This Quarter's Illustrator



Chiara Cupertino, the illustrator for this quarter's issue of *CQ*, is a student at the Secondary Art School in Forli, Italy. Presently studying to become an architect, she enjoys travel and is looking forward to being in Toronto for the General Conference session in July.

# 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 Bible Study Guide find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics, 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.

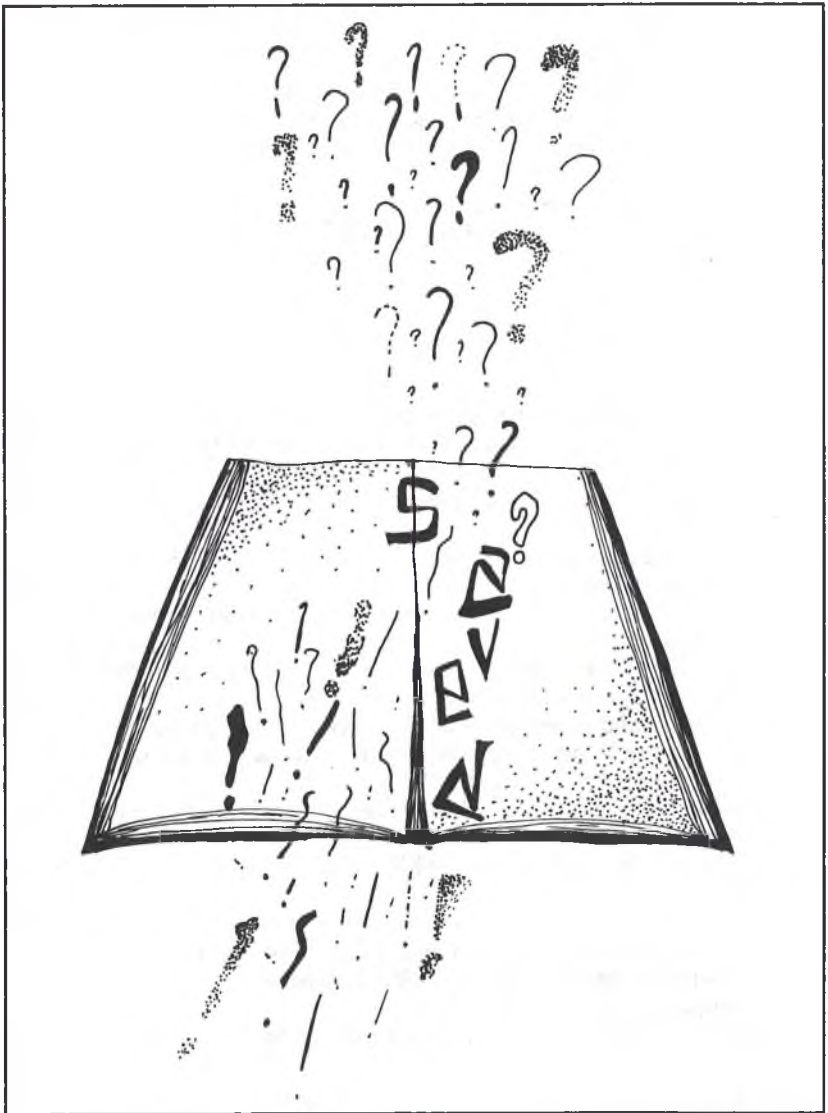
**"How-To"** (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.

**"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.*

# ARE YOU SAVED?



“Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth”  
(John 17:17, NIV).

# I Am Saved: True or False?

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: John 17:17**

I was a teenage colporteur selling books on the hot streets of Indianapolis. I wanted to make sure that this particular summer I would make enough money to earn a scholarship to Indiana Academy. Even though I was very young, I often encountered deep theological questions about my beliefs. Some were sincere, and some were just to see whether I knew why I was selling Christian literature.

I was often discouraged, sometimes meeting loud and belligerent passersby who sought to publicly humiliate me. One of the questions often thrown at me was, Are you saved: yes or no? If I began to parry or look as if I had been defeated, the inquirer would often look self-satisfied with a self-righteous smile. It reminded me of the story of the Pharisee and the publican (see Luke 18:9-14). One of the men *thought* he was saved, and the other dared hope for salvation. What do you think?

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## Is there danger in *knowing* you are saved?

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Is there danger in *knowing* you are saved? If, as Seventh-day Adventists, we believe we have been graciously endowed with the truth for this time, why are we uncomfortable with publicly acknowledging our spiritual status? Are we afraid that it might give us an air of superiority? Does the Bible give reasons for knowing we are saved?

As we enter a new year, a new decade, a new century, and a new millennium, are we certain of our standing before God? Jesus asked a poignant question: “ ‘When the Son of Man comes, will he find faith on the earth?’ ” (Luke 18:8, NIV). Is there enough faith in you to *know* you are saved?

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*By Clarence Hodges, Jr., teacher-coordinator and recruiter at the Suh-myun Seventh-day Adventist Language Institute in Pusan, South Korea.*

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# Assurance Through Comfort

## LOGOS

**Gen. 2:16, 17; Deut. 30:11-14; Ps. 146:5; Matt. 19:4, 8; Rom. 15:4; Eph. 6:17; 2 Tim. 3:15.**

Tom and Mary felt that they had a pretty good chemistry. As time went by, the chemistry grew stronger. Tom felt that he couldn't adequately express his love for Mary directly, so he sat down and wrote it in a love letter. He realized that he was at a loss to divulge his sentiments fully. He continued to write letters to try to convince Mary of his love for her. The more she read Tom's letters, the more her heart began to open. Little by little her fondness for him grew stronger.

One day Tom set a time to meet with Mary. The two of them began to spend many hours together. Their conversations became more involved and grew deeper. The love was strong but didn't reach its fullest before something terrible happened in Mary's life. Her father was killed suddenly in a car accident. The pain she felt could not be expressed in words. Yet Tom was there by her side. Day by day he continued to comfort and reassure her that he cared and was there if she needed anything. This horrible ordeal, and the affection she received from Tom, was the culmination of her assurance that he really loved her. Tom and Mary were married soon thereafter. The letters, the time spent sharing, and the comfort at a time of bereavement were what Mary needed to prove Tom's love for her.

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## **The more she read Tom's letters, the more her heart began to open.**

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What parallel can we find in this allegory to our relationship with Christ? In an age of superficial love, can we be assured He is coming back to redeem us from this planet?

When we look at how God has sought to reach us, we can better appreciate His efforts to win our love. He sent us letter after letter through His Word, the Bible. For hundreds of years, yea thousands, He has pleaded with humankind to "seek the Lord while he may be found; call on him while he is near" (Isa. 55:6, NIV).

When we study God's Word, we can get more than a surface knowledge of the salvation we need. This knowledge will also give assurance—build our faith. Our faith is built upon the "sure word of prophecy" (2 Pet. 1:19, KJV). This faith leads to prayer, which is simply communication with heaven. It is here that we can cast all our anxiety on Him, knowing that He cares for us (1 Pet. 5:7). Then, through service and unselfish love to others, we get a firsthand experience in God's unselfish love for us. We can then relate to His selflessness. And by sharing the good news of salvation, we can be participants in leading others to know of this "blessed assurance."

The love that flowed from Calvary is the ultimate assurance of eternal life as evidenced in the salvation offered to the thief on the cross. It would be well for us to meditate on this great mystery. Early morning meditation and prayer are essential in quickening our love for God. Our hearts will be assured of His presence and grace (Ps. 23:6). We will be ever thankful for this expression of His love.

“As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit. If we would be saved at last, we must learn the lesson of penitence and humiliation at the foot of the cross.”\*

## **REACT**

1. When asked the question “Are you saved?” when is it appropriate to answer Yes?
2. In what ways does God’s love for you seem most apparent?
3. What is your favorite quotation from God’s “love letter” to you? Why?
4. How can witnessing for Christ be as exciting as telling someone about finding the perfect sweetheart?

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 83.

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*By Bu Kwon Chun, pastor of the Suh-myun Seventh-day Adventist Church and director of the Suh-myun Seventh-day Adventist Language Institute in Pusan, South Korea.*

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# Are You Ready?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 25:1-6**

One of the many ways we can know we are saved is through preparation. Like the ten virgins in the story that Jesus told, we are given opportunities to experience God's grace. Unfortunately, not all of us take advantage of the provisions heaven has made. Some, like the five foolish virgins, will find themselves lacking at the great day of God.

"In the parable, all the ten virgins went out to meet the bridegroom. All had lamps and vessels for oil. For a time there was seen no difference between them. So with the church that lives just before Christ's second coming. All have a knowledge of the Scriptures. . . . Many are unready. They have no oil in their vessels with their lamps. They are destitute of the Holy Spirit."<sup>1</sup>

"Without the Spirit of God a knowledge of His word is of no avail. The theory of truth, unaccompanied by the Holy Spirit, cannot quicken the soul or sanctify the heart. . . . Unless the Spirit of God sets the truth home, the character will not be transformed."<sup>2</sup>

"The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites. They have a

### **"The class represented by the foolish virgins are not hypocrites."**

regard for the truth, they have advocated the truth, they are attracted to those who believe the truth; but they have not yielded themselves to the Holy Spirit's working. They have not fallen upon the Rock, Christ Jesus, and permitted their old nature to be broken up."<sup>3</sup>

"We are working for eternity. If we eat of the bread which came from heaven we shall be Christlike in spirit and character. . . . We are to give the mind and heart proper nourishment by eating the flesh and drinking the blood of the Son of God. Christ declares: 'Verily, verily, I say unto you, He that believeth on Me hath everlasting life.'"<sup>4</sup>

1. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 408.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Ibid.*, p. 411.

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, pp. 169, 170.

*By Suh Young-Shil, a children's teacher at the Suh-myun Seventh-day Adventist English Institute in Pusan, South Korea.*



# “What Must I Do?”

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** Col. 1:13, 14

An age-old question is How do I know that I am saved?

What can we learn from today’s Bible verses and similar ones about the guarantee of salvation? We hear a lot about the mark of the beast, but what about the mark, or seal, that God has placed upon His chosen ones? Does anyone qualify?

In Revelation 7:1-8, God itemizes some identifying characteristics peculiar to human nature. These represent each character of the 12 sons of Israel. Each of us has a personality trait found in at least one of Jacob’s sons. While developing characters on earth, we must receive the “seal of the living God” (verse 2) in order to “have right to the tree of life” (22:14).

What determines whether or not we have the mark of salvation in our lives? Is it regular church attendance on Sabbath, donating large sums of money to worthwhile causes, or emotionally responding to the grace of God?

## Each of us has a personality trait found in at least one of Jacob’s sons.

Based on biblical principles, the answer to the above questions is a decided No. Those who obtain the seal of the living God are those who live by the Word of God. The Bible must be the only living principle by which they are guided.

But what about faith? Does not the Bible say that “the just shall live by faith”? (Rom. 1:17). Yes it does, but remember what God says about some professed Christians: “Someone will say, ‘You have faith; I have deeds.’ Show me your faith without deeds, and I will show you my faith by what I do” (James 2:18, NIV).

There will be a marked difference between those who will be saved and those who have the mark of the beast. To enter heaven, away from this sin-darkened world, we must look like Jesus, act like Jesus, talk like Jesus, and ultimately be like Him.

## REACT

1. In 1 John 5:13 the apostle tells us that we can know that we have eternal life. Why do you think he wants us to be certain?
2. What realities does he highlight in his letter to give us certainty?
3. Jesus said that the mark of Christians is love for one another. Why do you think He chose this characteristic?

*By Park Se-Jong, an administrator at the Pusan Adventist Hospital, South Korea.*

# Salvation: Quickly, Quickly

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Acts 16:30, 31**

Since living in Korea I have noticed one thing in particular. Almost everyone is in a hurry. As in most major cities, if you are not careful, you may get jostled on every side. Because of economic struggles, many people don't have time to do anything but survive and make money. *Bahli* is a Korean term meaning "hurry up" or "move quickly." I find myself often using that terminology when I have little time. It seems as though it is always rush, rush, rush.

In a world in which all is moving so rapidly, who has time to "stand still, and see the salvation of the Lord"? (Exod. 14:13, KJV). Thanks to modern technology, we have access to instant everything. We have no seeming need to "wait on the Lord." So how can we find God in this rat race? Are there any quick ways to gain salvation through the blood of Christ?

**Believe:** It takes no time to believe (Acts 16: 31). As you go throughout the day,

## Justification is the work of a moment.

think about God and His goodness. Your heart can warm up to His love.

**Pray:** Like Nehemiah (2:4) and like the thief on the cross (Luke 23:42, 43), we can gain instant salvation in a quick-fix prayer. It takes no time at all for Jesus to cover you with His blood.

Someone once said that "sanctification is the work of a lifetime." But I dare say that justification is the work of a moment.

## REACT

1. If I can be saved in a moment, then why is it necessary to live a Christian life with all its ups and downs?
2. Are death-bed conversions always legitimate? Explain your answer.
3. What does the term *justification* mean to you?
4. In what way is it instantaneous? Why?
5. What contemporary experiences help illustrate sanctification for you?
6. What part does prayer play in justification?

*By Clarence Hodges, Jr., recruiter at the Suh-myun Seventh-day Adventist Language Institute in Pusan, South Korea.*

# Who's Going to Sit at the Table?

## OPINION

**Key Texts: Acts 4:12; John 10:16**

Working as an English/Bible instructor, I have encountered many thought-provoking questions from my students. Some of the students are from a Buddhist background or are free thinkers. As a result, they are concerned about the salvation of their ancestors.

"Isn't it arrogant to believe that Jesus is the *only* way to heaven?"

"Will my great-grandfather have the opportunity to meet Jesus? He was a good man but was never told of Christ's love."

"If I just try to live a good life, will I be saved?"

These are some of the many inquiries I am called upon to answer. I have also had to face the dilemma of dealing with students who want nothing to do with heaven if their family members are not there. What do you tell students who believe Buddhism reunites their families when Christianity seems not to? What do you say to people who have had abusive "Christian" relationships and, as a

---

## **"Isn't it arrogant to believe that Jesus is the *only* way to heaven?"**

---

result, reject religion completely? Some would think that such cases have no hope. Many people wonder at God's justice. What a tragedy to believe that God would send people to hell just because they grew up in the wrong culture!

The responsibility of the church is to enlighten and reveal truth. It should provide fellowship, inspiration, and training. But, unfortunately, some who do not attend church and some we style as "heathen" have higher standards than many professed Christians. Is it for this reason that we have so many skeptics? How can we account for the statement by Ellen White that "those whom Christ commends in the judgment may have known little of theology, but they have cherished His principles. . . . Among the heathen are those who worship God ignorantly, those to whom the light is never brought by human instrumentality, *yet they will not perish.*"\*

## **REACT**

1. Since we know that the church itself does not save us, why then is joining a church so important?

2. If it is possible for unbelievers to be saved, why should we send out missionaries?

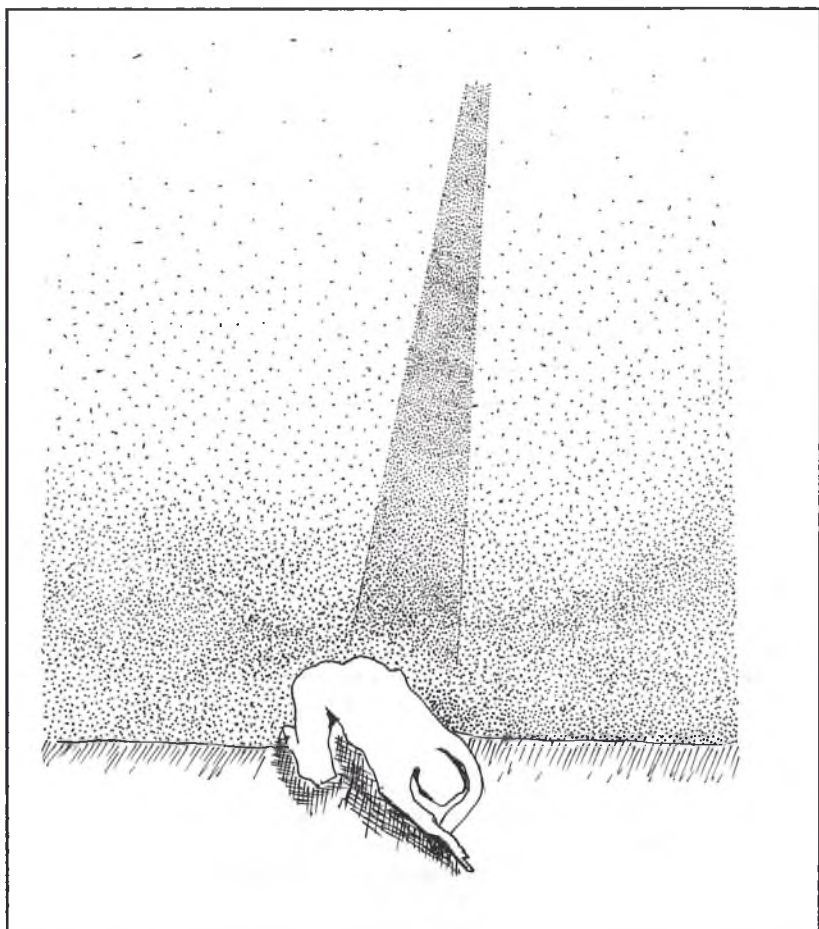
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\**Maranatha*, p. 320 (italics supplied).

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*By Bryan Bissel, a teacher at the Suh-myun Seventh-day Adventist Language Institute in Pusan, South Korea.*

# WHO'S IN CHARGE HERE?



**“ ‘You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me, yet you refuse to come to me to have life’ ” (John 5:39, 40, NIV).**

# God's Salvation

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Isa. 55:7**

Sometimes in our Christian experience, we forget that God is all-powerful. Nevertheless, for the sake of our human frailties, God has given us His Word of His love for us. According to Titus 1:2, we can be assured of salvation because God cannot lie, and even from the beginning of the world we have been promised eternal life.

Some of the greatest examples of God's salvation can be found in the historical records of the Scriptures. David was forgiven of his adulterous sin with Bathsheba and the murder of Uriah, the Hittite. "The law of God pronounced the adulterer guilty of death."<sup>1</sup> But David sincerely repented of his great sin. God's promise to the repentant sinner went into effect, and David saw the evidence of his pardon.

Another example of God's gift of salvation is the experience of Mary Magdalene, who was caught in adultery. The Spirit of Prophecy tells us that "her heart was melted" as Jesus forgave her. "She cast herself at the feet of Jesus, sobbing out her grateful love, and with bitter tears confessing her sins."<sup>2</sup> Jesus' pardon began a new life for her of devoted service to God.

---

## **Saul "bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child."**

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While God is faithful to forgive the repentant sinner, He does not reduce or lessen the consequences of sin. He seeks not to condemn but to save the sinner. Paul's conversion on the road to Damascus is another example of the gift of salvation. On the journey to persecute God's people, Paul was confronted with the question, "Why persecutest thou me?" (Acts 9:4, KJV). Saul yielded fully to the Holy Spirit and "bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child, confessing his own unworthiness and pleading the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour."<sup>3</sup> Salvation was given to Saul, who became Paul. God cannot provide salvation without human response. We need to repent truly and sincerely, and salvation will be given to us. These historical references are just a few examples of what salvation through God's power can do.

There is something we must never underestimate in regard to salvation: the power of our personal testimonies. How often do we neglect our personal blessings as strong evidence of our salvation? In fact, miracles are going on all the time. Yet, we have eyes and see not. We have ears and hear not! God has promised us that His love is everlasting (Jer. 31:3). The life and death of Jesus Christ is the greatest evidence of God's salvation.

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1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 718.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 462.

3. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 119.

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*By Derrick P. Whitlow I, pastor of the Southside Philadelphia Church, Indianapolis, Indiana.*

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# Search the Scriptures

## LOGOS

**Luke 4:16-21; John 3:16; 17:3; Exod. 6:1-3; Mark 8:31-33; Rom. 5:8**

“Search the scriptures” (John 5:39). The memory text as it relates to the present appears to invite you to taste and see. The Scriptures invite you to search out the prophecies of Jesus and research what you have found on the subject of the Messiah, the plan of redemption, and how that plan relates to you personally. In the days of Jesus, He no doubt posed this as a plain declaration to the Sanhedrin: “You diligently study the Scriptures because you think that by them you possess eternal life. These are the Scriptures that testify about me” (verse 39, NIV).

Ancient Jews thought that knowledge of the law would itself assure eternal life, but Jesus asserted that the Scriptures spoke of Him.<sup>1</sup> It would behoove us to heed the words of Christ. As we earnestly search the Scriptures, we will learn of the Messiah, the fulfillment of prophecies that will fortify our faith and through that faith we know that Christ redeems us from sin, death, and Satan.

**Luke 4:16-21.** *The SDA Commentary* points out that this was Jesus’ first return to Nazareth after He began His public ministry. When Jesus stood to read, He specifically requested the scroll of Isaiah and Scriptures that testified of Him. He brought attention to the Scriptures that attested to His being anointed to preach the gospel to the poor, heal the brokenhearted, preach deliverance to the captive, restore sight to the blind, and comfort those who are bruised. He concluded, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21, NIV).

## It is said that hindsight is 20/20.

The powers of Jesus’ preaching were well known in Nazareth. Reports were well circulated concerning His ministry of teaching and healing in Judea. He validated His ministry through Scripture when He announced, “Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing.” The Scriptures give witness of the Messiah: who He is and what is the nature of His work.

**John 3:16.** This text communicates a love that is superior to that which is portrayed in our world today. Today’s love is often conditional: I love you if you love me. The love in John 3:16 describes the preeminent attribute of the Creator with respect to His creatures. “It is the controlling force in divine government.”<sup>2</sup> God loves us in spite of us. He invites us to “search the scriptures” because in them we find God, who is love. He loves (*agape*) us and does not want anyone to be lost (John 5:39).

**Mark 8:31-33.** This text begins with Jesus teaching His disciples that as the Messiah, He must suffer many things: rejection, crucifixion, and resurrection (Mark 8:31). As we search the Scriptures, we must identify the Redeemer as He coincides with the fulfillment of prophecies. By understanding God’s purpose, we can (with God’s grace and the assistance of the Holy Spirit) put Jehovah’s plans in proper perspective. The Messiah must fit the identifying marks of prophecy. (See Psalm 22:1, 7, 8, 15-18.)

In teaching His disciples, Jesus said that as the Messiah, He must suffer and

be killed as recorded in the Old Testament: “My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me? why art thou so far from helping me, and from the words of my roaring?” (Ps. 22:1, KJV). These are not mere words of a dying man but prophecy being fulfilled. Centuries before the crucifixion, the Savior had foretold the treatment He was to receive.<sup>3</sup>

**Isaiah 53:9.** “A rich man donated a grave for him. He had done nothing violent neither had He ever deceived anyone” (The Clear Word). Persons who were put to death by crucifixion were consigned to a specific burial ground. However, Joseph of Arimathea and Nicodemus influenced Pilate to turn the body of Jesus over to them for an honorable burial. Jesus was laid in the tomb of Joseph of Arimathea, a wealthy man and member of the Sanhedrin.

**Numbers 9:12.** Jesus’ bones were not broken, as was the custom to hasten the death of those crucified. Instead, Jesus was found to be already dead. “The legs of the two thieves were broken to hasten their death.”<sup>4</sup> Today as believers of the gospel, when we search the Scriptures we find the prophecies written centuries earlier fulfilled very accurately. What impact does the fulfillment have on you?

**John 5:40.** As we dare to search the Scriptures and learn of God and the eternal life that He offers, why do so many not choose life? Many during Jesus’ day—even the disciples—did not fully understand Jesus’ mission. Not until Christ died, rose again as prophesied, and met with the disciples did the teachings begin to take hold of their lives. It is said that hindsight is 20/20, meaning if we can see the end from the beginning, we would make the right choices in life. When we search the Scriptures, it provides a witness that allows us to make the right choices. If this is true, why do so many still choose not to believe who Jesus is?

## **REACT**

1. Do you believe Jesus is the Messiah? Why?
2. What strengthens your belief in Jesus?
3. Why do you think many choose death over eternal life?
4. How would you discuss with a friend and loved one the authenticity of Jesus Christ?

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1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 955.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 929.

3. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 746.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 771.

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# Blessed Assurance

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Heb. 9:28**

*“Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many people; and he will appear a second time, not to bear sin, but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for him” (Heb. 9:28, NIV; italics supplied).*

We can be assured that Christ was sacrificed once to take away the sins of many and will appear a second time, not to bear sins but to bring salvation to those who are waiting for Him.

Are you absolutely sure that you are saved? Many Christians struggle with this question daily. How can we know? What if there were some kind of indicator that would give us the status of our salvation? What if we could purchase, or earn, our salvation? Would that be easier? If salvation could be bought or sold, where would you and I be? Fortunately for us, we don't have to earn our salvation or work to purchase it.

Ellen White makes it clear that we do not earn our salvation by obeying God's laws.<sup>1</sup> Salvation is God's gift, and we receive it freely by faith. Salvation is ours by grace through faith in Jesus Christ. It is a gift of God that was established for us before Creation by the Father and Jesus Christ our Redeemer and Savior.

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## **“The life of an angel could not pay the debt.”**

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Furthermore, she states, only Jesus Christ can provide redemption. When the angels learned of the plan of salvation, they “prostrated themselves before him. They offered their lives. Jesus said to them that he would by his death save many, that the life of an angel could not pay the debt. His life alone could be accepted of His Father as a ransom for man.”<sup>2</sup>

Jesus Christ is our assurance. “We have put our hope in the living God, who is the Savior of all men, and especially of those who believe” (1 Tim. 4:10, NIV). So, while it is not uncommon for us to wonder about our salvation or at times to feel totally lost with no hope at all, we need not despair, for even Christ experienced similar feelings at Gethsemane because He could not see through the portals of the tomb. He put on humanity when He came into this world. As a human, He suffered in all manner as we suffer. He was tempted as we are tempted and could have fallen. He was not completely sure that God would accept His sacrifice.

Nevertheless, we can be assured of our salvation through the merits of Jesus Christ alone, God's gift to humanity.

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1. *Steps to Christ*, p. 62.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 7A, p. 454.

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*By Justin Baham, a business management major at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.*

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# How Sure Are You?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Rom. 5:8, 9**

How many things in this life can we truly say are guaranteed? Better yet, if we live in a world of sin and uncertainty, how can we be sure that God's grace is truly sufficient?

One day after teaching Bible class, I sat down to pray. Sometimes we have to take some quiet time when no one is around and chat with God. So I asked the Holy Spirit, "Is salvation really a guarantee?" He told me in a still small voice, "It sure is."

Romans 5:8, 9 says, "God showed His love for us while we were sinners—by nature, His enemies—in giving his Son to die for us. If Christ died for us while we were sinners, how much more sure is our rescue from destruction now that He has reclaimed us?" (The Clear Word).

This amazed me. Why? Because God has the connection.

What is this connection? In the story of redemption God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit discussed the plan of salvation so we could have a guarantee in life. Meanwhile, Lucifer was angry because he was not included in

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## **Lucifer was angry because he was not included in the meeting.**

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the meeting and attempted to discredit God in heaven. God the Son volunteered Himself as the perfect sacrifice, example, and savior for us. God the Father lovingly consented.

Jesus was born in a world of sin in Bethlehem. Though He was tempted in all points, He lived a perfect life. He never sinned. Jesus began His ministry of healing, teaching, and preaching during the spring. He died on the cross for all our sins. He lay in a grave three days and rose early Sunday morning as our risen Savior and King. Now He is in heaven, representing us as our lawyer and mediating on our behalf. He will soon come back again to take us to heaven to be with Him, His Father, the Holy Ghost, the angels, and all the other holy beings.

We can see that Jesus Christ began a marvelous work on our behalf. Even now, as you are reading these words, Jesus is finishing this good work. His grace is and will always be sufficient, because Jesus Christ is all we need.

Our responsibilities are to obey Him willingly and to pray when faced with any issues or problems. We should always remember to read and study God's Holy Word, the Bible, each day.

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*By Frederick A. Whitlow II, a literature evangelist for the Southwest Regional Conference, Dallas, Texas.*

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# Our Assurance

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: John 5:39, 40**

The question is: Can you accept His death on Calvary? We need to question ourselves every day about this. We should take it as our life assurance. If you can, imagine yourself in His position living the kind of life He lived. If you want to know how to let Christ be your assurance, here are some steps to follow:

**1. Know who Jesus is.** The word *Christ* means “the anointed one,” and the name *Jesus* means “the Lord is salvation.” Jesus came to give us salvation—God’s free gift to humankind—and open the way for humanity to be redeemed from this earth. Trust Him, have faith in Him, and allow Him to change your life forever.

**2. Search the Scriptures.** The Bible says to search the Scriptures. They tell us about how Christ died for us on Calvary. They tell how He died for our sins; taking upon Himself a burden that no sinful being could bear. Christ is all we need to make our life complete. Jesus promised us all things, and He proved His love for us by His death on the cross.

**3. Accept Jesus.** How do we accept Christ as our life assurance? Know who

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## Imagine yourself in His position living the kind of life He lived.

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Jesus is. Search the Scriptures and believe the treasures you read therein. Apply them to your daily life. Know about the sacrifice of His life for us. Jesus is the Son that God promised to send to be our living example and to teach us of God’s love and salvation.

## REACT

1. Why is it that knowing the facts about Jesus is helpful in learning to trust Him?
2. What parallels do you see between this and human relationships?
3. What is it about the death of Christ that transforms lives?

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*By Tian Matthews, a freshman at Delgado Junior Community College, New Orleans, Louisiana.*

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# Stressed Out?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Josh. 24:15**

Asking others how they can be assured of salvation is almost like asking whether they are going to be saved or lost. To many, this question raises serious doubts that may leave them feeling stressed and fearful. They may feel trapped, with nowhere to turn because they may feel lost or feel that God no longer loves them. But what has helped me get through this trapped phase is the realization that we cannot trust our emotions all the time. Emotions are unreliable. We are to trust God.

Why does the topic of assurance of salvation evoke such fear and doubt? Why does it dredge up stress and worry when it should bring joy? Only you can answer these questions. As for me, I have hope. This topic of assurance of salvation brings a peace of mind that comes through knowing Jesus personally. I have realized that God, in His Word, has outlined that we are to love Him with all our heart, mind, and soul. God loves us with an everlasting love, and that perfect love casts out all fear.

Fear is the result of distrusting God's love. It is of Satan, and love is born from above. "Choose for yourselves this day whom you will serve" (Josh. 24:15, NIV).

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## Emotions are unreliable. We are to trust God.

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As for me, I had two choices. I could stay depressed, thinking that the Lord no longer loved me or wanted to save me, or I could get up, take action, and move forward in faith doing God's bidding. I opted for the second choice. And it is with great joy that I say with Joshua: "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

So now the choices we have are laid before us. On one hand we have doubt, fear, stress, and anxiety; on the other hand, we have confidence, love, freedom, and peace of mind. Which will we choose? The Bible says, "Choose ye this day" (Josh. 24:15, KJV). Let us make our decision today without delay. Move forward in faith, basking in the light of God's love. As we do this—walking that Christian way—God will work in us the desire to do His will and do His good works. He will place within our hearts hope and a sweet assurance of salvation. If we want to be relieved of all the stress and worry about being saved or lost, give that burden to Jesus and keep moving forward. Keep looking up, going on God's errands, and keeping our hand in the hand of God.

## REACT

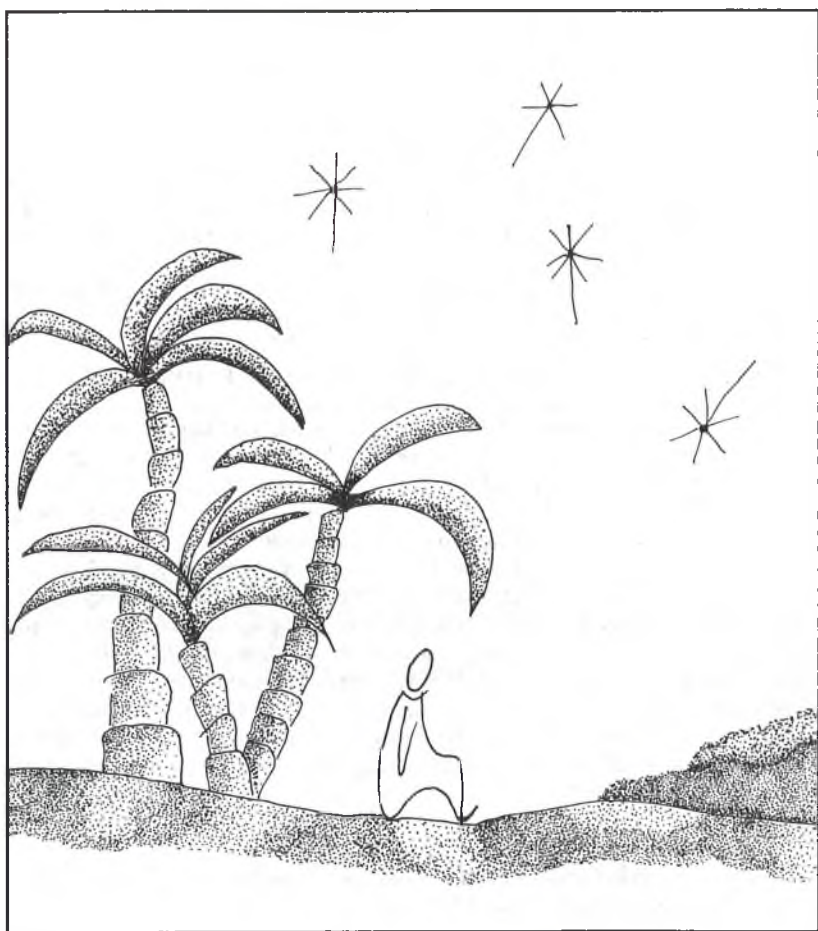
1. Have you ever been worried that you might not be saved? If so, what did you do?
2. How has God's gift of salvation changed your life?

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*By Kelley Alexander, a freshman at the University of New Orleans, Louisiana.*

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# NEVER LOST OR ALONE



**“Here is a trustworthy saying that deserves full acceptance: Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners—of whom I am the worst” (1 Tim. 1:15, NIV).**

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# Lost in the Gobi

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Jer. 50:6

On an ADRA Canada mission to the south Gobi desert of Mongolia, Christ's mission for His people suddenly became clear to me. Nearing the end of our third week in the village of Nomgon, where we had been constructing a medical clinic, our team of 10 students had become accustomed to the nonproselytizing law of the country. It was for this reason we decided to find a secluded place for our Sabbath worship. This excursion would also prove to be a welcome relief from our celebrity status as foreigners.

Because the desert surrounding Nomgon was intensely monotonous, we became quite excited at the sight of a mysterious mountain peak to the west. After an exhausting four-hour hike, we joyfully reached the peak. One group member, reciting a famous line from a popular movie, shouted, "I'm the king of the world," as he was prone to do upon reaching any elevated area! We were all amazed by the vast mountain ranges that came into view from this peak.

After determining that the crest of this mountain was not big enough for all of us to camp on, we headed down the other side and found a peaceful valley in which

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## **He did not seem interested in making any new acquaintances.**

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to lay out our sleeping bags. Knowing that the night would bring a temperature of 0-Centigrade or less, we thought it might be wise to find some desert campfire fuel—camel dung. Lo and behold, we found a producer of the desert fuel—a half-shaven, hobbled camel—a very long way from any sort of civilization. He did not seem interested in making any new acquaintances and became quite annoyed by the amount of attention that 10 camera-happy tourists were lavishing upon him.

Later that night as I lay in my sleeping bag, gazing at the magnificent array of stars and trying to fight off the cold, I thought of the lonely camel: Where did he come from? Why was he hobbled? Would he ever be found? Where was he now? I was suddenly filled with peace and security when I realized that the true "King of the World" would never leave me lost, hobbled, or alone in the desert of life.

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*By Carol F. Tardif, a fourth-year elementary education major and history minor, Canadian University College, College Heights, Alberta.*

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# Jesus Works

## LOGOS

**John 4:25, 34; 19:30; 2 Cor. 5:14-21; Eph. 1:4; Heb. 6:19, 20; Acts 17:31**

**Key Thought:** Jesus works for our eternal security in life, death, resurrection, and judgment.

Insecurity, uncertainty, and feelings of loneliness are all too common in our world. Global economic crises loom ominously before us. Social upheaval is rampant—divorce, suicide, teenage pregnancy, unemployment. The clamor of multitudes pushes in on every side—but all too often we feel alone. These things have been with us since the Fall. But the clock has struck midnight, and darkness, it seems, is deeper now than ever.

God understands the darkness. Jesus came from the kingdom of light to this dark world. His first home was a dark, dingy, dirty animal shelter. He knew insecurity—He and His family lived as strangers in a foreign land for the better part of His early life.

Jesus' life was marked with loneliness. At the beginning of His ministry He walked for 40 days in the wilderness of temptation. He was alone. Then—out of the silence—came Satan: “‘If you are the Son of God’” (Matt. 4:3, NIV). But Jesus clung to the strength of His Father's unshakable word. He replied, three times, “‘It is written,’” (verses 4, 7, 10, KJV).

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## **Jesus came from the kingdom of light to this dark world.**

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At that moment Jesus vocalized His eternal commitment to work, by faith alone, for the assurance and uplifting of fallen humanity. Further, He gave us an example of victorious faith. Faith that trusts in the unfailing promises of God is victorious. (See 2 Peter 1:3, 4.)

In Jesus' presence God's Word becomes our assurance, security, fellowship. Jesus met a woman one day at Jacob's well. She had spent most of her adult life running from one man's bed to another's. She longed for forgiveness, love, and security—a place to belong. “‘Will you give me a drink?’” Jesus asked (John 4:7, NIV). *Why is this Jew asking me, a Samaritan woman, a favor?* she asked herself. Yet there was something reassuring about this stranger.

Jesus read her heart. He sensed her soul thirst for something better. Jesus answered, “‘Everyone who drinks this water will be thirsty again, but whoever drinks the water I give him will never thirst. Indeed, the water I give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life’” (John 4:13, 14, NIV). In Him she found what she had been looking for. She found a soul sanctuary—she found home.

But Jesus had no home. His destiny was the cross. Roman soldiers stripped Him of His clothing. They hung Him naked on the cross, with not even the security of a familiar garment to die in. Two thieves mocked Him. Onlookers taunted Him. At least the chief priests protested, but their concern was over a sign that was nailed to the cross. It read: “This is Jesus, the King of the Jews” (Matt. 27:37, NIV).

Jesus' mother wept at His feet. He yearned to reach out, to comfort and kiss the one who had comforted Him. But His hands were crushed and His lips parched. His tongue burned for water. " 'I am thirsty,' " (John 19:28, NIV), He said. But they gave Him vinegar.

In those terrible forsaken moments, Jesus was taking upon Himself the sins of the world. Our aloneness became His. Our thirst parched His lips. Our insecurity, His nakedness. Our sin, His death.

But Christ's death brings the assurance of life. New life! Resurrection Life! Eternal Life! Triumphantly the apostle Paul declares, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God" (2 Cor. 5:21, NIV).

One day Jesus will come to gather His righteous ones. Then He will come as a Judge over all the universe. The gavel will fall, and He will finish the work that He began so long ago. There will be great joy on that day for those who have learned to trust in Him and in His unwavering promises.

For Jesus will have become for them " 'the Alpha and the Omega' " (Rev. 1:8, NIV), "the author and perfecter of [their] faith" (Heb. 12:2, NIV). They will have gained victory through the absolute assurance they have found in Him and in His unshakeable promises. They will declare with rejoicing "that he who began a good work in [them] *will carry it on to completion* until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6, NIV; emphasis supplied).

Jesus works, you see. He works for our eternal security in life, death, resurrection, and judgment. Yes, Jesus works. He worked then, and He works now, and He will work forevermore. Won't you let Jesus work for you?

## **REACT**

1. Think back to a time when you experienced aloneness—what was it like? How did you feel? Was there any assurance for you to cling to?

2. God calls those of us who trust Him to serve Him. How is God calling you to serve Him more fully?

3. When was the last time you visualized and meditated on the naked, suffering Jesus hanging on the cross for your sin?

4. If you've never done this, what is your reaction to trying it? If you have, what was your reaction? Why?

5. How do you think it would affect you if you spent just five minutes a day visualizing this scene from a different perspective each day (i.e., the women at the cross, the soldiers, the Sanhedrin, the disciples, etc.)?

6. If you saw the film *The Last Temptation of Christ*, what was your opinion of it? If not, do you think it would be wrong to see this movie? Why?

7. Why do you think the death of Jesus is given more space and attention in the Gospels than any single "work" of Christ?

# Unconditional Love

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 4:34**

Jesus didn't come into this world wearing royal robes, seated in a golden coach, riding down Main Street Jerusalem, delivering the people from the Romans, like so many people expected. Jesus chose to enter this world by being born in a lowly, dirty, smelly stable. By choosing this path, "Christ took upon Him the infirmities of degenerate humanity. Only thus could He rescue man from the lowest depths of his degradation."<sup>1</sup> By taking on man's sinful form, Christ experienced temptations, yet He never gave in to them.

"He never committed sin, in word, in thought, or in deed. Throughout the entire course of His life He kept Himself from sin in every way. Here on earth He lived a holy, undefiled, and pure life, ever conscious of being in harmony with the Father's will."<sup>2</sup> Ellen White goes on to say that "Christ, the Sinless One, took sinful humanity to His warm heart of love and experienced the temptations that beset us without being in the least degree overcome by them. He 'identified Himself with sinners.'<sup>3</sup>"

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### **By taking on man's sinful form, Christ experienced temptations, yet He never gave in to them.**

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Imagine Christ's unconditional love for us to risk everything by becoming a human man and taking on human infirmities. When one really stops to think, the whole plan of salvation lay in the palms of that tiny babe that lay in a lowly manger. How Satan must have worked to tempt the Savior and make Him slip. Yet as Ellen White said, He never gave in to the temptations.

When Christ was ready to begin His ministry, He went into the wilderness to spend time with His heavenly Father in prayer. It was during this time when Christ became very weak from the lack of food. Here Satan tried his best to tempt the Savior. Christ might have been weak from the lack of food, but He had the strength from the Father to withstand the tempter. "When Christ was the most fiercely beset by temptation, He ate nothing. He committed Himself to God and, through earnest prayer and perfect submission to the will of His Father, came off conqueror."<sup>4</sup>

Jesus came to this world to serve humankind. What are we doing to serve Him?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 117.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 870.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, p. 202.

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*By Heidi Unruh, a third-year elementary education student at Canadian University College, College Heights, Alberta.*

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# In God We Trust

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: 1 Tim. 1:15**

We read Paul's counsel to those whom he has left in charge: He advises Timothy to take time and care not just to instruct but also to encourage. The lesson for us today is reassuring and brings to us the same hope with which Paul intended to comfort Timothy.

In the original language, the words *pistos o logos* means "a faithful saying." This refers to the faithfulness of Jesus. It shows us the totality of the revelation given by Jesus Christ. Paul is trying to be very clear in this verse as to the mission of the Savior, and to remind the fellow believers that Jesus is worthy of their approval and acceptance.

Paul explains to the church why Jesus came into this world. He says that "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15, NIV). This is a wake-up call for all Christians. How does he describe himself? As the thing he despised the most: a sinner.

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## This is a wake-up call for all Christians.

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The experience of personal religion is when each person is alone with their God. This can be extremely revealing. The Holy Spirit reveals our faults, and if we let God work on us, the end product is truly amazing. I can appreciate the ministry of the apostle Paul. He did not consider himself of any great importance in the shadow of Jesus Christ.

We all need that self-examination in our lives on a daily basis, to marvel at the amount of patience and understanding that God has for us. He listens to us night and day and never becomes tired of us coming to Him constantly with our joys and our sorrows. He has advice and encouragement to help us make it through the hard times. I believe if we all, like Paul, allow Jesus to make us humble, we also would realize that Jesus came from glory to save us. The problems will still be there, but the burdens will be lighter because of Him.

## REACT

Reflect on the relationship that Paul had with Jesus and ask yourself how Paul maintained such a strong connection? Look at your own staying power.

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*By Andrew King, a fourth-year theology student at Canadian University College, College Heights, Alberta.*

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# Dear Cherie

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: John 5:1-8**

Dear Cherie:

Congratulations on finishing your course in nursing. I'm so proud of you. You are one of my favorite people, and I ask God to be with you every day. I know a little of what you are going through, because your mom and I have talked. Please don't be upset with her for telling me—she loves you so much I believe she would give up her life for you if that would change things.

Right now I know you would like to have a long talk with your Uncle Brian. You two seemed to understand each other. We wish he were still with us. Remember the struggle that he had with his addiction to alcohol? For years he fought against going to Alcoholics Anonymous. He was terrified that if he really were healed from the alcoholism, then what would he do when he was stressed? Sad? Hurting? Depressed? He said it was like going to the hospital to have his right arm amputated.

Cherie, there is not one of us who doesn't need healing. Whether it's emotional, physical, or relational, for all it is spiritual healing, even though we may not even know we are sick.

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## Remember the struggle that he had with his addiction to alcohol?

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When Brian went to AA, he sat with others in a circle and said, "Hello, my name is Brian, and I'm an alcoholic." Right then he was closer to a solution than he had ever been before. You have already taken the first step. *You have admitted you have a problem.* Then you took the second step and *admitted you are incapable of solving it.* I am proud of you.

Let's talk about another man who had a problem. He, and many others, were lying by this pool of water. It was believed that after an angel stirred the waters, the first one in would be healed. Jesus stopped beside this man, the most pitiful of all, and asked, "Do you want to be healed?"

A flicker of hope lighted up in the man's heart. "Yes, sir, but I don't have anyone to help me."

Jesus said, "Get up, pick up your bed, and walk." He didn't ask him for a signed, written statement of his faith or a promise of a sin-free future. He simply asked the man to act on his faith. He made a decision to put his will on the side of Christ, to let go and let God. He sprang to his feet and discovered he was a healthy man.

Cherie, Jesus is lifting your eyes up to His and saying, "Do you want to be healed?" Please say Yes.

I love you, Cherie.

Aunt Katie

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*By Shari Macdonald Hagen, assistant dean in Lakeview Hall, at Canadian University College, College Heights, Alberta.*

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# God Is . . .

## OPINION

**Key Text:** Acts 4:12

We know God by so many different names. These names are supposed to show the various types of relationships people can have with Him. Are these names relevant to us at all anymore?

Growing up in the church, I had a relationship with God only through my parents. I didn't truly know Him for myself. How could I relate to God knowing Him as "the Good Shepherd" or "the Bread of Life"? I probably could have if I had lived back in Bible times. Back then, they knew exactly how important shepherds were and how important bread was in order to live. It is difficult to relate to any of those names anymore.

If we realize how small, sinful, and insignificant we humans are, we should be able to relate to God. He is our wonderful Savior. He didn't have to create us, to let us continue to live after the incident in Eden, and He definitely didn't have to send His only Son to die in our place. If we sit back and really think about God and what He's done for us, we can truly believe that He loves each of us. This knowledge can give a basis for a way to relate to God. We can relate to God as our Savior and begin to have a personal relationship with Him.

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### **It is difficult to relate to any of those names anymore.**

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The name of Savior is one of God's names we can still relate to and begin to base a relationship with Him. But where do we go from there? God is so much more than just our Savior. In the Bible He was described as so much more, but these names don't mean as much now as they did back then. Is it that the Bible is outdated? Does this mean that there is no way we can have the same kind of relationship with God as they did in Bible times? Maybe we should update the names for God that express the various aspects of His work on earth. For instance, instead of calling Him the Good Shepherd, maybe use a name we would understand as holding similar meanings: He loves us, searches for any lost person no matter what, and watches over every individual on earth.

It is extremely important to remember the name of God. He is our Savior, our Friend, our Provider, our Parent, our Sustainer, and so much more. We should look closely at the names that have been used for our God, figure out why the name was used to describe Him, and find a name that suits God in terms of the present day.

## **REACT**

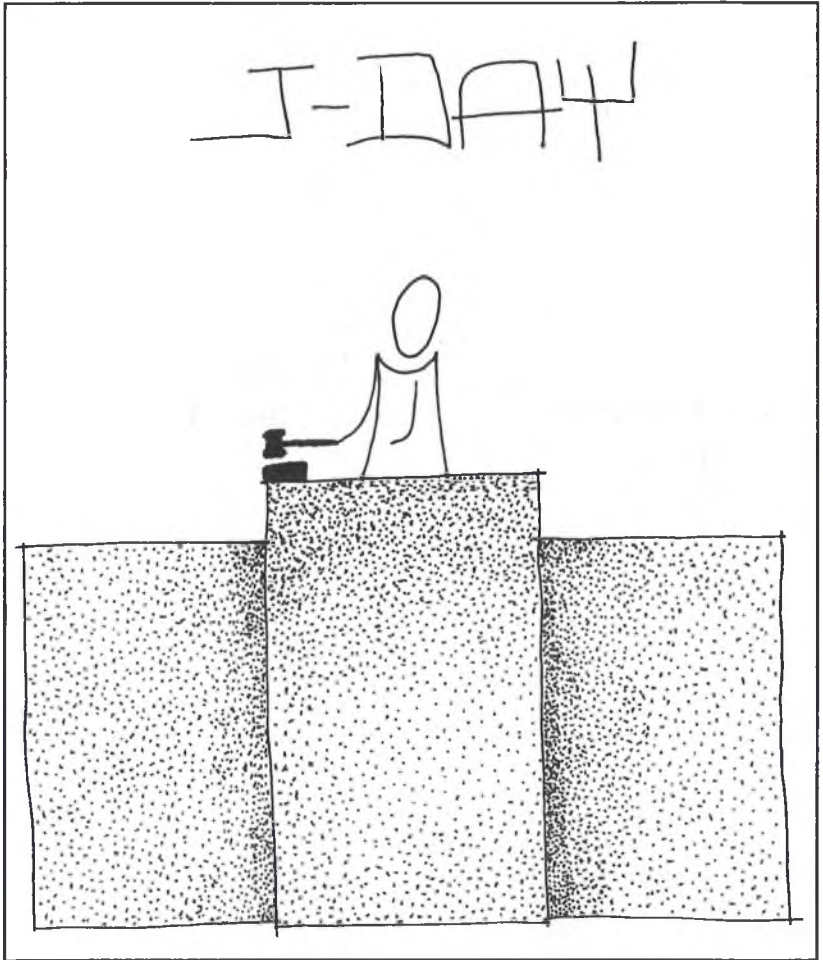
What kind of names can you come up with that would describe God and mean something to you?

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*By Amy Rochford, a junior math/chemistry secondary education major at Canadian University College, College Heights, Alberta.*

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# SENTENCED TO LIFE!



**“God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him” (John 3:17, NIV).**

# Judgment Day

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rom. 3:21-26**

It was a tense moment. The crowd seated in the courtroom remained nervously chatting as the jury returned from deliberations. The defendant, with a look of desperation, focused complete attention on the 12 members of the jury who had funneled in and taken their seats. Instantly, the courtroom was hushed as the jury delivered its verdict: "On the charge of reckless endangerment, we find the defendant guilty."

From one side of the courtroom, cheers of joy could be heard; on the opposite side, however, tears lurked in many of the onlookers' eyes. The judge, pounding his gavel, demands order in the court. When all is calm, he sentences the defendant, who is then led out by the same officers who had previously escorted him into the courtroom.

Here on earth, our courts are the busiest they have ever been. Men, women, and children await their day in court. Before the judgment is made, however, society is to assume that all who enter the courts are innocent until proven guilty. If found guilty, they are then sentenced by a judge.

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## **When the judge pronounces His verdict, we will be sentenced to heaven.**

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Most of us will never have to go in front of a judge and be proven innocent or guilty, yet each of us will one day soon come before our heavenly Father to be judged. The difference will be that we are not presumed innocent until proven guilty, but guilty until proven innocent through Jesus Christ.

We are born into this world full of sin, and there is no way for us to escape. "Blessed are those whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered; blessed is the one against whom the Lord will not reckon sin" (Rom. 4:7, 8, NRSV). This is difficult for us to comprehend, but through faith in the free grace of God, we are all loved, accepted, forgiven, and freed from our sins. When the judge pronounces His verdict, we will be sentenced to heaven. I am anxious for that day to come, aren't you?

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*By Missy Willson, an elementary teacher at St. Patrick School, Walkerton, Indiana.*

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# A Leap of Faith

## LOGOS

**Matt. 2:5-12; 20:10-16; Luke 18:1-14; 15:11-32; John 1:29; 8:1-11**

It's a hot, muggy day, and even though it is only 8:30 A.M., you can feel a bead of sweat trickling down the back of your arm. You look around the crowded subway car as it careens down the track to its destination. You've seen the faces around you before—perhaps not the same ones, but these expressions are timeless: boredom, anxiety, curiosity, sadness, stress, pain, and the list goes on and on. You question, What is it that all these people have in common? What is the factoring bond that unites these individuals in spite of their personal uniqueness?

Immediately you focus on the particulars. Well, they're all riding the subway. OK, but what else? They're all wearing clothes and going somewhere. Yo, Sherlock! Can you somehow take these superficial observations and give them some substance? Well, now, if we are going to try to glean spiritual truth from this mundane event, then we have to draw from the cisterns of knowledge that we have accumulated over our one score and miscellaneous years of life. Let's get some facts straight:

### FACT

1. They are all human beings.
2. They are all on a subway that does the majority of its travels in darkness, away from the sun.
3. The subway has a preordained destination.
4. All the passengers are wearing clothes.

### SIGNIFICANCE

1. We are all sons and daughters of God.
2. Being born into a world of darkness, our exposure to the Son is typically limited.
3. Because we are born into a sinful world as sinners, our natural destination is death.
4. The clothes that we wear, unless provided by God, are filthy and full of holes.

After analyzing these facts, you quickly surmise that this is one train you do not want to be on! This train is bound for hell! Frantically you yell at the conductor to stop the train—funny you hadn't noticed his Vulcan-like ears and the deep reddish hue to his skin. The guy laughs salaciously at you and tells you to “chill out” and “ride the Big One.”

No way! You spot the emergency release, yank on the lever, and the doors fly open. Before you lunge into certain oblivion, you notice that the train seems to have quadrupled its speed. With all the determination of a wind-blown feather, you take a deep breath and jump!

As you're hurtling through space, you spy another train coming at you from a different direction. Can things get any worse? You close your eyes, whisper softly, “Oh God, if You're out there, save me . . .” and grit your teeth for the expected impact. But the impact never comes.

You slowly open your eyes, and they quickly widen in amazement. Whoa, what

happened? The last thing you remember was a train bearing down on you, and now here you are, sitting safely in one of its cars. Strange, what happened to your clothes? You don't remember acquiring such nice, new ones. You motion to the conductor. That's certainly an odd smock he's wearing, and what are those 12 stones doing on his chest? His cap is equally peculiar—it looks like a short baker's hat with a gold band across the forehead. What does it say? Nike? No, something like "Holiness to the Lord." As He comes closer, you notice blood dripping from his hands, his feet as well. His forehead—why does it have all those gashes?

Your brain races, memories of Bible stories, Sabbath School, elementary school, academy. Could it be? It's not possible . . . is it? Yes, it must be! Awestruck, you slowly drop to your knees and clutch His feet. Words from the recesses of your mind echo, "Behold the Lamb of God!" (John 1:36).

Jesus never expounded truth via theological expressions. Rather, He used everyday events and stories to drive home His point. I challenge you to find the key thought in each of the following events. What do these stories have to do with each other? As an added consideration, how does the above modern allegory parallel your findings?

### **Players**

1. Eastern mystical astrologers
2. Generous benefactor/whiney employees
3. Persistent parent/truth-telling tax collector
4. Wayward WASP
5. Runaround Sue in church
6. Honest John

### **Texts**

Matthew 2:5-12  
Matthew 20:10-16  
Luke 18:1-14  
Luke 15:11-32  
John 8:1-11  
John 1:19

### **REACT**

1. Look for the key idea in each event above.
2. Try to tie the key ideas together. What perceived truth do you find?
3. How do your findings based on these stories of Christ correlate or detract from your understanding of the assurance of justification by faith?

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*By Joshua Lizarraga, pastor of the LaPorte and Michigan City (Indiana) Seventh-day Adventist churches.*

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# Breaking Satan's Power

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 8:32**

Power. Who has power over you? Do you daily decide, consciously or unconsciously, to give your life over to another force? As Christians, Seventh-day Adventist Christians, do we elect to place our lives in the omnipotent hands of Jesus Christ?

At times, I suspect, Satan's power seems to interrupt the daily offering of ourselves to Jesus Christ, and we succumb to his temptations. When we do, the shadow of darkness falls on our Christian walk, preventing our unashamed, bold approach to our heavenly Father through His Son. We falter in our surrender to Christ because Satan has gained control over us. This is a dark moment in the journey toward the heavenly kingdom. Questions and doubts fill the mind: Am I a child of the King? Am I still saved? Does Jesus still love me?

"The thought that the righteousness of Christ is imputed to us, not because of any merit on our part, but as a free gift from God, is a precious thought. The enemy of God and man is not willing that this truth should be clearly presented; for he knows that if the people receive it fully, his power will be broken. If he can control

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## **This is a dark moment in the journey toward the heavenly kingdom.**

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minds so that doubt and unbelief and darkness shall compose the experience of those who claim to be the children of God, he can overcome them with temptation.

"That simple faith which takes God at His word should be encouraged. God's people must have that faith which will lay hold of divine power; 'for by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: it is the gift of God' (Eph. 2:8). Those who believe that God for Christ's sake has forgiven their sins, should not, through temptation, fail to press on to fight the good fight of faith. Their faith should grow stronger until their Christian life, as well as their words, shall declare, 'The blood of Jesus Christ . . . cleanseth us from all sin' " (1 John 1:7).

As you examine those times of temptation in your life, realize that Jesus Christ paid the price for your freedom to approach boldly the throne of God and obtain the power to overcome through the shed blood of your Savior. When that old serpent approaches you and tries to wield his power over your Christian walk, remember: " 'You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free' " (John 8:32, NIV). The price has already been paid. Satan's power is already broken.

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<sup>\*</sup>*Gospel Workers*, p. 161.

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*By Greg Goolsby, an aircraft mechanic at Michiana Regional Airport, South Bend, Indiana.*

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# Justified Freely by His Grace

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text:** John 8:1-11

*Katakρίνω*, *katakriño*, “judgment,” “damnation,” “condemnation”: The words rise in a suffocating cloud from the dust that surrounds her. Hemmed in by the religious leaders who have thrust her there, the woman lies in shame and humiliation at Jesus’ feet. The law is specific and undeniable: the adulterer and the adulteress will be put to death (Lev. 20:10; Deut. 22:22). Curious that there is no adulterer quivering in fear. Let’s take a closer look.

**The Pharisees.** The religious leaders and their minions are very interested in *katakriño*, but not of the woman cowering before them. She is simply a means to an end, one to be sacrificed for the cause: their power, position, authority. Why are these people here so early in the morning? If this woman was caught in the act, where is her male cohort in crime who likewise stands under the judgment of the law? The entire scene reeks of entrapment—not of the hapless woman, but of the Teacher Himself. In their mind, He has no way out. But Jesus sees things differently. He throws the gauntlet back down at their feet; it is a challenge that none of them is willing to accept.

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## A compassionate, forgiving Messiah is a hard sell in this barren desert.

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**The woman.** Over and over in her mind, scenes of the previous night play out in all their vivid color. Hot tears of humiliation flood over bitter self-accusations. She cannot understand why they have dragged her to the public forum of the temple instead of a courtroom. She struggles to comprehend what any of this has to do with the Teacher seated before her. But one thing pierces clearly through the haze of confusion: She is guilty, caught in the web of her own choices, condemned under the law. But when she hears the voice of her Judge, she meets, perhaps for the first time, a Man who is “interested in saving rather than exploiting and forgiving rather than condemning.” When sentence is passed, she finds that it is neither what she expects nor what she deserves.

**The Teacher.** The prophets foretold Him as One who would bind up, heal, deliver (Isa. 61:1-3). But a compassionate, forgiving Messiah is a hard sell in this barren desert. The people dream of a conquering hero, an enforcer of power and privilege. Sadly, what they want they do not have; what they have they will not accept.

Jesus Himself made it clear: “God sent not His Son into the world to *krino* [condemn] the world; but that the world through him might be *sozo* [saved, rescued, delivered]” (John 3:17, KJV). To the woman and to us, Jesus’ heart of love lifts from the dirt and despair of sin, proclaiming, “No, I do not condemn you. I forgive you. Go forward in faith and leave the path of sin.” We receive the pure gift of justification by His grace, and it is enough.

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\**The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*, vol. 9, p. 91.

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By Sherrie Lizarraga, minister of music, St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, LaPorte, Indiana.

## Before We Ask . . .

### HOW-TO

**Key Texts: Matt. 20:10-16; Luke 15:11-32**

When my kids were learning how to ride a bicycle, there came a time when I had to let go and let them ride on their own. My wife and I watched with pride as they progressed from short jaunts in our driveway with us supporting the bicycle to riding on their own throughout our subdivision. Inevitably, however, there were scraped and bruised knees and elbows from falls as they gradually became more independent and rode farther and faster. When they did fall, we ran to their side to provide encouragement and support, in addition to drying the tears.

Just as my wife and I rushed to our kids' side the instant they fell, so is Christ ready to freely bestow His grace the moment we stumble. Before we even cry out to Him, He knows our pain and is ready to provide refuge and comfort.

Consider these points illustrated in the parables of Matthew 20:10-16; Luke 15:11-31:

**1. Christ gives us more than we deserve.** The prodigal son felt unworthy even to be a servant in his father's house. The father restored him to his status as his son. The laborers in the vineyard received more than they deserved. The reward is a gift, not something earned by the laborers.

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### **When they did fall, we ran to their side to provide encouragement and support.**

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**2. Justification is not based on seniority.** It is an either/or state. You either are or you are not justified. The parables of the prodigal son and the laborers in the vineyard illustrate that the depth of our sins or the length of our service to Christ are not what matters. Instead, by seeking refuge in His righteousness, we are assured of Christ's gift of forgiveness and restoration.

**3. Jesus actively seeks to bestow His grace upon us.** The owner of the vineyard actively sought to bring the idle laborers into His vineyard. He went to the marketplace several times to look for additional, idle laborers. The father of the prodigal son also actively looked for his son and ran to meet him in order to restore him to his household. He threw a lavish party, giving his wayward son unearned gifts.

### **REACT**

1. How do you think the father of the prodigal son would (or should) react if the son left again, only to return penniless a few years later? Why?

2. What did the prodigal son need to do in order to regain his status with his father? Why?

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*By G. Thor Thordarson, administrator of Woodland HealthCare SurgiCenter, Michigan City, Indiana.*

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# God's Noncondemning Love

## OPINION

**Key Texts: John 3:16-18; Rom. 8:1**

The idea that a born-again Christian can be absolutely sure of salvation is very attractive. But believing that eternal life is ours regardless of our actions or attitude can lead to wanton disregard of God's law. The results may be selfish behavior and willful sinning.

Human nature is sinful and all of us will sin. We will all continue to sin even after accepting Christ as our Savior. If we believe that salvation is dependent on how good we are, then we will always doubt whether we will, in fact, be saved.

The Bible repeatedly uses the analogy of a marriage relationship to illustrate what our relationship with God should be like. The Lord says, "I will betroth you to me forever" (Hosea 2:19, NIV).

Once we have committed our life to God, we begin a relationship of love that should last a lifetime. God is not fickle; His love for us is steadfast. He will not condemn us or "divorce" us because of our sinful nature. Jesus has already paid the price for our past and future sins. Being married, however, does not give us license to ignore, abuse, or betray our spouse. We should demonstrate our love for

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## **Once we have committed our life to God, we begin a relationship of love.**

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God and our appreciation for what He has done for us by following His guidelines and spending quality time with Him and His Word. Christ instructed us to " 'Love the Lord your God with all your heart and . . . love your neighbor as yourself' " (Mark 12:30, 31). Even though we may feel confident in our salvation through Christ, we should still live by the principles of love for God and our fellow humanity that are embodied in the Ten Commandments.

## **REACT**

1. The publican of Luke 18:10-14 went home justified in spite of his life of sin, yet the law-abiding Pharisee was not justified. The publican appears to gain justification by acknowledging his sins and humbly recognizing his need for God's mercy. What parallels do you see between the publican and the prodigal son (Luke 15:21)?

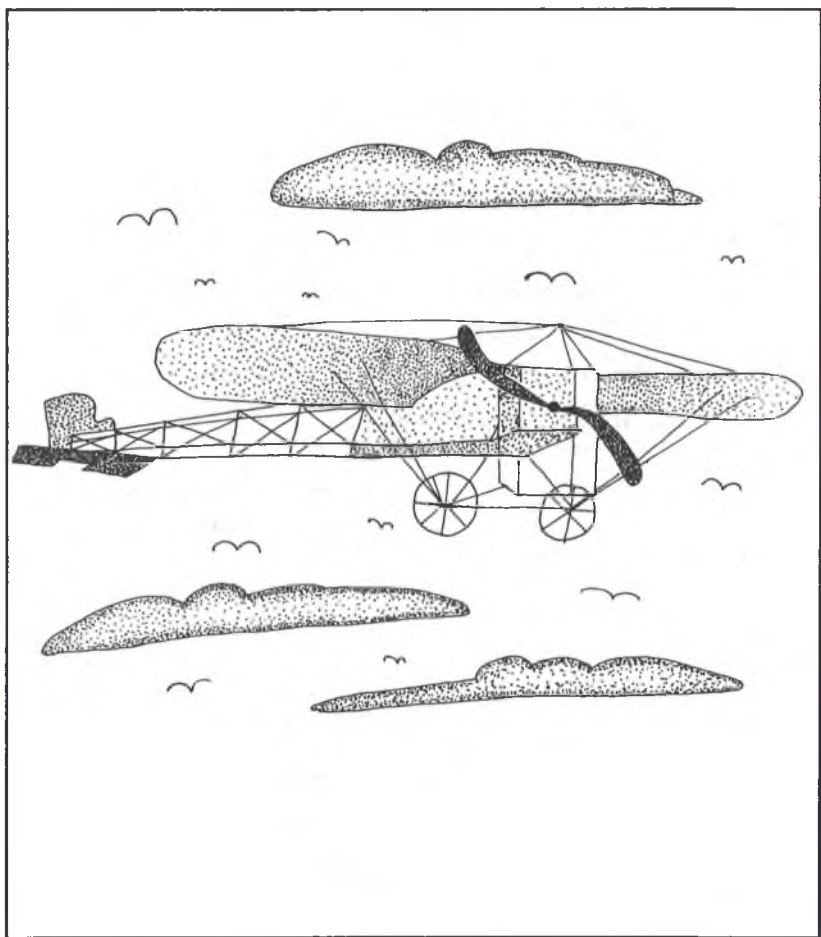
2. Christ did not condemn the woman caught in adultery (John 8:11), yet He instructs her to " 'go, and sin no more' " (KJV). How do you reconcile this instruction to sin no more with Christ's apparent refusal to condemn even the "worst" of sinners?

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*By Smari Thordarson, a radiologist practicing at LaPorte (Indiana) Hospital.*

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# BLINDING, SIMPLE TRUTH



**“We hold that a person is justified by faith apart from works prescribed by the law” (Rom. 3:28, NRSV).**

# Airborne

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rom. 3:22**

On a windy December day in 1903, a narrow strip of sand called Kill Devil Hill, near Kitty Hawk, North Carolina, witnessed the planet's first manned flight in a power-driven, heavier-than-air machine. With Orville of the Wright brothers at the controls, the plane flew 37 meters for a duration of all of 12 seconds!

Alongside contemporary aeronautical understanding, a feat such as this would probably be classed as a simplistic experiment and consigned a place in national history.

As a human civilization, we are in our element when, grasping for truth and light, we manage to push back the frontier of some region of our understanding far enough to reveal the glimmer of a previously hidden reality.

It is at times like these, as we stand blinking in the brilliance of simple truth, that our eyes adjust to the light and we wonder how we managed for so long to walk in ignorance in the darkness.

Imagine Paul's bewilderment on realizing that he had sincerely put the cart before the horse in his quest for righteousness and his grief at the thought of those he had gravely misunderstood. Then consider the exhilaration as he finally became airborne; free flight to salvation.

This week we crawl beneath the underbelly of the core of our faith. We will open our minds to truth so blindingly simple that it left Paul without sight for many days.

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*By Adrian Harris, a computer software consultant from Stevenage, Hertfordshire, England.*

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# Paul's Assurance of Salvation

## LOGOS

**Rom. 3:19-28; 4:1-8; 5:1; 8:1, 14-17; Phil. 3:1-11; Gal. 2:15-21; 3:1-14; 1 Thess. 1:5**

### Paul's Experience

Suppose you are an avid student. Go on, use your imagination. You study all there is to know in your field. You are taught by one of the leading professors in your discipline. Almost everyone in your field anticipates a given result in an experiment or a particular result to occur. According to your calculations, you are expecting a certain outcome. Then some people begin to announce that the anticipated conclusion was misapprehended, that something else is actually fact. How would you feel? What would you do about it if you felt that the new announcement was wrong?

To put this vague scenario into a tangible context, the apostle Paul faced a similar situation. Paul was a well-educated man. Born in the metropolis of Tarsus, a melting pot of Greek, Roman, and Jewish cultures, he went to Jerusalem to study "the law of our fathers" (Acts 22:3, NIV). He was taught by Gamaliel, one of the top two Jewish instructors of his day. He became a Pharisee of the "strictest sect" (26:5). This man knew the Scriptures back to front and inside out. He could not be outwitted by anyone in regard to the Scriptures (Gal. 1:14). But he had not seen who Jesus is, despite the Scriptures' proclamation of the future coming of the Son of God. His anticipation of the Messiah was entrenched in the old misconceptions of the Jewish religion. "There can be little doubt that he was marked for great things by the leaders of the Jewish nation."

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## **This man knew the Scriptures back to front and inside out.**

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This background gives us an understanding of Paul's experience of the assurance of salvation. Paul, at first known as Saul, had no idea of who Jesus of Nazareth really was. To him He was a fraud, a man who had misled many people, who had died and became a false legend. Jesus' heretical followers were a nuisance, a blasphemous sect that had to be dealt with.

Paul had been so engrossed in his own level of understanding that he neglected to see that Jesus really was the Son of God, and that He had more to offer than a sectarian religion derived from Judaism. After Paul saw Jesus on the Damascus road, the full meaning of salvation was revealed to him. His eyes were opened, as when his eyes were opened at Judas's house when "something like scales fell from [his] eyes" (Acts 9:18, NIV). He became filled with the Holy Spirit and was baptized.

The important thing to note here is not only that he began to preach in the synagogues but that he proclaimed that Jesus is the Son of God. So strong was his conviction and proclamation that he had to escape from Damascus by being lowered in a basket over the city wall. But what does the proclamation that Jesus is the Son of God have to do with Paul's assurance of salvation? For Paul it was everything.

It is in the recognition that Jesus Christ is the Messiah, the Son of God, that we can discover the key to Paul's assurance of salvation. Remembering that Paul was well-versed in the Scriptures, it may have been that while he waited at Judas's house in Damascus, passages like Isaiah 53 came to mind. Known as a Messianic chapter, words like "led like a lamb to the slaughter" (verse 7) and "my righteous servant will justify many" (verse 11) may have penetrated reality. The events of only a few decades before now convict Paul that Jesus Christ is who He said He was.

After conversion, Paul could not contain his enthusiasm for the good news that the mission for the incarnated Son of God was to offer salvation from the inevitable consequences of sin: eternal death. In its place each man, woman, and child could receive the gift of eternal life at the time of Christ's second advent. "Christ Jesus came into the world to save sinners" (1 Tim. 1:15, KJV).

If we wanted to define Christian salvation according to Paul, it would have to be with Christ's act and God's offer in mind. Salvation is to save, to deliver; Christian salvation is the acceptance, through faith, of what Christ has done for humankind and being offered eternal life instead of eternal death.

### **Paul's Teaching**

Following his conversion, Paul taught that once you have a faith in Jesus Christ, you can be part of a threefold salvation:

**1. Past.** We have been saved by Jesus Christ's death and resurrection (Rom. 8:24).

**2. Present.** We can be sure of salvation *now!* This is because we believe in Jesus and what He did.

**3. Future.** Salvation will reach its maturity when Jesus returns for His faithful believers (2 Tim. 4:18; 2 Cor. 1:10).

From the time Paul realized who Jesus was, he preached that God gives salvation as a gift to all who will accept. Everything depends on a person's acceptance of who Jesus is and what He has done for those who will accept. This acceptance is through faith alone (2 Tim. 3:15).

To best summarize what Paul taught about assurance, we must understand that all things hang on the acknowledgment that Jesus is who He is and did what He did. Nothing more, nothing less. Basically, we are dead in sin but can by faith be alive in Christ (Eph. 2:4-8).

### **REACT**

1. Why do you think Paul found his assurance in acknowledging Jesus as Christ?

2. Why do you think we might find the same assurance if we accept Jesus for who He is and what He has done for us?

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\**The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, p. 845.

# Faith and Salvation

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Rom. 5:1**

Paul was brought up in the concept that salvation could be obtained only through complete and strict obedience to the law. As a young man Paul was trained by the best, brought up in the laws of the Pharisees. In the letter to the Philippians he said of himself: "In regard to the law, a Pharisee; . . . as for legalistic righteousness, faultless" (Phil. 3:5, 6, NIV).

While Paul was on his way to Damascus, the Lord visited him. By the end of the visit he was left blind, and everything that he knew about his mission and his salvation through the law had been blown apart. He was left alone for three days in blindness for some serious soul searching.

"As Saul yielded himself fully to the convicting power of the Holy Spirit, he saw the mistakes of his life and recognized the far-reaching claims of the law of God. He who had been a proud Pharisee, confident that he was justified by his good works, now bowed before God with the humility and simplicity of a little child, confessing his own unworthiness and pleading the merits of a crucified and risen Saviour."<sup>1</sup>

## Everything that he knew about his mission and his salvation had been blown apart.

When Saul looked at himself with eyes opened by the Spirit, he saw his many sins, that he had led a life of righteousness by works. He could have focused on his guilt and let it drive a wedge between him and God—but he didn't. He realized now that Christ crucified was his way out, that faith in Christ's sacrifice would be his salvation.

"Saul longed to come into full harmony and communion with the Father and the Son; and in the intensity of his desire for pardon and acceptance he offered up fervent supplications to the throne of grace.

"The prayers of the penitent Pharisee were not in vain. The inmost thoughts and emotions of his heart were transformed by divine grace; and his nobler faculties were brought into harmony with the eternal purposes of God. Christ and His righteousness became to Saul more than the whole world."<sup>2</sup>

"When the Spirit of God controls mind and heart, the converted soul breaks forth into a new song; for he realizes that in his experience the promise of God has been fulfilled, that his transgression has been forgiven, his sin covered. He has exercised repentance toward God for the violation of the divine law, and faith toward Christ, who died for man's justification. 'Being justified by faith,' he has 'peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ.' Romans 5:1."<sup>3</sup>

1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p.119.

2. *Ibid.*, pp. 119, 120.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

*By Andrew Evers, assistant manager of the health food store at the Country Life Restaurant, London, England.*



# Jesus—the Christ

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Rom. 3:21-24**

*“A righteousness from God, apart from law, has been made known, to which the Law and the Prophets testify. This righteousness from God comes through faith in Jesus Christ to all who believe. There is no difference, for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus” (Rom. 3:21-24, NIV).*

Why did Paul, the disciples, and the rest of Jesus’ followers listen to Him and take note of what He said when He claimed that He could forgive humanity for their sins? How can we be sure that they made the correct judgment about Jesus and that we, too, can have salvation through Him?

To discover the answers to these questions, we need to go back to the very beginning of time and understand who Jesus actually claimed to be.

The story of the fall of humanity in Genesis 3 tells us that although God made everything perfect, sin came into the world through Adam and Eve. But verse 15 says that God had a plan to redeem the fallen race of humankind and that Satan would be defeated.

## The whole of the Old Testament reveals how God’s plan to redeem humanity took shape.

The whole of the Old Testament reveals how God’s plan to redeem humanity took shape: from the promise that God gave to Abraham to the predictions made in Isaiah about the coming of the Christ, or Messiah, the one who was going to redeem humanity.

Jesus claimed to be this predicted Christ, and the apostles knew that there was something special about Jesus. They believed that He was who He claimed to be.

For them, Jesus fulfilled all the prophecies about the Christ, and when Jesus asked them who they thought He was, “Simon Peter answered, ‘You are the Christ, the Son of the living God’” (Matt. 16:16, NIV).

When Paul came to realize that Jesus was the Christ, through the vision on the way to Damascus, even he repented and asked for forgiveness. Paul, the apostles, and all of Jesus’ followers believed that He was the Christ, who had authority from heaven to forgive.

“‘Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved’” (Acts 16:31, NIV).

We can take comfort in the fact that Jesus is the Christ. He has the power to forgive, and no matter what we have done, He is still willing to wash away our sins with His blood—and all we have to do is believe that He is the Christ, the Savior of humankind.

## REACT

1. Why do we continue to sin even though we have Jesus in our lives?
2. How did Paul come to be such a great tool used in God’s work?

*By Adam Keough, a theology student at Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

# Paddle Your Own Canoe?

## HOW-TO

**Key Text:** Eph. 2:8, 9

Is this true for you?

Since becoming a Christian, there have been great fluctuations in my spiritual life. On some occasions I would be on those spiritual heights, soaring like an eagle in the power of His love. Sometimes, though, I would be in the depths. At those times I may have heard a stirring sermon, read a Spirit-filled book, or talked to a Christian friend. Then the quality of my spiritual life would take an upward turn and, for a while God would seem very close. The trouble was, it wouldn't last. By falling before some temptation or by a gradual decline, all my best experiences would be lost as I found myself back in the depths.

Why couldn't I live in the heights like others around me who seemed to have a consistent, close fellowship with God? Why couldn't I have Paul's assurance that kept him faithful while facing difficulties and discouraging experiences?

I then discovered something that put everything into perspective—facts are sometimes more useful than promises. The Bible is full of promises of what God *will* do for us, but that is only good for the future. What about today? It is surely

## There have been great fluctuations in my spiritual life.

more useful to know that God is doing a certain thing in the here and now.

When we became Christians we believed that, by God's grace, we had been justified by faith—we had nothing to do with accomplishing it—we believed what God had done. We are promised that one day, by God's grace, we will be glorified. What about in the meantime—between the beginning and the end? What is the justified Christian going to do while waiting for his glorification? Paul gives us the answer: "Just as you received Christ Jesus as Lord, continue to live in him" (Col. 2:6, NIV).

How did you receive Him? "Thank you, God, I am going to help you get me born again!" Of course not. You received Him as a gift of God. In the meantime, we are not left paddling our own canoes. God's "grace is sufficient for [us]" (2 Cor. 12:9, emphasis supplied; not "*will be* sufficient for us").

## REACT

1. This article implies that we are both "justified" and "sanctified" by faith alone. Define these two words in your own language and state whether you agree with this perspective.

2. Why do you think Ellen White takes the position that we are *justified* by faith alone but *sanctified* by faith and works?

3. Is it OK to disagree with Ellen White? Do you agree or disagree with her in this case? Why, or why not?

By Eric Dell, a graduate student in information technology at Brunel University, England.

# As Good as It Gets

## OPINION

**Key Text: Rom. 3:28**

Finding the correct path to salvation has been likened to steering a large ship between two narrow rocks: legalism and liberalism. Both are dangers but focusing on the rocks instead of the direction of travel has led many to flounder needlessly.

If we look closely at this week's text, we see that it is quite categorical. A person is justified by faith *apart* from the deeds of the law. And just in case there was some confusion or some doubt, Paul repeats this concept throughout the whole of his New Testament letters.

Far from this concept being accepted and practiced in the church today, it is still ignored or at least misunderstood. Although this may be a little generalized, I can certainly say, through experience, that total assurance of salvation is preached and discussed but, in actual fact, it seems that very few truly believe it in their hearts.

This is probably because it flies in the face of our own natures. We live in a society in which we must achieve whatever we want for ourselves. Anything is possible, but you must be prepared to slog your guts out every inch of the way in order to get there. This concept is, of course, nothing new as we see Saul, before Damascus, driving

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## Highly critical people are usually even more highly self-critical.

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himself in the fast lane toward a successful career in his time. Self-sufficiency is in our genes, and, therefore, texts like Romans 3:28, which basically claim it can all happen just through our belief, are very difficult to handle.

If we truly had complete assurance of salvation, then we surely wouldn't see many of the problems that afflict our church as we go into the new millennium. Let us take the problem of criticism and gossip that occurs in many churches. Surely, if all the believers were totally assured about their salvation, they wouldn't feel the need to belittle others in order to make themselves appear big. They wouldn't care about how they appeared. Highly critical people are usually even more highly self-critical—I know this from my own painful experience.

Surely this text means that we are justified by faith, not by what we eat, watch, or what Paul terms the deeds of the law. Until we truly believe that salvation can come only from God, then we will continue to make our own rules and produce many churches that drive people out to the world, which is seen to be a more tolerant and accepting place to be.

## REACT

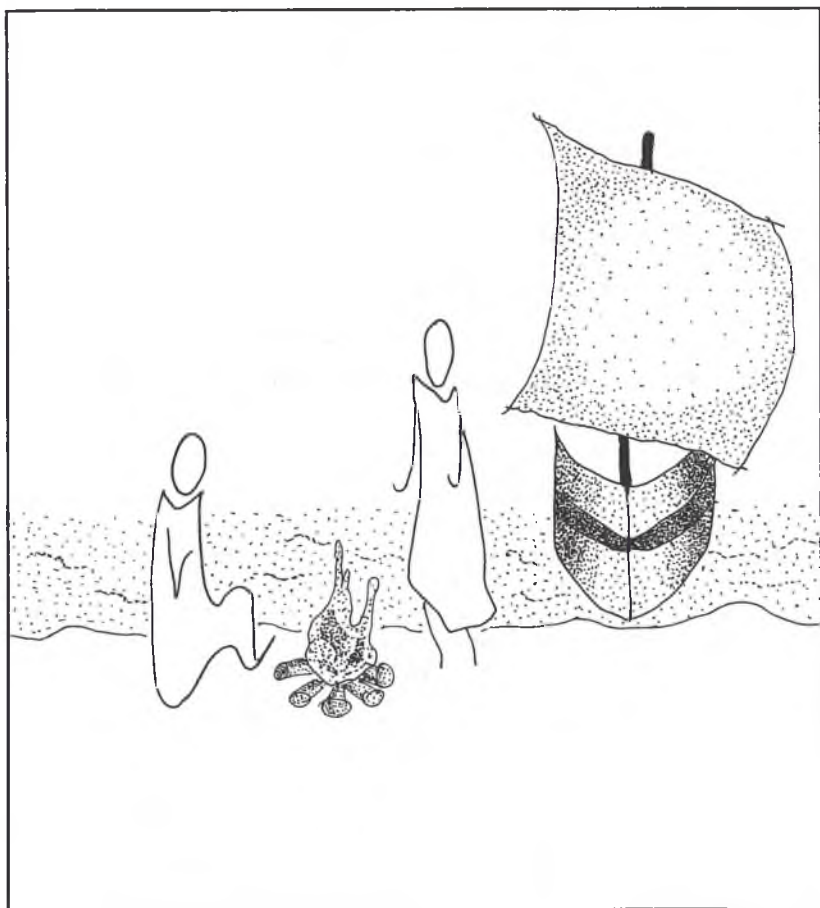
What can individuals do in a church where few of the other members actually have full security in their own salvation?

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*By Roger Hunter, a teacher of English at Stanborough School, Stanborough Park, England.*

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# PETER: BEFORE AND AFTER



**“There is salvation in no one else, for there is no other name under heaven given among mortals by which we must be saved” (Acts 4:12, NRSV).**

# The Eyewitness

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Pet. 1:16

“By beholding we become changed.”

What a perfect phrase to describe Peter! One minute he is honoring Jesus by declaring Him to be “the Christ, the Son of the living God” (Matt. 16:16, NIV). Only six verses later, he is rebuking Jesus for speaking about His impending sufferings!

Ellen White writes about this experience: “Self-pity, which shrank from fellowship with Christ in suffering, prompted Peter’s remonstrance.”<sup>1</sup> More simply said, Peter was a coward with a big mouth. But something changed in Peter. He became courageous and welcomed suffering for Christ. He writes, “Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering. . . . But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed” (1 Pet. 4:12, 13, NIV). What changed him? I think Peter himself gives us the answer: “We were eyewitnesses of his majesty” (2 Pet. 1:16).

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## Peter was a coward with a big mouth.

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In short, Peter was with Jesus. When you’re with Jesus, you are always changed. Jesus taught the disciples many things that they did not initially understand. But when the Holy Spirit came upon them, Jesus’ teachings were easily grasped. “Many of the most precious lessons of the Great Teacher were spoken to those who did not then understand them. When, after His ascension, the Holy Spirit brought His teachings to the remembrance of the disciples, their slumbering senses awoke. . . . Then the wonderful experience of His life became theirs.”<sup>2</sup>

Peter’s experience with Jesus changed him. But it didn’t stop with a personal change. Peter also wanted the people of the church to be changed as well. If the church was to survive, the members of the church would need a living connection with Christ. Thus, Peter pleaded with them to join him in following Jesus: “Therefore, prepare your minds for action; be self-controlled; set your hope fully on the grace to be given you when Jesus Christ is revealed. As obedient children, do not conform to the evil desires you had when you lived in ignorance. But just as he who called you is holy, so be holy in all you do; for it is written: ‘Be holy, because I am holy’” (1 Pet. 1:13-16, NIV).

We also live in a world in which the word *god* means many things to many people. If the church is to survive now, our lives must be changed by Christ, just as Peter’s was. Peter was an eyewitness of Christ. As we, through the life of Peter, witness Christ as well, we will become eyewitnesses of Christ. I know we will be changed.

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1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 525.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 520.

# The Good, the Bad, and the Ugly

## LOGOS

**Matt. 16:13-23; 26:31-35, 69-75; Luke 22:31, 32; Acts 2:14-45; 2 Pet. 1:16-19, 3-9**

Jesus asked them, “ ‘Who do you say I am?’ ”

They answered, “You are the eschatological source of our existence, the kerygma of our being, and the reality of our essence.”

And Jesus replied, “ ‘What?’ ”

### The Good

Ask Peter who Jesus is and you get a profound theological insight: “ ‘The Christ, the Son of the living God’ ” (Matt. 16:16, NIV). Peter understood the lordship of Jesus Christ and in fact had this knowledge revealed to him by God Himself. It is not enough for Peter to acknowledge that Jesus is a great teacher or a great healer. It is not enough for Peter to acknowledge that Jesus is anything but the One, True, Living Son of God! This profession of lordship is a pillar that Peter will return to again and again during his spiritual journey. He confesses that if Jesus is indeed Lord, then he does not have to be, and in fact, cannot be. It is not a small confession to recognize the lordship of Jesus Christ in one’s life.

Ultimately, Peter’s recognition of the lordship of Jesus Christ in his life will provide the foundation to survive an open denial of Him. The unwavering commitment that Jesus made to Peter sustained him in the final analysis and enabled him to become a powerful witness and preacher.

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**“Only Jesus fully understood that there was no treachery in Peter’s denial.”**

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### The Bad

Overconfidence, or just stating the facts? Self-confidence or just letting those present know that he would never fall away? The wise man, Solomon, remarked, “Pride goes before destruction, a haughty spirit before a fall” (Prov. 16:18, NIV). Interesting to note that often those areas in our lives in which we believe we are the strongest and most secure may sometimes be the areas of our greatest weakness.

Peter did not want to deny his Lord. He did not premeditate the act, and he simply could not fathom how he could do any less than respond with the emphatic Never. Not only Peter but also the other disciples responded accordingly: sincere, passionate, self-assured, and quick to respond—yet limited in perception. Peter’s experience reminds us that even when one is confident in the lordship of Jesus, one is capable of falling.

### The Ugly

It is not a pretty scene. It is an open denial before witnesses. It is a public gathering. The denial calls attention to itself. Not just one opportunity for

denial but three. Peter denies that he was with Jesus, he denies that he even knows Jesus, and reinforces the denial by swearing that he does not know the Man. And this happened within a few hours of his statement of loyalty to his Lord and Savior.

### **The Rest of the Story**

“Only Jesus fully understood that there was no treachery in Peter’s denial; just a temporary loss of nerve. Like a Marine in combat for the first time, the instinct for self-preservation had prevailed. The purity of Peter’s heart and the quality of his love were not debatable or open to question in spite of his betrayal. But Jesus had to rid the apostle of his clarity, of his limited self-perception, of the debased self-image of who he thought he was. There would be healing from self-hatred for Peter that morning.”\*

On the shore of the Sea of Tiberias, Jesus offered Peter the opportunity to repudiate publically his triple denial by triply affirming his love to “ ‘feed My sheep’ ” (John 21:17, NIV). He is reinstated and appointed leader of Christ’s church, entrusted to preach the gospel with authority in the power of the Holy Spirit. Peter’s life had new meaning because of Jesus’ love for him and his love for his Lord. Indeed, the Lord’s prayer that Peter’s faith would not fail and that when he turned back he would strengthen his brothers (Luke 22:31, 32) came to be fulfilled.

As an eyewitness to the power of Jesus’ life, death, and resurrection, Peter grew to become not only a great theologian but a powerful preacher as well. When he spoke he told and retold the story of his own weakness, always recounting the strength of his Lord. From Peter’s weakness the power of God was made real. When the power of the Holy Spirit came upon Peter and the other disciples, people were attracted to the gospel, and they were amazed. About three thousand accepted the gospel and were baptized in Jerusalem on that day of Pentecost, and more people were added daily. Peter no longer denied his Lord but continued to assure people that Jesus is Lord, that there is forgiveness for sin, that we can rely on the promise of the Holy Spirit.

When others see that the power of God has touched our lives, people will be converted.

### **REACT**

1. What does my life say about who Jesus is?
2. In what areas in my personal life do I feel that I could never fail or fall? Do I display an attitude of overconfidence?
3. List some ways that people deny Jesus other than the way that Peter did.
4. What would happen in your church if you erred more from compassion than from a lack of it?
5. How can God use flawed people like Peter, you, and me to do His work?
6. Why is it such a struggle to make our “calling and election sure”? (2 Pet. 1:10, NIV).

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\*Brennan Manning, *A Stranger to Self-Hatred* (Carlsbad, Calif.: Dimension Books, 1982), p. 34.

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*By Ken Rogers, campus chaplain at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# The Sign of a True Apostle

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 2 Pet. 1:5-11**

A recent movie called *The Apostle* tells the story of a charismatic preacher who devoted his life to ministering to the spiritual needs of others. The movie was true to life, right down to the deep personal flaws of the preacher, who called himself "The Apostle." Even after having to flee from the law, he started up a brand-new church in a different region, only to be plagued once again by faults he couldn't quite escape.

*The Apostle* is not your typical movie. It gives a much more realistic and positive view of Christianity than typical Hollywood films. However, something really disturbed me about it. Why did it portray someone who seemed to be so filled with the Spirit but with such deep, permanent flaws? "But don't we all have flaws of our own?" I asked myself. "Doesn't Jesus take us right where we are and use us despite our flaws to further His work?"

Peter seems to be the perfect example of such deep, hidden flaws. He was so confident in his love for Jesus, yet he fell so hard, cursing and swearing to prove that he wasn't Jesus' disciple. "Peter had just declared that he knew not Jesus, but he now realized with bitter grief how well his Lord knew him, and how accurately He had read his heart, the falseness of which was unknown even to himself."<sup>1</sup>

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## Even after having to flee from the law, he started up a brand-new church in a different region.

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In speaking of Peter's denial, Ellen White writes, "Here is given a lesson for all Christ's followers. The gospel makes no compromise with evil. . . . The reproach of the disciple's sin is cast upon Christ. It causes Satan to triumph, and wavering souls to stumble. By giving proof of repentance, the disciple, so far as lies in his power, is to remove this reproach."<sup>2</sup>

This is where *The Apostle* missed the point! The preacher in the movie never gave proof of repentance in the form of a changed life.

What about Peter? Within weeks the uneducated fisherman was preaching one of the greatest sermons in all of the Bible (see Acts 2:14-39). What happened? Was he different?

You bet. "The converted Peter was very different. He retained his former fervor, but the grace of Christ regulated his zeal. He was no longer impetuous, self-confident, and self-exalted, but calm, self-possessed, and teachable."<sup>3</sup> Peter learned his lesson. His testimony in the key text for today proves it.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 713.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 811.

3. *Ibid.*, pp. 812, 815.

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*By Daniel J. Warner, an education and psychology student at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# Who's Who Among Gods?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Acts 4:12**

On that day in A.D. 31, when Peter made public the spiritual bankruptcy of all other gods except Christ, the Roman Empire was flooded by religions, cults, and gurus. The Romans imported (and renamed) the Twelve Olympians, from Zeus to Pluto, that made up the Greek pantheon. From Egypt came Isis and Osiris with their rituals. The Phoenicians exported Astarte, with her escort of sacred prostitutes. Cybele came from Asia, pretending to be the “Great Mother” of all gods. Then came the Persian Mithra, with his initiatory rites and elaborate astrology, whose cult eventually became the foremost adversary of Christian religion. Among the last came the Syrian sun god, who later became the imperial religion of *sol invictus*.

Had Peter preached his sermon in Alexandria, the greatest center of intercultural exchange in antiquity, he would probably have been ridiculed, labeled as a fundamentalist, narrow-minded bigot, even possibly imprisoned. The bitter lesson of the rooster and the sweet baptism of the Pentecost, however, had made him no longer ashamed to declare Jesus Christ as the only way to heaven. Christians have preached Peter's sermon ever since, at times paying with their lives for their

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## Christ's claim to be the only way to heaven is still unwelcome.

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determination to share with no other the glory due their crucified and risen Savior.

Christ's claim to be *the only* way to heaven (John 14:6) is still unwelcome by today's adepts of religious syncretism, who operate under the banner of the New Age movement. Furthermore, our level of civilization is measured by the tolerance we display in our pluralistic society. If my religion works for me, it may be good *just for me*; why then press it upon others?

Nevertheless, though we respect others' right to worship anything—from Buddha to their VCR—as Christians we have a responsibility to tell the truth as it is in Jesus. In humility and timeliness, we must eventually declare to all that Christ is indeed the only way. If His love found its way into our hearts, we would love people too much to see them outside the New Jerusalem.

## REACT

1. How do you respond to someone's assumption that “since Zen meditation works for Japanese and Shiva divination for Hindus, Christians should not send missionaries to those parts of the world”?

2. You have a friend who has just converted to Islam. He thinks that Jesus was only a godly teacher and that Mohammed was actually the true son of God. What do you answer?

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*By Cezar R. Luchian, biblical languages lab assistant at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# Servant of the Most High

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Phil. 1:4-6**

Let's face it: we all sin. Our human nature comes with certain weaknesses and propensities that eat at our spiritual lives. Often I myself battle discouragement as I wonder how God can use someone who repeatedly fails Him.

Throughout the Bible, God sends numerous messages of encouragement as a reminder despite the truth of the verse, "all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God" (Rom. 3:23, NIV). He is not finished with us yet. Although at times we may still be disappointed with our shortcomings, God can and will take us, imperfect as we are, and transform us into valuable partners with Him (Phil. 1:5).

What steps can we take to begin this transformation? Here are a few suggestions:

**1. Understand and accept God's unconditional forgiveness.** Perhaps guilt from a past mistake has become a barrier to your spiritual progress, or maybe daily struggles with temptation leave you spiritually weak and discouraged. But God has promised that no matter how many times we sin, His forgiveness will never fail. "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). In fact, when Peter asked how many times he should forgive others, Jesus used the number seventy times seven to demonstrate the limitlessness of true forgiveness. God will forgive us as many times as we ask for forgiveness.

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## We must ask God to change us before He can begin the transformation.

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**2. Keep a constant line of communication open with heaven.** The Bible tells us to "pray continually" (1 Thess. 5:17, NIV). God will never act against our will. We must ask Him to change us before He can begin the transformation. However, the communication cannot end there. By conversing with God as a Friend throughout the day, not only will we be strengthened against temptation, but through beholding we will become more like our heavenly Father.

**3. Pray for a specific area of service.** All have been given individual talents and strengths with which they may serve God. No talent is inferior. Paul compares new Christians to a body, with each person serving a vital and unique purpose (Rom. 12:4-8). It is the same for us today. We pray for God to reveal our part in the plan of salvation, and as He shows us ways in which we can serve Him, we will be amazed at the opportunities that are presented to us.

## REACT

1. What positive qualities, special abilities, or talents do I have to offer in God's service?

2. Which particular areas of my life is God helping me to change right now?

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*By Jolene Harrell, a freshman print journalism major at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# My Weightless Cross

## OPINION

**Key Texts: 1 Pet. 4:12, 13; Matt. 10:38; Heb. 4:15**

They all hated me. Every time my classmates saw me coming, they stopped talking and walked away. My friends gave me dirty looks in class, and the faculty discussed me among themselves.

Every year our academy produced a senior class play. Because I was director of the drama team, the director asked me to be his assistant and give my opinion on casting. I auditioned just like everybody else, and I was to help with directing. But someone said that I wasn't required to audition, that I was in charge of casting and was going to choose only my friends. Word spread like wildfire, and parents began showering our sponsor with phone calls. By the time I discovered why no one was speaking to me, it was Labor Day break, and the students had a four-day weekend to go home and stew in their anger. I had four days to indulge in selfish misery.

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### I was rude to everyone throughout the break.

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I was rude to everyone throughout the break. I kept bursting into tears and wondering why God allowed this to happen to me. The thought crossed my mind that I might grow from the experience, yet I never prayed about it. I just didn't want to deal with it. Why should I have to suffer because of other people's insecurities? Then Matthew 10:38 popped into my head: "Whoever does not take up the cross and follow me is not worthy of me" (NRSV). Hebrews says that Jesus went through everything I'll ever go through, and He was *still* without sin. I realized I had no right to be irritable and mean just because I suddenly had a burden to bear. It was my job to rejoice in my sufferings and somehow to let God use me through them.

So I prayed. With tears streaming down my cheeks and my knees hugged to my chest, I told God all about my frustrations and anger. I begged Him to help me carry my cross in a way that would make me worthy of Him. When I returned to school, my class sponsor spoke in chapel to clear up the misunderstanding. Later, one of my friends apologized for spreading things about me. "No problem," I told him. "I forgive you. Don't worry about it." And I meant it.

He looked at me strangely. "I don't know whether I'd be as cool about it," he said.

"Thanks." I could almost feel God's arm around my shoulder as I smiled. With His help, I'd carried my cross, and with His strength it was almost weightless.

## REACT

1. When was the last time someone said something about you behind your back that you found devastating when it was related to you? How did you deal with it?

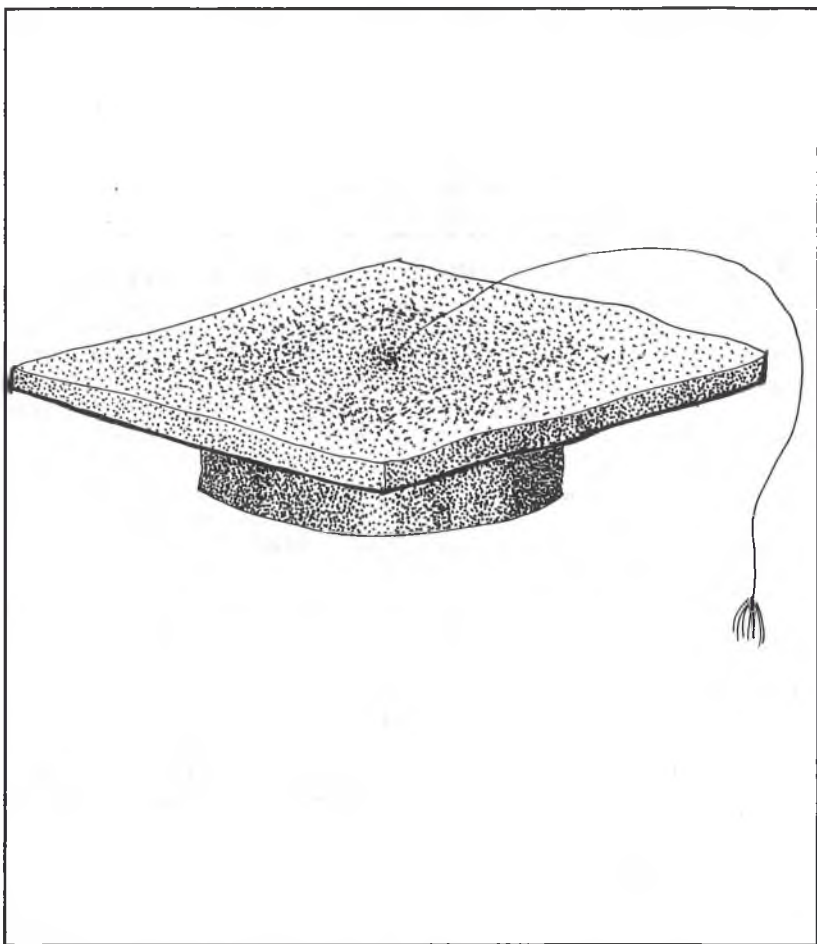
2. When was the last time you spread a hurtful rumor that you heard about someone and then later went to that person and asked forgiveness?

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*By Carrie Ann Whittenburg, a print journalism major at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.*

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# JOHN: LOVE IS THE ANSWER



**“As many as received Him, to them He gave the right to become children of God, even to those who believe in His name” (John 1:12, NKJV).**

# A Thrilling Experience

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Ps. 27:1**

It was in my final year of studies at the University of Eastern Philippines, one month prior to my graduation, that I noticed that it fell on Saturday, March 30, 1996. I talked to no one about it. But I kept on claiming God's promises. I committed myself wholly to Him. I kept praying that the graduation day would be changed to another day. I made up my mind not to attend the graduation exercises if it were on Sabbath.

I told myself that graduation was just a passing event but that if we trust in God, we will have everlasting joy. I was praying earnestly that God would deliver me from evil, that I would not be tempted to attend the graduation event on Sabbath. I was concerned that my non-SDA relatives, who had promised to be there, would

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## **I kept praying that the graduation day would be changed to another day.**

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not understand my actions, but I received great encouragement from Psalm 27:1—“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear? The Lord is the strength of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” (NKJV).

I knew that God has a thousand ways to lead us. And “we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose” (Rom. 8:28, NKJV). I claimed His promises. Then two weeks before the event, graduation day was changed to Thursday, March 28, instead of Saturday, March 30. I was thrilled. God was indeed wonderful. If God can provide for our needs in this earth, how much more our salvation?

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*By Julie C. Alberio, a major in technology and home economics at the University of Eastern Philippines, North Samar.*

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## Benefits of Love

### LOGOS

**Mark 9:39-41; John 1:1-18, 29, 36; 3:18; 1 John 2:28; 3:23; 4:15-18**

A Christian without love is nothing. Some seek to validate their Christianity by a display of spiritual gifts, miraculous answers to prayer, and eloquent exposition of biblical truth. God says that without love, which is the basic spiritual fruit, all else is meaningless (1 Cor. 13:1-3).

Some in John's day thought it was possible to know Jesus because they were keeping various commandments and were morally free. But John is clear and concise: It is only through the Holy Spirit that a person can be joyfully certain of salvation.

When John ministered in Ephesus, he was exiled to Patmos and seemed to be the last living witness of the ministry of Jesus. All the other apostles were dead.

Jesus Christ knew the heart of John, the brother of James. When he heard the spiritual teaching of love, he humbled himself and accepted that he was a sinner. Love changed his personal characteristics. He learned the lesson of love. And it transformed him from carnal to spiritual life. "We have known and believed the love that God has for us. God is love, and he who abides in love abides in God, and God in him" (1 John 4:16, NKJV).

Love is important in our daily lives. Without love perhaps John couldn't have followed Christ's teachings on his own. We cannot be called true Christians if there is no love. "Therefore be followers of God as dear children. And walk in love, as Christ also has loved us" (Eph. 5:1, 2, NKJV).

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## When we became believers, we passed from death to life.

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John did not give up his faith even though he was thrown into boiling oil. But God preserved his life. This experience proves that God cares for our safety—on condition that we believe in Him and trust in His love.

John's experience—that he was still alive in the boiling oil—is a great lesson that God saves His people not only in this present world but also in the judgment day. Just trust in God's love. A father tells his baby to jump from a table, and the baby jumps without fear. The father immediately stretches his arms and catches the baby because he loves it.

"Love has been perfected among us in this: that we may have boldness in the day of judgment; because as He is, so are we in this world. There is no fear in love; but perfect love casts out fear, because fear involves torment. But he who fears has not been made perfect in love" (1 John 4:17, 18, NKJV). John has an assurance of salvation because he knows God and His love.

"He who does not love does not know God, for God is love. . . . If God so loved us, we also ought to love one another" (verses 8, 11, NKJV). Through love John was able to influence people in his surroundings, and seeing he faced persecution and trials without fear, some were converted.

When we became believers, we passed from death to life, the life of the age to

come. That life that is a life of joy and self-sacrificial love in the power of God will fill all the universe after Jesus returns.

Love is a prerequisite for our salvation.

### **REACT**

1. How can we be sure that we have eternal life?
2. Name the characteristics of God's love.

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*By Solon Alberio, an agriculturist from Abuyog, Leyte, Philippines.*

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# Dependent Apostle

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 John 4:7**

“The disciple John was a man of earnest and deep affection, ardent, yet contemplative. He had begun to discern the glory of Christ, not the worldly pomp and power for which he had been taught to hope,”<sup>1</sup> but “the glory as of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth” (John 1:14, NKJV).

“The love of Christ, manifested in unselfish ministry, will be more effective in reforming the evil-doer than will the sword or the court of justice.”<sup>2</sup>

John was faithful amid his tough experiences. “God is true to His promises, true to the call He has extended to men to serve Him. If He permitted temptations to come to His people that were beyond their strength to overcome, then His promises would appear to be wholly unreliable. . . . The faithfulness of God is the Christian’s source of security against the enemy. There is no security in depending on self, but if the believer relies entirely on the promises of our covenant-keeping God, he will be safe.”<sup>3</sup>

## “The faithfulness of God is the Christian’s source of security against the enemy.”

“As the inspired apostle John beheld the height, the depth, the breadth of the Father’s love toward the perishing race, he was filled with adoration and reverence; and, failing to find suitable language in which to express the greatness and tenderness of this love, he called upon the world to behold it. ‘Behold what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God.’ ”<sup>4</sup>

If we profess that we are the sons and daughters of God, we will keep His commandments and walk as Jesus walked, then “we may be sure that we are in him” (1 John 2:5, NRSV).

That’s good news. That is the true assurance of salvation.

## REACT

1. What important factor(s) assures us of our salvation?
2. Why does God permit trials and persecution?

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 139.

2. *Christian Service*, p. 189.

3. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 744.

4. *Steps to Christ*, p. 15.

By *Crisansa Bolaño*, a homemaker from Balocawe, Abuyog, Leyte, Philippines.



# Actions Confess the Secrets of the Heart

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts: 1 John 4:8; Luke 6:45**

“Sanctification is merely the process of becoming more loving. The biblical picture of perfection is one of becoming mature in expressing God’s love. Such people are forming characters like Christ’s, for ‘God is love’ (1 John 4:8). Such people are safe to save for eternity.”<sup>1</sup>

John was deeply concerned at the lack of true love that was evident in the church near the end of the first century.

“In presenting the binding claims of the law, many have failed to portray the infinite love of Christ. Those who have so great truths, so weighty reforms to present to the people, have not had a realization of the value of the atoning Sacrifice as an expression of God’s great love to man.”<sup>2</sup>

Love is the fruit of the Holy Spirit (Gal. 5:22). It can be taught and preached. And it can be revealed in practical Christianity. We Christians, if we have love in our hearts, reveal it in our actions and even in our facial expression. In love, we

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## Doing His will is an evidence of the assurance of salvation.

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are inspired to do God’s will. Doing His will is an evidence of the assurance of salvation.

Because the apostle John the beloved had love in his heart, he was able to walk as Jesus walked. He preached without fear. He endured trials and temptations, and he always looked up to Jesus. God knew what was best for him.

“The good man out of the good treasure of his heart brings forth what is good, . . . for his mouth speaks from that which fills his heart” (Luke 6:45, NASB).

It is evident that the apostle John had a “good treasure” in his heart: love. This love gave him hope for life after death, and he was sure of it.

## REACT

1. What are the requirements for us to have love in our hearts?
2. Why was the apostle John able to walk as Jesus walked?

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1. George R. Knight, *Walking With Jesus on the Mount of Blessing*, 1996, p. 355.

2. Selected Messages, bk. 1, p. 371.

# Control Measures of Self-Deception

## HOW-TO

**Key Texts: James 10:14; 1 John 3:18, 20**

“Christian assurance of salvation is a Bible doctrine, but it is based on holy living by those who have been justified and born again. Assurance, according to Jesus in Matthew 7, belongs to the ‘doers’ of the Father’s will.”<sup>1</sup>

“A second thing we can do to avoid self-deception regarding our standing with God is to examine ourselves. Paul tells us to examine ourselves as to whether we are in the faith (2 Cor. 13:5). That examination needs to take place in the full light of Scripture. We must honestly ask ourselves why we are doing certain things and what the motives are behind our words and actions. We need to honestly face up to the truth if we are doing good things for self-interest.”<sup>2</sup>

“A third thing we can do to avoid self-deception is to get our priorities straight. First and foremost, God wants our hearts; He wants us to have a loving relationship with Him that leads to obedience in all things. And here it is important to be honest. Some of us are ready to be obedient in those areas we like, but avoid faithfulness in other areas. God wants us to take the whole Bible and put it into balanced practice.”<sup>3</sup>

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## Total dependence on God’s love serves as a compass for our journey.

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Some, claiming to be Christians, do many good things, but this would not help them obtain salvation. In spite of all their good works, they will not be able to earn their way to heaven. This is because they have not been inspired to help others and share their talents for the right reasons.

Some enjoy studying the Bible. And then there are some who love to debate theological issues. Ask them what Jesus means to them, however, and they are silent. They don’t know what to say. These are some of the factors that may lead them away from obtaining assurance of salvation.

As Christians we must humble ourselves and accept our wrong doings and confess them all to the Lord. When we do this, we can be a light to our classmates, office mates, students, neighbors—to all those around us. We must depend completely on God and His love, as the apostle John the beloved did. Total dependence on God’s love serves as a compass for our journey. We will not become lost when we are looking at that compass and follow His directions.

## REACT

How can a person be aware that he/she is a victim of self-deception?

1. George Knight, *Walking With Jesus on the Mount of Blessing*, 1996, p. 359.
2. Ibid.
3. Ibid.

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*By Divine Grace Ramos, a self-employed businesswoman from Abuyog, Leyte, Philippines.*

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# Opportunity Offered

## OPINION

**Key Text: Rom. 10:9, 13**

It was in my sophomore year at the University of Eastern Philippines, North Samar, that our animal-science examination was scheduled for Friday afternoon from 2:00 p.m. to 8:00 p.m. The examination was on formulation of feeds, and it was an open-book test. The examination started on time.

I began writing the answers in my 18-column worksheet and intended to stop at six o'clock because of sunset. At around 5:30, I approached my professor and said, "Sir, here is my worksheet."

He then replied, "Did you finish it?"

My answer was, "I am a Seventh-day Adventist, and we do not work from Friday sunset to Saturday sunset. So if you want me to finish it on Sunday, I can do that." Saying that, I handed over to him my incomplete worksheet.

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### **At the beginning he did not understand what I was trying to tell him.**

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At the beginning he did not understand what I was trying to tell him and he kept saying, "I told you to just finish it even if it takes you until midnight. Anyway, God will understand, and you need the grade." I just kept quiet and did not utter a word. But something made him change his mind. Later he told me that I could bring my worksheet over to his house on Sunday.

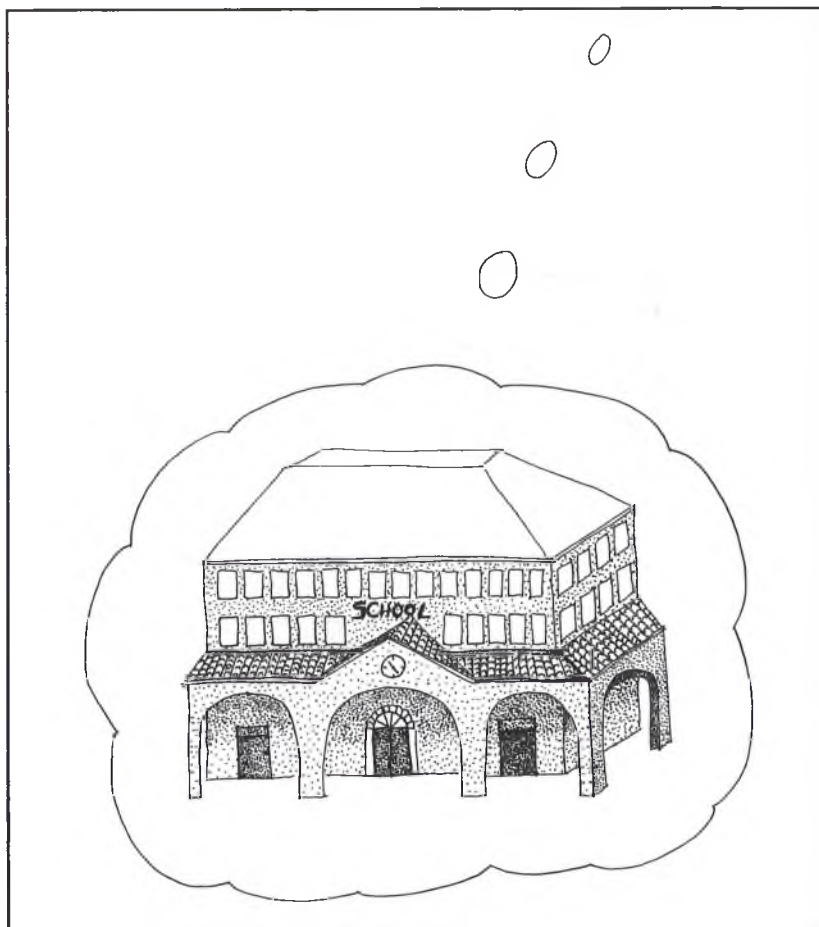
If a man can grant your request, how about God? He does not withhold His salvation from anyone but offers it to all. We need simply to accept His offer. There is no denomination that offers everlasting life as a gift. No other sect offers assurance of forgiveness. Christ offers salvation not because we have done anything great for Him but because we have confessed our sins and accepted Him for what He has done for us. He asks us only to follow Him with love. Only then can we obtain eternal life.

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*By Julie C. Alberio, a major in technology and home economics at the University of Eastern Philippines, North Samar.*

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# BEYOND YOUR WILDEST DREAMS



**“He is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them” (Heb. 7:25, NIV).**

# God's Assurance Through a Dream

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture:** Heb. 4:14, 15

My husband and I had been teaching at Flaiz Memorial High School in Narsapur, south India for about two years when out of the blue the principal of the school called us into his office and informed us that we had a call from Central India Union to go to Ibrahimpatnam, a small village near Vijayawada.

I was to begin a preschool, and my husband would teach in the junior theological seminary that the union was setting up there. This came as a rude shock to us, since we were just getting settled at the mission school. Initially, we refused the call for several reasons: we had a two-month old baby, and there were no hospitals in the village. The nearest hospital was 50 miles away with no transportation to that hospital, and I had grown up in Pune and felt that it would be difficult to adjust.

In spite of our reasonable excuses, the principal insisted that we accept the call. My husband was called to Vijayawada by the three officers of the union to talk to him and convince him to accept the call to Ibrahimpatnam.

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## Initially, we refused the call for several reasons.

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While my husband was gone that night, I was restless and could not sleep. I kept asking God, "Why us?" We had begun teaching only a couple of years before and were inexperienced. Then I remembered the text: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun" (Ps. 37:5, 6, NIV). This promise was the first assurance I received from Jesus. I knelt and prayed for His guidance and assurance.

My second assurance came in a dream in which the school had a farewell program for us. I saw the principal handing over to me a model of a school that I was to begin. He said, "This is all yours." Right then I was convinced that it was God's will that we accept this call and go in faith to Ibrahimpatnam.

When my husband came from Vijayawada, I told him the dream. He, too, was convinced that it was God's call, and we accepted. We need to trust in Jesus Christ, our High Priest. The apostle Paul states, "Since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess. For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:14, 15, NIV).

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*By Hepsy Bathini, a teacher from Corona, California.*

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# Our Hope as an Anchor

## LOGOS

Heb. 7:25

### The Earthly Priesthood

The Lord's infinite love for the human race was demonstrated in an astounding plan to restore the broken relationship—the separation—that sin had caused (Isa. 59:2). God's purity, His perfection and holiness, in all its divine dazzling light and glory, is a consuming fire to sin and sinners. The earthly sanctuary (patterned after the one in heaven), with its ministering and mediatorial priesthood, was ordained of God, through Moses, not only to show the awesome glory of God but to also demonstrate, very dramatically, how God's justice, love, and mercy operate in the removal of sin and the reconciliation of the sinner. "The law requires that nearly everything be cleansed with blood, and without the shedding of blood there is no forgiveness" (Heb. 9:22, NIV).

The priests were to be mediators, offering unblemished sacrifices on behalf of humanity (8:3; 5:1-3). But they themselves were sinners in need of forgiveness, and so needing to offer sacrifices for themselves before they could sprinkle the blood of the substitute in the sanctuary on behalf of the sinner. Death prevented them from continuing in office; that is why many priests were appointed to serve (7:23). Then, "day after day every priest stands and performs his religious duties; again and again he offers the same sacrifices, which can never take away sins" (10:11, NIV).

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## All this ritual had great significance, foreshadowing the fulfilment of God's promise.

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This is why the Day of Atonement, with its elaborate ritual symbolizing the removal of sin from the sanctuary, was celebrated year after year (verses 1-3). But all this ritual had great significance, foreshadowing the fulfillment of God's promise—His covenant to put "'my laws in their hearts, and I will write them on their minds. . . . Their sins and lawless acts I will remember no more.' And where these have been forgiven, there is no longer any sacrifice for sin" (verses 16-18, NIV). All this through a perfect sacrifice offered by a perfect Mediator.

### Jesus Our Perfect High Priest

The center of God's plan was the Incarnation, the mysterious blending of divinity and humanity in the person of Jesus, Son of God and Son of Man—the God-Man—God in the flesh (2:14-18). He was the active agent in Creation, yet he became flesh, with all its frailty. He was "tempted in every way, just as we are—yet was without sin" (4:15). He sees, knows, and understands every fear, every trial and struggle, every heartache, sorrow, and tear—which makes Him a "perfect" intercessor. He provided the sacrifice, His perfect, sinless life "once for all" (7:27; 9:12, NIV). He bore our sins and died the death that was ours and gives us the life that is His—He who committed no sin. He lives forever; the grave could not hold Him. "The point of what we are saying is this: We do have such a high priest, who

sat down at the right hand of the throne of the Majesty in heaven, and who serves in the sanctuary, the true tabernacle set up by the Lord, not by man” (8:1, 2, NIV).

We can “approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need” (4:16, NIV). And “since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near to God with a sincere heart in full assurance of faith, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. Let us hold unwaveringly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching” (10:19-25, NIV).

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*By Terrence H. Davin, a retired pastor from Mission, British Columbia.*

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# Double Assurance

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Heb. 10:22**

I was tired, despondent, and frustrated while heading out of the office in Riverside, California. A challenging appointment awaited me in Loma Linda, 25 miles away. Speeding East on the 91 freeway, my ambivalent feelings hung like a heavy cloud over my head.

As I sped along, struggling to unravel my negative feelings, black, broiling clouds filled my windshield. It seemed mother nature was mimicking my troubles, trying to teach me a dramatic lesson. Angry clouds burst overhead, and heavy raindrops fell, blinding my view. Then, the thunderstorm stopped, the skies cleared, and right before my astonished eyes appeared a double rainbow!

Reflecting on the wonderfully colored display, it dawned on me that God was giving me assurance—double assurance, if you please. He was with me despite the ambivalence I was experiencing that day. “I am with you always, even to the end of the age” (Matt. 28:20, NKJV).

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## A challenging appointment awaited me in Loma Linda.

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What assurance! How grateful I am for the promise that Jesus will be with me *always!* He gives me confidence to go about my business of serving people even though I may feel inadequate or despondent.

Ellen White says, by “feeding upon the teaching of Christ, and through prayer strengthening their faith; then, when brought into trial, the Holy Spirit will bring to their remembrance . . . the knowledge obtained . . . at the very time when it is needed.”<sup>1</sup>

I learned that day that God works in dramatic and less dramatic ways to get my attention. The Lord wants me “to see the need of drinking from the living fountain of the water of life. . . . If the hearts were only subdued by the Spirit of God! If the eye were single to God’s glory, what a flood of heavenly light would pour upon the soul.”<sup>2</sup> “The assurance given to Christ is assurance to every repenting, believing, obedient child of God that he is accepted in the Beloved.”<sup>3</sup>

“Therefore, brothers, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, and since we have a great priest over the house of God, let us draw near . . . in full assurance of faith” (Heb. 10:19-22, NIV).

1. *Maranatha*, p. 45.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 249.

3. *The Signs of the Times*, July 31, 1884.

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By John O. Easton, auditor, Southeastern California Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Riverside, California.

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# Cross to the Throne

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Heb. 4:14-16**

Abraham crossed the Euphrates from idol-worshipping Mesopotamia into Canaan, the land of promise. On the return from slaughtering the confederated kings, he met "Melchizedec, king of Salem, priest of the Most High God" (Heb. 7:1, NKJV), who gave him bread and wine (symbols of Christ's atoning sacrifice). Understanding the significance of this incident is crucial to a grasp of the nature of Jesus' ministry in resurrection and to assurance of one's standing in Christ.

Like most Christians today, the Hebrew believers had crossed over the Red Sea from Egypt (sin) into the wilderness (Judaism), where they contacted God through the Aaronic priesthood. But God's purpose was to bring His people into the good land (Christ), to enjoy the riches through His atoning sacrifice. This required that they make another crossing, this time over the river Jordan (going through the cross to effect a complete separation from Judaism).

This is the situation in which we find the Hebrew believers. Until they make this second crossing, they will continue to wander in the wilderness of quasi-Judaism, having not entered into their complete rest (salvation). This is typified by most Christians today who are unsure of salvation and weak in faith.

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## **Until they make this second crossing, they will continue to wander in the wilderness.**

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"The cross, with its blood-sprinkling, is the deliverance from Egypt; the throne, with its living Priest-King, brings into the rest of God and its victory. With Aaron there's nothing beyond atonement and acceptance; nothing of kingly rule and power; it is with Melchizedek that the fullness of power and blessing comes, the blessing that abideth continually.

"There are too many Christians who see in Christ only the fulfillment of what Aaron typified. Christ's death and blood are very precious to them. And yet they wonder that they have so little peace and joy, of the purity and power which the Savior gives, and which faith in Him ought to bring.

"The reason is simple, because Christ is only their Aaron, not their Melchizedek. They do indeed believe He has ascended to heaven, and sits upon the throne of God; but they have not seen the direct connection of this with their daily spiritual life. They do not count upon Jesus working in them in the power of the heavenly life, and imparting it to them. They do not know their heavenly calling, with the all-sufficient provision for its fulfillment in them secured in the heavenly life of their Priest-King. And, as a consequence of this, they do not see the need for giving up the world, to have their life and walk in heaven."\*

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\*Andrew Murray, *The Holiest of All* (Springdale: Whitaker House, 1996), pp. 237, 238.

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*By Edward E. Henry, an associate professor of English at Riverside (California) Community College.*

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# An Overwhelming Day

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Heb. 10:22, 23**

One day I returned home depressed, discouraged, and despondent. The daily pressure of the job had gone on for several weeks. I felt overwhelmed by the conflict I was having with my supervisor. I called my wife, son, and daughter into the bedroom to express the pain, frustration, and despair I was experiencing. "I can't take it anymore!" I said, and I broke down in tears. "I am having personality conflicts with my boss."

In my ethnic culture, men seldom express emotional feelings. Immediately my family assured me that they loved and cared about me. Then we prayed that God would guide me in resolving the conflict with my boss.

I realized, as never before, that I needed to surrender my life to Jesus my Lord and High Priest so that He might take away the heavy burden in my heart. The apostle Paul states that I may have full assurance of faith as I daily draw near to Him by intercessory prayer, Bible reading, reflection, and meditation (Heb. 10:22, 23).

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## "I am having personality conflicts with my boss."

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*Webster's II Desk Dictionary* defines assurance as "a statement intended to inspire confidence. It involves guarantee, certainty, and self-confidence." There are three important aspects that inspire confidence:

**1. He is my Creator:** "You made him a little lower than the angels; you crowned him with glory and honor and put everything under his feet" (Heb. 2:7, 8, NIV).

**2. He is my Redeemer:** "For surely it is not angels he helps, but Abraham's descendants. For this reason he had to be made like his brothers in every way, in order that he might become a merciful and faithful high priest in service to God, and that he might make atonement for the sins of the people" (verses 16, 17, NIV).

**3. He is my Mediator:** He is my High Priest and mediator in the Most Holy Place. Ellen White states that Christ pleads His blood before the Father in behalf of sinners and presents before Him also, with the precious fragrance of His own righteousness, the prayers of penitent believers.\*

We can have full assurance that Jesus' blood cleanses us from all unrighteousness.

## REACT

1. What promises do I have to sustain my faith in Christ and to know that my sins are forgiven?
2. How can I develop my faith in Jesus as my mediator-advocate?
3. How can I share my faith in the assurance I have in Jesus?

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\**The Great Controversy*, p. 421.

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By Victor Bathini, educator and QMRP consultant, Hooyenga & Associates, Inc., Upland, California.

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# Be Assured

## OPINION

**Key Text: Heb. 6:11**

Have you been asked if you were going to be in heaven someday and you hesitated to answer? Then maybe you mustered spiritual strength, looked at your relationship with your Savior, and answered, "I hope."

Thoughts of inadequacy fill your mind. You think of the time in the future when you hope to be good enough to be permitted to enter heaven. You want to be a person safe to save for heaven, so that you will not be the one starting the whole cycle of sin in heaven again.

So you are not quite confident about being good enough today to be in heaven but hope to become better in the future. You look forward to a time when your relationship with Jesus will be better and closer, and you hope you will get that warm, fuzzy feeling that gives you the confidence and assurance of His love.

I have news for you, yes, good news! Because of the life and death of Jesus and your assurance of the gift to you and me, we will be in heaven with Him. Don't wait for the future for circumstances to change when you feel better assured. Be assured in His love and salvation today.

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## No credit card debt. No high interest loans.

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Jesus is waiting to spend eternity with you and me. He has done His part. We need confidently to accept His gift of eternal life. Our picture of our future need not end or be stopped at our death on this earth. We need to visualize our life continuing in heaven. If we die before the Second Advent, we will only skip a moment and then be welcomed by our Savior! What a difference in our perspective of things that temporarily bother us now.

Earthly problems pale when we know we have an eternity of happiness to experience. Broken relationships tear us up now, but we will be able to have new relationships throughout eternity—wow! Physical problems, health challenges, will be a thing of the past. We will have renewed bodies. I can't wait! We will finally be able to get out of the rat race of acquiring more things. What a relief! Financial problems will be a thing of the past. No credit card debt. No high interest loans.

Our upbringing has encouraged us to criticize others whom we identify as the once-saved-always-saved people. Have we been so involved in criticizing others that we are unable to proclaim the assurance of our salvation? Are we unable to believe our Savior when He tells us He is with us always, even to the end?

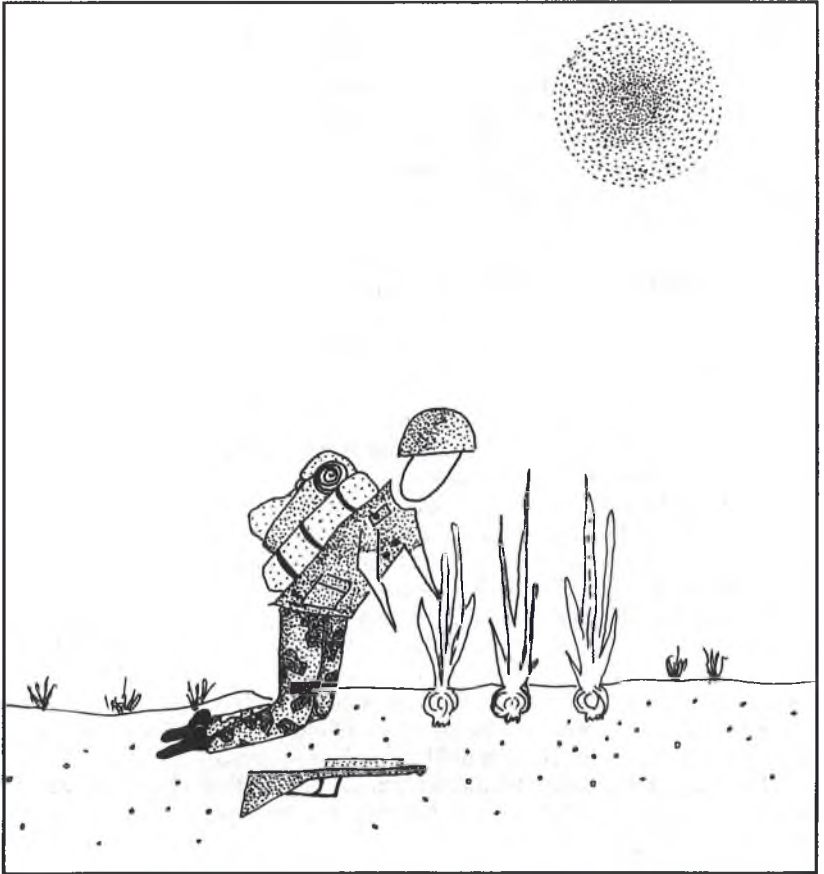
When we can internalize the assurance that Jesus is with us always and we will be spending eternity with Him, it will change us from depression and despair to assurance and hope.

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*By John Rathnam, president of Vision Enterprises, a business consulting firm, Riverside, California.*

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# CHARACTER WITNESSES FOR THE DEFENSE



**“I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand, I will not be shaken” (Ps. 16:8, NIV).**

# Completing the Unfinished

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Hebrews 11**

The suitcase that I took with me into military service contained my only memories linked to civilian life. And to religious life too. Among other things, it contained a pocket-size New Testament. In Hebrews 11 I could find a condensed list of the great characters of the Old Testament. The heroes of faith!

First, Abel is murdered without leaving a word, but his offering was favorably looked upon, and he was commended as a righteous man. Then, Enoch walks with God. He also was commended as one who pleased God.

During the communist time we were not allowed freedom of conscience in the army. You had to do what you were told. There was no alternative other than going to prison. Encouraged by the example of Abel and Enoch, I decided not to give up my faith. Several weeks passed, and God worked miracles every Sabbath. For the first three months, I was allowed to attend church every Sabbath. The pass was signed by the commander himself. But after several weeks it happened!

Early Saturday morning three buses stopped in front of the compound. An officer announced that there would be no instruction that day; we would have to sort onions

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## **There was no alternative other than going to prison.**

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in a vegetable store. The commander-in-chief was not there yet. I was lost! Heaven seemed closed. I was waiting for a miracle. But nothing special happened. The vegetable store was 10 miles from the city, in the middle of a huge farmland, far from every possible escape. The psychological war was intense. The stress was insupportable. My colleagues raised their voices because I wouldn't work. The lieutenant warned me about the consequences. I could no longer bear it. I gave up.

I made myself very small digging on the bottom of a big wooden box full of rotten onions. I could no longer think. Heaven was too far from me, unreachable. Then I heard somebody calling my name. It was the lieutenant. Near him was one of my friends from the church. The salvation was there! But it's too late, I told myself. Why go to church if I couldn't be like Abel or Enoch? I was sad all that day and recovered very slowly.

I had to learn a lesson: You have to read on in order to understand. And I discovered Noah, a drunkard hero; Abraham, a polygamist and liar; Moses, a rebellious killer; Samson, an immoral hothead; David, a lustful killer; and Rahab, a prostitute.

Is there hope after a fall? My pocket New Testament told me Yes! The cloud of witnesses sang in one voice: Yes, because they had faith. And their eyes were focused on the reward.

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*By Cristian Dumitrescu, professor of applied theology at the Romanian Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica, Romania.*

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# Sanctuary Revisited

## LOGOS

Heb. 11:1-40; Job 19:25-27; Psalms 16, 23, 73; Gen. 5:21-24; 6:22; 12:1, 4

### A Pure Heart

To be pure in heart means more than clean-minded. It stands for a total commitment to God.<sup>1</sup> “The state of the heart determines whether a man lives in the truth in which God’s goodness is experienced, or in the semblance, where the fact that it ‘goes ill’ with him is confused with the illusion that God is not good to him.”<sup>2</sup> Circumstances may seem against us, we cannot control them. But we are in control of our attitudes, of our love. Circumstances may affect our pride or self-interest, but love is not dependent on what we see. Faith is motivated by love. We have faith even when we don’t experience good times, because we love and trust. Circumstances are of little importance in comparison with attitudes. A pure heart flies higher than what our eyes can see.

### The Doubt

Doubt leads to crisis of faith, confusion, and shame. The doubts arise when we judge only by what we normally see. There are enough factors that help us raise doubts. Envy and ignorance, for example, make us blind, senseless, ignorant,

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## We often forget that the Most High receives the least respect of all.

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almost brute beasts. Too much well-being is another factor that goes with the temptation to arrogance that is a clear sign of human independence from Him. We desperately want to be respected but often forget that the Most High receives the least respect of all. When we are physically ill, we also live the pain of doubt about God’s interest in us. We question God’s faithfulness to His people with whom He entered the covenant. We also doubt God’s care to us.

Here we deal with the most common philosophy of life: the righteous versus the wicked. Very often we ask the same questions as Job and hear the same advice his wife voiced (Job 2:9). Job believed that strict obedience to God’s commands brings blessings and prosperity and that disobedience will cause the curse of God, sickness, and premature death. In spite of his philosophy, he was led to conclude that the real thing is beyond our sight.

### The Turning Point

All the pain, mourning, and weeping is justified *until* we enter the sanctuary. The turning point from the self-interest and self-pity to remembering basic responsibilities and loyalties for Asaph was the witnesses in Israel to God’s goodness.<sup>3</sup> We need to realize we are a part of the family of God. This kind of relationship is wealth of another kind. There is no longer independence from Him but expressions of love from different angles. There is no longer the longing to turn to the wicked to find their favor.

The sanctuary offers help, the possibility not so much for reason but worship. It is not so much an intellectual solution to the questions but a settling reassurance. There we begin to discern the larger plan of God for humanity. We see a totally new perspective on life in the light of eternity. In the symbols of the sanctuary it is very easy to see the judgment.<sup>4</sup> It is the reassurance that in the end God will restore the right order. The moment of shaming the shameless no doubt will come. "I never knew you" will finally be heard (Matt. 7:23).

### **The Reward**

"Afterward you will take me into glory" (Ps. 73:24, NIV). The same Hebrew word as in Genesis 5:24 is used here, reminding us that Enoch was taken to heaven. And all those who will walk with God will rejoice in the same place. Life may seem difficult, but don't forget that God is in control even when it seems that the wicked rule the world. "God's style is noncoercive. He permits sin to run in order for us to see its fruits."<sup>5</sup>

A better understanding of God will lead to a new self-estimation. The better we come to know our Maker, the more we will know ourselves. This is the dynamic of true religion in the Bible. We need a true revelation of the living God through His people.

The only good on this earth is to be near God. This statement turns us back to the beginning of Psalm 73: "God is good . . . to those who are pure in heart" (verse 1, NIV).

### **REACT**

1. How could you comfort a friend who suffers injustice or misunderstanding?
2. What should you do when you have an impure thought? How do you define "impure"?
3. Can doubt ever be a good thing for the Christian way of life? Explain your answer.
4. How would you describe the connection between knowing God and having high self-esteem?

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1. Derek Kidner, *Psalms 73-150, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Leicester, England: IVP, 1975), pp. 259, 260.

2. Martin Buber, *Right and Wrong* (SCM Press, 1952), p. 37.

3. Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1983), p. 169.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 171.

5. *Ibid.*

# Holy Energizers

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Heb. 11:14-16**

“So many people, such a long journey, and so many suitcases!” said the young lady looking around at the people who traveled to the peak of the mountain. “It seems that the road won’t be easy,” continued the woman looking at the narrow path edged by a vertical rock like a white wall on one side and a deep ravine on the other.

After so many hours of climbing, the view in front of her left her speechless: the white wall was spotted by blood. She felt a cold sweat on her back. *Wouldn't it be better for me to give up?* For a moment she followed her thoughts. There was joy and happiness when they left the valley. But after a while they realized that the path became narrower. So they had to abandon some of their things. Everybody did the same; there was no other way to continue. First she abandoned the buggy, keeping the horses and the luggage. Later, the suitcases had to be abandoned. They followed on the back of the horses until the path became so narrow they had to continue by walking. But the path was so narrow they had to take off their shoes and continue barefoot. Was it safe to continue? It was at that moment that she saw fresh blood prints.

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### So they had to abandon some of their things.

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The cool air that flowed through her hair wakened her to reality. It was not only a frightening sign but an encouraging one too. Somebody else had taken this path before them. Invigorated she said, “If others can do it, I can do it. It might be possible that my feet will bleed too, but I will not give up. Others will follow me, and my blood will encourage them to go on. I will endure everything.” So she stepped forward.\*

There may not be such a real mountain to be climbed in the world today. This story was a vision in a dream. But it represents the hardships the children of God have to endure on their way to the kingdom of heaven. Are we going to arrive on the top of the mountain?

Hebrews 11 seems to be a catalog of those witnesses who wrote history with their blood: Abel, Isaac, the prophets . . . “If they could, we also can!”

## REACT

What would you prefer: sure paths or taking a risk? Why?

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\*This is a retelling of the vision of Ellen G. White, found in *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 2, 596.

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*By Adrian Zaharia, a theology student at the Romanian Adventist Theological Seminary, Cernica, Romania.*

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# Perplexed Winners

## EVIDENCE

### Key Text: Psalm 73

Psalm 73 gives an answer to the old question: Is it worthy to live a pure life with God, when the evidences are contrary?

The psalm creates an antithesis between the two categories of people: those who are righteous and those who are wicked. Asaph records the fact that the wicked are happy, rich, respected by the others, and protected by every possible harm. They are head, not tail; in other words, the best. "Always carefree, they increase in wealth" (verse 12, NIV). The pure in heart, instead, suffer from the hand of the wicked, and nobody seems to care. Heaven is closed for them; their prayers cannot pass the gray clouds. The conclusion: every effort is in vain. The world has its rules and priorities.

It is so only until you change perspective. When you enter the sanctuary of God, the picture is turned upside down. What was so big and insupportable is now so small and worthless. The perspective is larger, and you can see the end of all these people. The wicked receive their reward; the pure in heart understand the reason for their sad experiences. Is it worth more to endure hardships and inherit eternal life than to live a carefree life and end in eternal death?

## "It is good to be near God."

The wicked live the moment but have no future. Their end comes in a moment. The hardships of the pure in heart seem endless, but their future will be the same. They have found true happiness: "It is good to be near God" (verse 28, NIV). If they are rich or poor, in heaven or on earth, it doesn't matter. He matters. You may not understand His real reasons or motivations, but you no longer care: "It is good to be near God." He makes all the difference.

The race will end soon. You won't even look at the results. You go straight to Him and, taking off your crown, sing a grateful song for the real Winner: *God is so good!*

## REACT

1. How can you live a pure life and remain on God's side without compromising?
2. What is the risk in being rich, respected, and in high positions?
3. To what degree is Psalm 73 true for you? How accurately does it describe your life?
4. How are you "suffering" for your religious beliefs? To what degree do you think "suffering" indicates the closeness of a person's walk with God?
5. Some religious movements consider suffering to be a virtue and deliberately deprive themselves of personal comforts. Do you agree that this is worthwhile? Why, or why not?

*By Mihai Stoicescu, a theology student at the Romanian Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica, Romania.*

# Online With God

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Ps. 73:23-26**

Several steps are needed in order to renounce self-seeking and material prosperity as the ultimate goal of your life and to have faith in God's promises:

**1. Decide to stay online with God.** Disconnecting from Him leads to power failure. Our batteries may be long-life, but they finally will die. Encounter the living God personally as Enoch did. If you would like another example, take Elijah. Only then will you discover that "God is good" (Ps. 73:1) and that "it is good to be near God" (verse 28, NIV).

**2. Study the lives of biblical heroes.** The biblical account is very short, even on the life of Christ, but meditating with prayer on the lives of biblical heroes will help you to discover new insights. Compare Abraham's life, for example, with Isaac's. What are the differences? Is God working in similar ways with them?

**3. Pray for help.** "Nothing is apparently more helpless, yet really more invincible, than the soul that feels its nothingness and relies wholly on the merits of the Saviour. By prayer, by the study of His word, by faith in His abiding presence, the weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ,

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## The weakest of human beings may live in contact with the living Christ.

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and He will hold them by a hand that will never let go." He has promised no smooth sailing but a sure arrival (Rom. 8:18).

**4. Worship in the sanctuary.** A living faith leads you to the sanctuary to seek God. There you meet Christ. Stick to the Almighty; remain dependent on Him. In Asaph's words, "you hold me by my right hand" (Ps. 73:23, NIV). The idea of God taking someone by the right hand signifies that He places him or her in an exalted position of honor and fellowship. Fellowship with Him is a freely bestowed gift to anyone who looks to Jesus as their righteousness. Asaph rejected all earthly or heavenly saints as intercessors. In God alone he trusted!

## REACT

1. If you have a personal diary, how does it describe your walk with God?
2. In addition to the habits presented here, what other habits can you develop to be near God?
3. By "worshiping in the sanctuary," what might be included in the word *sanctuary*?
4. Where do you—or can you—find God?

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*\*The Ministry of Healing, p. 182.*

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*By Alina-Gabriela Dumitrescu, a literature and theology student at the Romanian Adventist Theological Seminary, Cernica, Romania.*

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# Felt With, Too

## OPINION

**Key Text: Heb. 12:1**

I have frequent encounters with some outstanding friends of mine: Job, Jacob, Joshua, Jeremiah, Jonah, and John. They often visit me when they have some spare time in their schedules. We usually stroll together and share, be it in soft melancholy or, why not, in pointed arguments.

But is this not fictitious? These names represent more than characters in a story, and my story is real. Though they are historical personages, my account takes on a strong fictional flavor.

This suggests that categories like “reality” and “fiction” are, if not interchangeable, at least not so easily definable, that they sometimes drag us into the shallow intricacies of *any* discourse on life.

I believe there are several reasons to consider the Bible relevant to our world. First, if we accept the idea that our existence is a readable text, then we will surely need to find its most suitable interpretation. The Christian solution provides us with the best Interpreter. God, the major character of the Bible and, moreover, its author, is also the Governor of our space and time. He is the only One to help us

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## They often visit me when they have some spare time in their schedules.

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make sense out of the meaninglessness, to give us reason for being.\* Thus the Scripture becomes the reading guide to our world.

Second, the world of the biblical text becomes to a certain extent our own. It intermingles with our daily lives, proving to be the necessary counterpoint, the vital diversion, the stunning account of the same story.

Third, there is the stupendous picture of the shouting throngs who joyfully witness our pursuing and catching the meaning of life. There is jubilation, yea, celebration all around us. The examples of the Bible heroes suggest ways of enduring in times of stress and distress, as well as celebrating instances of elation that punctuate our existence.

## REACT

How do you think you should approach the Bible so as to get the best look through—and into—its Author’s eyes?

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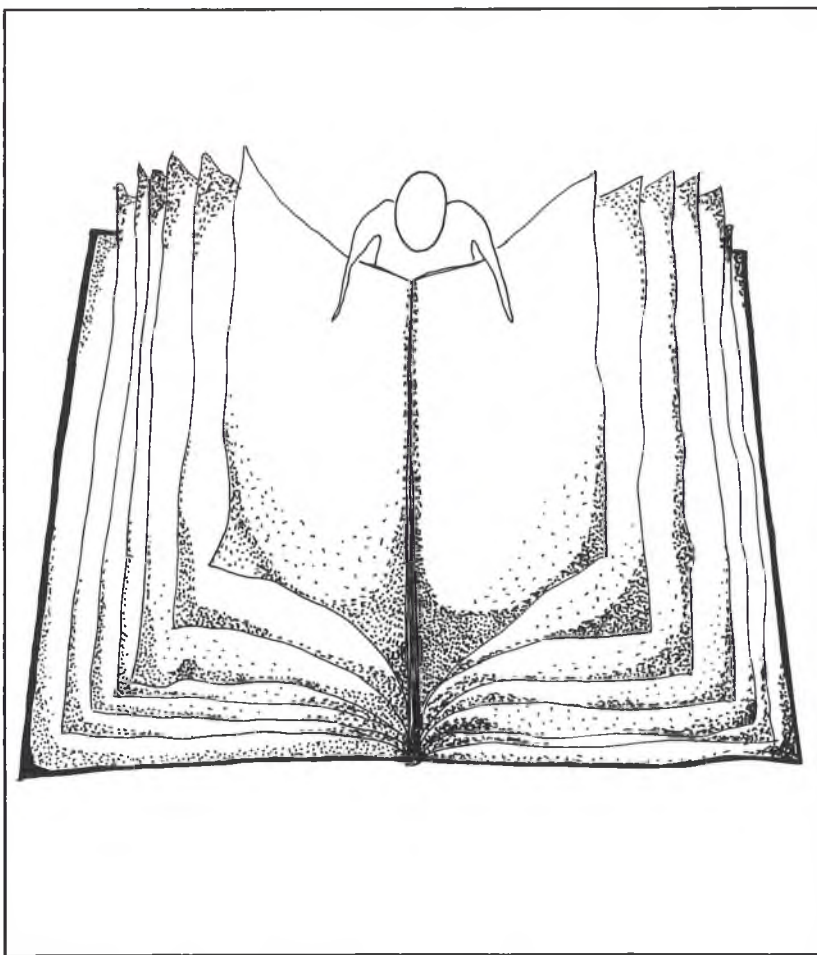
\*Jaques Ellul, *Reason for Being* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1990).

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*By Bogdan Gheorghita, a theology student at the Romanian Adventist Theological Institute, Cernica, Romania.*

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# STANDING IN THE DOCKET



**“There is therefore now no condemnation to those who are in Christ Jesus, who do not walk according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom. 8:1, NKJV).**

# The Naked Truth

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Phil. 2:12, 13**

One fine, hot, sunny day, Truth went to the beach to enjoy the deep blue waters of the sea. He quickly took off his clothes and lay them on the sand. While Truth was basking in the sunshine and water, Lie came along, saw Truth engrossed in the splendor of God's creation, and quickly clothed himself in Truth's garments. Thus he went into the city, pretending to be Truth. The people were glad to see Truth but after a time realized something was wrong.

Meanwhile Truth came out of the water and searched for his clothes. Finding Lie's clothing, he considered wearing them but decided not to. How could he, Truth, wear Lie's clothing? So he decided to go just as he was. When the people in the city saw him, they exclaimed, "Here comes the Naked Truth!"

The assurance of salvation is bound up in the Word of God. The Bible teaches that Jesus volunteered to be the sacrifice for us. His blood was shed on Calvary so we could stand justified in the judgment. It was all about love.

With this knowledge, what should be our attitude? Should we take that precious sacrifice for granted and say, "Once saved, always saved"? No!

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## **Thus he went into the city, pretending to be Truth.**

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The Word of God declares that we should work out our salvation with fear and trembling, for it is "God which worketh in you both to will and to do of his good pleasure" (Phil. 2:13, KJV).

What is the naked truth about the judgment? In the judgment, the pen of inspiration says that Jesus does not excuse our sins, but He shows our penitence and faith and claims forgiveness for us. The inspired pen also proclaims that Jesus, the Divine Intercessor, presents the plea before the Father that all who have overcome through faith in His blood be forgiven their transgressions, that they be restored to their Eden home and crowned as joint heirs with Himself to "the first dominion" (Micah 4:8, KJV).

So why worry? You have been bought with a price. You are justified before God. Recommit your life each day to Jesus. Through defects in character, Satan works to gain control of the whole mind, and he knows that if these defects are cherished, he will succeed. Therefore, he is constantly seeking to deceive the followers of Christ with his fatal sophistry that is impossible for them to overcome. But Jesus pleads, "My grace is sufficient for thee" (2 Cor. 12:9, KJV). "Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me; for I am meek and lowly in heart: and ye shall find rest unto your souls" (Matt. 11:29, KJV). Let none, then, regard their defects as incurable. God will give faith and grace to overcome them. This is the Naked Truth!

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*By Sonia Coggin, a dietetics and nutrition student at Caribbean Union College, Port-of-Spain, Trinidad.*

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## It's All About Love

### LOGOS

**John 3:16-19; 12:31-33; 1 John 4:16-18; Rom. 2:6-13; James 2:14-17; Dan. 12:1; Rev. 20:12**

Just imagine that you were to pay for a terrible crime that you were guilty of. As soon as you were to face a penalty, a very wealthy man who had read of your case in the papers offered to pay your debt, plus give you \$5,000 to hold. How would you have felt? Happy, yes! But immediately you would love that man. This is exactly how it is with salvation. Jesus has paid our debts and given us His righteousness. With this kind of action, you love Him to death.

### Salvation Through Jesus Only

Paul declares that we are no more under condemnation or on the road to damnation. The Greek word for condemnation is *katarima*, which means that we are no longer servants to the penalty for our sins. The guilt was removed at the Cross; therefore, we can now stand before the judgment seat of God clean—it's as though we had never sinned. Romans 8:1 is the ultimate summary that Paul makes concerning the depravity of humankind and the provision of righteousness through the sacrifice of Jesus.

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## You feel like fighting the devil singlehandedly.

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### Works—a Testimony of Love

When you truly understand the sacrifice made at Calvary, a great measure of joy springs up in the heart. You feel like fighting the devil singlehandedly. You want to pull down his strongholds and shoot him on sight in the name of Jesus. You hate him, and everything that is done is a direct result of love for God and hatred for sins. You work, not to be saved, but because you are already saved. When God says jump, you ask how high, and all this comes without a fuss, without a fear. It is just like loving a boyfriend/girlfriend; you give out of love.

This is the result of true conversion. You don't see yourself righteous; you just, by faith, accept it. Righteousness is obedience to the law. The law demands righteousness, and the sinner owes to the law, but he is incapable of rendering it. The only way in which he can attain righteousness is through faith.

### Judgment's Effect

Now that you have accepted Christ, you are free from the penalty in the judgment. The purpose of the judgment is to give every person according to his or her works. The wicked who have not surrendered to Jesus Christ will then stand on their own. When God destroys sin, there will be no advocate to plead their case. They will then be dealt with justly. On the contrary, those who made Jesus their refuge will be rescued. Hence, your love for Christ will produce good works, and His love will save you from the harsh penalty of the judgment.

## **REACT**

1. If God forgives me because I have accepted Jesus, how is that justice?
2. If one is saved, why is temptation still so tempting?
3. Does being drawn to the negative signify that one is not 100 percent saved?  
Explain your answer.

4. Augustine, an early Christian leader, wrote, "Love God supremely and do as you please." Explain why you agree or disagree with this idea.

# All Judged, but Not All Condemned

## TESTIMONY

**Key Texts:** Rom. 2:6-13; 14:12; 2 Tim. 1:12

Often we confuse *judgment* with *condemnation*. The two are not synonymous. This confusion, more often than not, causes those who love the Lord to harbor an unhealthy fear of Him. Maybe it is for this reason that we sometimes refer to judgment as something through which only the wicked have to go.

We are held accountable, however, for the use of the generous gifts our Father bestows upon us (Matt. 25:14-30), and where there is accountability, there is judgment. “[Our own people] do not stop to consider their accountability to God. They do not stop to consider that there is to be a reckoning day not far hence, when they must give an account of their stewardship.”<sup>1</sup> “God holds [the youth] accountable for the use they make of the talents intrusted to them.”<sup>2</sup> “Our heavenly Father requires no more nor less than He has given us ability to do.”<sup>3</sup> “If each one realized his accountability to God for his personal influence, he would in no case be an idler, but would cultivate his ability and train every power that he might serve Him who has purchased him with His own blood.”<sup>4</sup>

## In the parable of the talents, all were held accountable.

In the parable of the talents, all were held accountable, but only the one referred to as “wicked and slothful” was condemned (Matt. 25:26). In striking contrast, the other two servants were commended and rewarded for their service of love and trust—love for their Master and trust in His character. Rather than fear judgment, should we not look forward to it? Judgment, rightly understood, should never cause the one who loves the Father, trusts in Christ, and by faith cooperates with the Holy Spirit to dread losing salvation.

“A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ.”<sup>5</sup> “Rest in God. He is able to keep that which you have committed to His trust. He will bring you off more than conqueror through Him who hath loved you.”<sup>6</sup>

“For what purpose are you living? What good are you accomplishing? Can you afford to live for self? . . . Has not God a place and a work for you?”<sup>7</sup>

1. *The Adventist Home*, p. 368.

2. *Messages to Young People*, p. 370.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 309.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 188.

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

6. *The Faith I Live By*, p. 121.

7. *Medical Ministry*, p. 133.

*By Elvis Agard, a secondary school teacher at Alexandra Secondary School, in Speightstown, St. Peter, Barbados.*



# Quiet Confidence—Loud Apprehension

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts: Acts 17:31; Ps. 9:8**

One Sunday evening, with inner turmoil threatening to destroy my soul, I watched fascinated as the angry pounding surf smashed against huge boulders. But something else caught my eye: There on the thinnest branch imaginable, hanging over the raging surf, sat a little bird, totally unperturbed by the events around it. Quiet confidence? Yes. Apprehension? A definite no.

Scripture tells us that all must appear before the judgment bar of God, and the thought of such is rarely welcome. But how is it with you? Are you filled with apprehension as your mind's eye sees a rough, uncouth scene with a spiteful, unmerciful judge waiting to pronounce eternal death? Or are you like the little bird, exuding peaceful assurance, knowing that Jesus will judge the world in righteousness (John 5:22) and will minister judgment in uprightness (Ps. 9:8). Which is it, calm certainty or noisy trepidation?

Acts 17:31 states: "He has set a day when he will judge the world with justice by the man he has appointed. He has given proof of this to all men by raising him from the dead" (NIV).

## Something else caught my eye.

The concept of God entering into judgment upon the inhabitants of the earth is frequently presented by Bible writers. Enoch pictured the Lord as coming to execute judgment upon all (Jude 14, 15). Isaiah described God as coming with fire to execute judgment (66:15,16), and the prophet Jeremiah pictured the awesome time when "the Lord will roar from on high" (25:30). Daniel foresaw a time when "the court was seated, and the books were opened" (7:10, NIV). Jesus frequently spoke of the judgment. He asserted that men shall give account of "every careless word they have spoken" in the judgment (Matt. 12:36, NIV).

No one can escape the judgment, for indeed a specific time is chosen when Christ intends to review, consider, and decide the destiny of all those who lived and live on the earth. But you can approach the judgment with boldness and courage, for Christ will act justly and will not condemn you wrongfully. Because Christ was resurrected, you can be wholly confident that the same power will resurrect you, if faithful, to inherit eternal life. For He is not willing that any should perish.

Therefore, God wants "each of you to show this same diligence to the very end, in order to make your hope sure" (Heb. 6:1, NIV). "The Lord will be your confidence and will keep your foot from being snared" (Prov. 3:26, NIV).

So, therefore, with quiet confidence, face the Judge.

*By Ingrid Brathwaite, a special education teacher at The Glebe, St. George Primary School, Barbados.*

# Keep Running

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Rom. 8:1**

Have you ever been trying to mend a broken friendship or calculate a math problem, and it took so much effort that it seemed better to give up? I surely have. There will always be moments in our lives when success lies way beyond the horizon, never within our view. Giving up, however, does not offer much consolation.

In my teen years at school, the 100-meter hurdle was the event I dreaded most. Standing at the starting line called for courage, strength, endurance—and sometimes a miracle. There were times when every jump was successful; at other times, failing to make a complete jump, I stumbled and fell. I could not stop: I had a goal in mind, and it had to be accomplished. I kept running and running, never giving up, until I had made it to the end. This reminds me of the attitude needed in our walk with Christ.

In our Christian journey there will be challenges. There will be moments when our days are bright, God answers our prayers positively, and supplies our needs. Then at other times the road becomes dark, and it seems as though God has turned

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## The 100-meter hurdle was the event I dreaded most.

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His back as we desperately cry for help. We can be assured of victory, however, and here's how:

**1. Choose to obey.** When tempted to follow the crowd or break the rules, remember Christ is there to help us keep His commandments (Rom. 2:13).

**2. Overcome life's hurdles.** Don't let the hurdles of life be indicators of defeat; rather view them as a means of spurring you to victory. When you make mistakes, ask for forgiveness and then press on (1 John 1:9).

**3. Abide in Christ.** The closer you get to Christ, the harder the struggles will be. Don't believe the lie that you can never succeed. Satan is at work to deceive you. Keep trusting Christ, for He's willing to help you until the end (2 Cor. 4:8, 9).

## REACT

1. If I'm not having momentous struggles in my Christian walk, what—anything—does this signify?

2. Though Jesus had struggles, children were drawn to him, so He must have had a pleasant demeanor. If children looked at and listened to you this week, how would they rank you (10 = most pleasant, content, upbeat; 0 = stressed, pressed, troubled)?

3. How can you remain confident about the judgment when you sin?

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*By Marcia Webster, a final-year sociology student at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, St. Michael, Barbados.*

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# So Hot It's Smoking

## OPINION

**Key Texts: 2 Pet. 3:9; 1 John 3:6, 7, 9; Prov. 24:16**

You awake. Your body is drenched in perspiration, and you have a ghostly look on your face. You look around, take a deep breath, and relax, because it's only a nightmare.

Have you ever dreamed, thought, or spoken about the judgment and wondered, *Am I really saved? Am I doomed for hell? Am I good enough to enter heaven?*

Sometimes questions like these bombard our minds. They are part of Satan's design to make us doubt our soul salvation. He knows that the closer we get to God, the harder it is for him to get us to join his side. But God wants us to be assured that though we sometimes fail Him, He still loves us, and we are still His precious treasure.

Consider these analogies: A student may flunk an important examination, but it does not mean that the principal will kick him out of school. A wife may become very angry with her husband, but that does not mean the marriage is over. A teenager may wreck his parents' car, but that does not mean that he will be grounded for the rest of his life. Similarly, Christians may fall beneath God's standards, but they are still Christians, because God does not view them as sinners trying to do good but as Christians struggling with sin.

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## These questions are part of Satan's design to make us doubt our soul salvation.

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So why are some Christians still so afraid of the judgment? Because many of us are living lives trying to avoid hell's fire. We should instead live simply for Jesus and have comfort that when the roll is called up yonder, our names will be there.

"In this larger scope, God's judgment does not threaten the believer's assurance of eternal salvation. Rather it acknowledges publicly their living faith in Christ, ratifies their justification by faith, and rewards them for their witness for Him." Christians, therefore, should not panic when they dream, think, or read about the judgment; rather, they can be assured, as Paul was, and say, "Finally, there is laid up for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will give to me on that Day, and not to me only but also to all who have loved His appearing" (2 Tim. 4:8, NKJV).

So even though the judgment books have been opened, we can be assured that we shall stand.

## REACT

What was the real purpose of Old Testament prophets in their vivid descriptions of God's judgment?

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*By Racquel Lewis, a sociology student at the University of the West Indies; and Paul Collymore, a computer and physics student at the University of the West Indies, Cave Hill Campus, St. Michael, Barbados.*

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# THE RICHNESS OF RITUAL



**“He who believes and is baptized will be saved; but he who does not believe will be condemned” (Mark 16:16, NKJV).**

# Ritual or Encounter?

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Mark 16:16

It even reached the columns in newspapers here in Norway. A Pentecostal church in the United States (of course) had arranged a baptismal service in the church's parking area. They had called in the local fire corps to help them baptize their new converts—with fire hoses! They surely had to use low pressure in order not to hurt anyone. "The point is not *how* you baptize but with what spirit you are baptized," they argued.

Adventist missionaries tell other stories. I have heard of baptisms in sand in desert countries, baptisms in emptied oil tanks, etc. So, if baptism can be performed in so many different ways, why not also on infants?

During Sabbath School in my church one morning, a young girl suddenly gave us a shocker: "I can't stand Communion services!" The silence afterward more than indicated that she had got her point across. After a few minutes of nervous discussion, however, even older members admitted they, too, had problems in seeing the point. General participation at the foot-washing ceremony at our regular Communion services demonstrates clearly that routine or other obstacles keep many from experiencing assurance of salvation through these means.

Assurance of salvation is what being a Christian all boils down to. An infant

## **The meaning is not to be found in the rites themselves. The meaning is in Jesus.**

doesn't understand what salvation is all about. So, to baptize infants has no meaning—unless, of course, one believes that these ordinances have some mysterious effect on the participants. As Seventh-day Adventists, we don't. We believe the ordinances were given to demonstrate in symbols what Jesus has done for us. As with baptism, there is nothing mysterious in the wine or bread that will change you. But the moment you understand how much Jesus values you, something will happen to you.

It is all a question of focus. Do you focus on the ritual in itself—recognizing the idiosyncrasies of your local pastor or elders—or do you focus on Jesus? See Him as He served His arguing disciples, as He washed even Judas' feet. Hear Him when He in reality said to His disciples—and to us: "I am willing to die for your salvation. That's how important you are to Me."

Sand and dust is not our problem here in northern Norway, far above the Arctic Circle. But by actually doing what Jesus did, we are challenged to think of how we in our daily lives can serve each other. And how we can pass on the assurance of salvation we receive when it dawns on us what Jesus was willing to do for us. The meaning is not to be found in the rites themselves. The meaning is in Jesus. That's the focus of our study this week.

*By Atle Haugen, pastor of the Tromsø (Norway) Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

# For Us

## LOGOS

**Mark 1:4; 1 Pet. 3:20, 21; John 13:1-20; Rom. 6:3, 4; Matt. 26:26-29; 1 Cor. 11:23-26**

The focal point of Jesus' salvation act is found in His death, burial, and resurrection. Our assurance and security is found in looking at Jesus. Look at what He did. Look at what happened to Him.

### Death

Jesus died as a consequence of our sins. He paid the wages for our sins, i.e., death. When we accept Jesus as Lord of our lives, we declare that we also die to our past life of sin. The ordinances of baptism and Communion reinforce this act of faith in a marvelous drama and allow us to participate in the experiences of Jesus.

Paul states that "all of us who were baptized into Christ Jesus were baptized into his death" (Rom. 6:3, NIV). At baptism we are reminded in a powerful way that our old, sinful way of life has been put to death, crucified, rendered powerless for the sake of setting us free (verses 6, 7). Likewise, the broken bread and poured wine of Communion reminds us that Jesus' life was broken and poured out for us (Matt. 26:26, 27). Death is an inseparable part of our salvation. Fortunately, this death does not need to be repeated, because Jesus "died to sin once for all" (Rom. 6:10).

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## **Assurance of salvation sets us free to pass it on to others.**

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The fact that we perform these symbols shows our belief in the substitutionary death of Jesus. How does the idea of Jesus' substitution affect your daily life? On Calvary there were three crosses. Have you ever stopped to think of the fact that the one in the middle was meant for Barabbas? But miracle over miracle—he was set free because Jesus took his place. Jesus literally became his substitute. How do you think this experience changed Barabbas's attitude toward life, toward Jesus?

Baptism connects us as new believers with the historic act of Jesus' crucifixion on Calvary. Communion keeps us in touch with both the saving act of Jesus and our own decision to rely solely on Him for our salvation.

### Burial

Once the brutal reality of death as the consequence of sin has been established, we then need encouragement. We are encouraged with the fact that this act accomplishes forgiveness. In baptism our burial with Christ (verse 4) symbolizes the burial of our sins in the depths of the sea (Micah 7:19). And there, as has been pointed out, is a sign saying, "No fishing!" Jesus states that forgiveness of sins is also the aim that is dramatized in Communion (Matthew 26:28). Our participation in baptism and Communion reminds us that we have a relationship with One who willingly forgives totally.

John 8 records one woman's unforgettable experience with this God who forgives totally. Having been caught in the act, her fate was sealed; her doom was inevitable. But the words she heard from her Savior were, "Neither do I condemn you. . . . Go now and leave your life of sin" (John 8:11, NIV). How deeply do you think those words affected her life? Have you ever experienced the empowering of forgiveness?

### **Resurrection**

But we must not get the wrong impression. The ultimate goal of salvation is not death but life. Thus we are resurrected together with Christ in the baptismal symbol (Rom. 6:4, 11). A resurrection that brings a "new life" (verse 8, TLB). Jesus looked forward to the new life of fellowship with us when He promised, "I tell you, I will not drink of this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it anew with you in my Father's kingdom" (Matt. 26:29, NIV).

An exciting consequence of this resurrection idea is that resurrection power is available for us to live our daily lives here and now (Rom. 8:11). Do you need power in your life today? Do you feel the need for help to make it through the days that lie ahead? Are you struggling with issues in your life that keep you defeated? There is good news for you! Resurrection power is available to you. Every time you participate in Communion, be reminded of this. Experience the power!

And then—bring this power with you to your neighbor and fellow humanity. That is the example Jesus set as He washed His disciples' feet. Love has practical consequences. Our experience of assurance of salvation in Jesus is not something to be kept and cherished on our own in private. Assurance of salvation sets us free to pass it on to others. So let us do just that!

### **REACT**

1. How do you react to the idea that someone else had to take your place on death row in order to give you any hope for the future?
2. You are forgiven! How does this promise affect your assurance of salvation?
3. What does baptism and Communion teach us about the value of a human being?
4. How can you share your assurance of salvation with others?
5. What is the value of symbols such as baptism and Communion in teaching us about Jesus?
6. Symbols, by their very nature, can be prone to misinterpretation. What are the possible misinterpretations of the symbols of baptism and Communion?

# Receiving His Peace

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 14:27**

Our Savior wants His followers to experience spiritual union, with Him and with each other. He wants us to have fellowship and closeness. Jesus Christ wants His church to have harmony, participation, and togetherness. To help us believe and practice His intent, our Savior gave us Communion, something to experience together.

“The Communion service was not to be a season of sorrowing. This was not its purpose. As the Lord’s disciples gather about His table, they are not to remember and lament their shortcomings. . . .

“They come to meet with Christ. They are not to stand in the shadow of the cross, but in its saving light. They are to open the soul to the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness. With hearts cleansed by Christ’s most precious blood, in full consciousness of His presence, although unseen, they are to hear His words, ‘Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you.’ John 14:27.

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## Our Savior gave us Communion, something to experience together.

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“Our Lord says, Under conviction of sin, remember that I died for you. When oppressed and persecuted and afflicted for My sake and the gospel’s, remember My love, so great that for you I gave My life. When your duties appear stern and severe, and your burdens too heavy to bear, remember that for your sake I endured the cross, despising the shame. When your heart shrinks from the trying ordeal, remember that your Redeemer liveth to make intercession for you.”<sup>1</sup>

“It is only because of His death that we can look with joy to His second coming. His sacrifice is the center of our hope. Upon this we must fix our faith.”<sup>2</sup>

## REACT

1. What does the “saving light” of the cross mean to you personally?
2. What attitude is the most prevalent in your local church—lamentation or joy?
3. What does it mean that Christ’s sacrifice is the center of our hope?

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 659.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 660.

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*By Roger F. Jakobsen, pastor of the Betel Seventh-day Adventist Church in Oslo, Norway.*

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# Remember His Work

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Exod. 14:13**

We humans are not always good at remembering things. Having to remember dates, appointments, anniversaries, and so on, we invented organizers, tape recorders, computers, etc. Yet, remembering is the backbone of our faith. When God created the universe, He filled the world with reminders of His love and grace. The Sabbath is a reminder of Creation; the law, a reminder of His character; the sanctuary, a reminder of His ministry; the bread and wine remind us of His sacrifice; and baptism is a reminder of His saving grace.

Baptism is not solely a New Testament idea. It was practiced by Jews for centuries before Jesus' birth as a reminder of the crossing of the Red Sea. On that occasion, the people of Israel were trapped, terrified, and angry. Had Moses brought them out of Egypt to die in the desert? Moses answered, "Do not be afraid. Stand firm and you will see the deliverance the Lord will bring you today" (Exod. 14:13, NIV). Moses stretched out his hand, and the sea opened up, an amazing event that the Israelites wanted always to remember. Baptism, therefore, was the perfect reminder for the Israelites of this great salvation. The word *baptizo* in Greek was used to refer to the act of dyeing clothes in which cloth was dipped into colored waters. Some ancient

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## Remembering is the backbone of our faith.

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writers have used *baptizo* as a word referring to the sinking of a ship, shipwreck, and drowning.<sup>1</sup> Every translation of *baptizo*, however, clearly illustrated the wonderful deed of God; the salvation and freedom from Egypt through immersion in the waters.<sup>2</sup>

In the New Testament, baptism is also a reminder and reenactment of God's act of salvation. In baptism, the person goes down into the water, representing Jesus' coming down into our world. The person is immersed in water; representing Jesus' death and burial. The person comes out of the water; representing Jesus' resurrection.

Another point to consider regarding baptism is the fact that one does not baptize oneself. The convert is baptized by someone else. In the same way we are baptized by someone else, so are we saved by someone else—Jesus Christ. Baptism is also a public ceremony, and rightly so, because Jesus hung publicly on the cross at Calvary.

## REACT

Can you think of other ways in which baptism is a reminder of a spiritual principle?

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1. Gerhard Kittel and Gerhard Friedrich, eds., *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1964), vol. 1, p. 529.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 8, pp. 118, 119.

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*By Tito Correa, pastor in the Betel Seventh-day Adventist Church, Oslo, Norway.*

# A Togetherness That Sets Us Free

## HOW-TO

**Key Texts:** Ps. 103:12; John 8:36; 13:3-10

Peter's hesitancy to allow Jesus to wash his feet is like the hesitancy many of us feel. We know we have failed our Lord. Baptism represents the washing away of our old life, death to it, and the beginning of a new life with God. At that moment we know that the Son has set us free. Celebrating Communion offers us the opportunity to know that we are washed clean again.

"Forgiveness has a broader meaning than many suppose. When God gives the promise that He 'will abundantly pardon,' He adds, as if the meaning of that promise exceeded all that we could comprehend: 'My thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways My ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts.' Isaiah 55:7-9. God's forgiveness is not merely a judicial act by which He sets us free from condemnation. It is not only forgiveness *for* sin, but reclaiming *from* sin. It is the outflow of redeeming love that transforms the heart. David had the true conception of forgiveness when he prayed, 'Create in me a clean heart, O God; and renew a right spirit within me.' Psalm 51:10. And again he says, 'As far as the east is from the west, so far hath He removed our transgressions from us.' Psalm 103:12."

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## Peter's hesitancy to allow Jesus to wash his feet is like the hesitancy many of us feel.

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How do I experience the truth of this for myself?

1. **Pray.** Realize that I have made mistakes. Recognize my need of repentance and forgiveness from God.
2. **Ask.** Check whether I have offended anyone in the church community—prepare to ask their forgiveness.
3. **Praise Him.** Acknowledge God's power to save each of us.
4. **Serve.** Participate in foot washing with joy and inner peace.
5. **Give thanks.** During the taking of bread and wine, appreciate what Jesus endured to be my Savior.
6. **Rejoice in this assurance.** With a clean slate, begin living for God again—free from past failings.

## REACT

How can I experience the assurance of forgiveness and a new life on a daily basis?

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\*Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 114.

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By Paul Lockham, pastor and youth sponsor in the Welsh Mission; and Helen Lockham, an elementary teacher in Newport, South Wales, United Kingdom.

# Gays, Gabriel, and Dynamo Truth

## OPINION

**Key Text: Matt. 9:11-13**

There was this fellow who used to wear scruffy, tooled leather cowboy boots on the bus I took to my work in Washington, D.C. This was back when the Review and Herald Publishing House and the General Conference headquarters were both within a few paces of this particular bus stop. I noticed the boots after I registered that he was the only person on the bus who read his Bible every morning.

I was not reading mine.

One day I struck up a conversation about his Bible reading. By the end of the journey he had invited me to visit his church. (Clearly he didn't realize that I was supposed to be the one to invite him to my church.) Anyway, I accepted and on the following Sunday I showed up in my Sabbath best at the sanctuary where he worshiped.

You could have knocked me over with an angel's down-feather. It turned out that it was a church for gays and lesbians who claimed the power of the gospel to save them without altering their sexuality. As if that weren't enough to leave me agog, when it came time for the special music, it was provided by a very close relative of one of the most famous pastors in Seventh-day Adventism. In a day made up of such revelations there was, you might assume, not much room for

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## **He was the only person on the bus who read his Bible every morning.**

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serendipity, but the most powerful serendipity of my entire life flooded through me when it came time for the Communion near the end of the service.

*They're going to presume to offer me Communion?* I asked myself incredulously. Still, I went forward. One "priest" put the wafer on my tongue. He said, "The body of Christ, broken for you." Another "priest" held the goblet to my lips. He enfolded me in his arms and whispered in my ear, "The blood of Christ, shed for you."

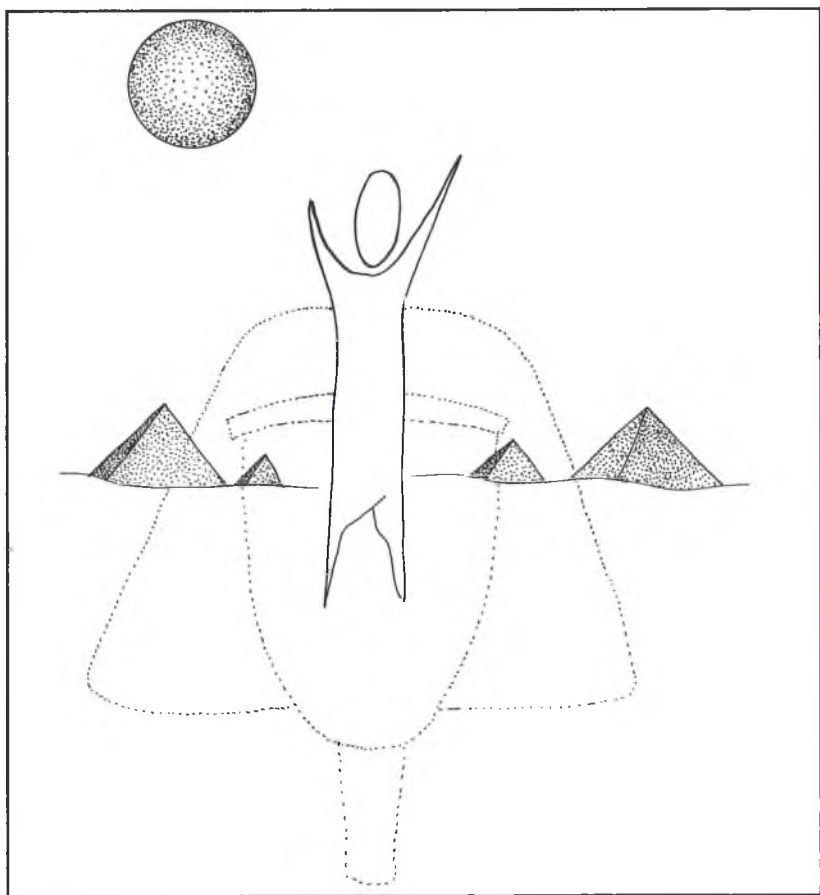
Believe me, what I expected was outrage at their presumption. What I experienced, for the one and only time in my life, was the overpowering surge of the electrifying power of God, come down to save sinners. I'm sure it was as stunning as the charge sent through condemned prisoners in an electric chair, but instead of killing me, it filled me with monolithically calm power for the rest of my life.

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*By Phillip Whidden, a graduate student at the University of London, England.*

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# A SUMMONS TO WITNESS



**“You shall receive power when the Holy Spirit has come upon you; and you shall be witnesses to Me in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the end of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NKJV).**

# Satan's Witness Protection Program

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Isa. 52:7

How ya' doin'?' Hey—what's new?"  
 "Nothin' much; what's up with you?"  
 Easy greetings, most unsaid;  
 Kept my thoughts inside my head.

Elders came, anointed, prayed.  
 Mama cried; yet still she stayed.  
 Poor old Dad; worked days then sat  
 by the bed as Mama wept.

Fever's rising. Doctors' dread.  
 "We've done all we could," they said.  
 "We'll sedate her, ease her fright . . .  
 Doubt she'll make it through the night."  
 Lying still I thought of those  
 memorialized in Bible prose.  
 Bartimaeus, lepers nine . . .  
 Thousands more of humankind.

Jesus healed them; He could still  
 make me well if it's His will.  
 Then I prayed, straight from my heart  
 that His grace He would impart.

In and out of dreams I went.  
 Hot, then cold; the pain, torment.  
 Fainter still my heartbeat sighed.  
 With all the breath I had I cried.

"Jesus, please don't take me now.  
 Make me well again, somehow.

I'll be a witness true for You—  
 not care about the worldly view."

Super grace! A calmness came;  
 stopped contortion of the pain.  
 Then I slept; awoke to see  
 Mama smiling down at me.

"Child! You almost like to died!  
 But my Jesus, crucified;  
 in His mercy heard my plea—  
 brought you back again to me."

Well, I'm strong now; out, alive.  
 With my friends I'm talkin' jive.  
 When they asked me where I'd been . . .  
 Answered vaguely, with a grin.

Couldn't bring myself to say  
 words like "Jesus," "mercy," "pray."  
 I just shrugged . . . the subject changed.  
 They might think me weird, or strange.

So I laughed and danced and played.  
 Let all thoughts of Jesus fade.  
 I can go to church someday.  
 Maybe when I do, I'll say . . .

Some few words; I *did* get well.  
 It can wait. Not much to tell.

# Witnessing in Unlikely Places

## LOGOS

**Josh. 24:1-21; Isa. 42:6; 52:7-10; Mal. 3:13-18; Rom. 10:14, 15; 1 Pet. 2:9; 3:15; Rev. 6:9**

When God calls a man or woman to do a specific job, He prepares that individual for the task. God's servants sometimes would prefer a more pleasant surrounding for witnessing if they could choose the place and the circumstance. The story of Joseph is a good example of God preparing His servant for witnessing in an unlikely place.

"Joseph had a dream, and when he told it to his brothers, they hated him all the more" (Gen. 37:5, NIV). As if that were not enough, "he had another dream, and he told it to his brothers. 'Listen,' he said, 'I had another dream, and this time the sun and moon and eleven stars were bowing down to me'" (verse 9). The brothers had planned to kill him. They ended up selling him into slavery.

An officer of Pharaoh named Potiphar bought Joseph, and Joseph became a witness in his household. He had the opportunity to go to bed with Potiphar's wife, but he refused. She lied and said he tried to force himself on her, and Potiphar put him in prison.

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## **Joseph didn't go with his feelings—he went with his faith.**

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Isn't prison an unlikely place for a child of God? He could have felt that God had forsaken him even though he had not done anything wrong. Joseph maintained his integrity to God, although he was behind bars. "The warden paid no attention to anything under Joseph's care, because the Lord was with Joseph and gave him success in whatever he did" (verse 23).

Joseph didn't go with his feelings—he went with his faith. He could have been bitter, angry, and disappointed because he was innocent, but God used him to witness to the keeper of the prison and the prisoners.

Joseph was also used to interpret the dream of the butler and the baker who had been put into prison by orders of the pharaoh. When the butler was cleared of charges and was about to be restored to his former position, Joseph asked him to help him when he was discharged. " 'When all goes well with you, remember me and show me kindness; mention me to Pharaoh and get me out of this prison' " (40:14, NIV).

We are admonished by Scripture not to put our trust in flesh. The butler did not remember Joseph until two years later when Pharaoh had a dream that his magicians could not interpret. The butler told Pharaoh about Joseph.

The God of heaven can open a door that no human can close and close a door that no human can open. Pharaoh sent for Joseph and received the interpretation of his dream. Joseph was immediately promoted by Pharaoh: " 'Only with respect to the throne will I be greater than you' " (41:40, NIV). This big promotion could have caused Joseph to lose his fidelity.

We have a tendency to let promotions and other achievements go to our heads,

but Joseph was leaning on the everlasting arms. “The same fidelity to God was manifest when he stood in the palace of the Pharaohs as when in a prisoner’s cell. . . . Through Joseph the attention of the king and great men of Egypt was directed to the true God.”\*

The prison cell was indeed an unlikely place to witness for God. On the other hand, sharing the throne of a king who practiced idolatry was also an unlikely place to witness. God had directed Joseph’s life from the time he was born. When the 11 brothers finally discovered Joseph’s identity, they were sure that he would retaliate against them for their cruel treatment of him. “ ‘Now, do not be distressed and do not be angry with yourselves for selling me here, because it was to save lives that God sent me ahead of you’ ” (Gen. 45:5, NIV).

Joseph knew that God had chosen and prepared him for his mission. He said that God sent him. “How can they believe in the one of whom they have not heard? And how can they hear without someone preaching to them? And how can they preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:14, 15, NIV).

Christ’s followers have a mandate to go into the prisons and witness to the inmates and correctional staff. Jesus has identified with those who are in prison. “ ‘Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me’ ” (Matt. 25:34-36, NIV).

Those who are called to witness behind bars have been prepared by God. The key text points out, “How can they preach unless they are sent?” (Rom. 10:15, NIV). If God is calling you to witness in an unlikely place, He has already given you the preparation you need to accomplish the task. Our response should be the same as that of Isaiah: “Here am I. Send me!” (6:8, NIV).

## **REACT**

1. Why did Christ say in Matthew 25:34-36 that He was in prison?
2. How was God’s purpose served by having Joseph second in charge of Egypt?
3. If a classmate or a co-worker should say to you, “There is something different in the way you always conduct yourself,” how would you respond?
4. How can we become more prepared to give an account for the hope that is in us? Explain.
5. Though we consider Joseph a hero of faith, how do we account for his behavior in Genesis 37:2? Is this merely a minor flaw compared to his major strengths? Explain your answer.

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\**Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 222.

# Alive in Christ

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 Pet. 3:15, 16**

In the courtroom of our universe, God has called all to be His witnesses. Only eyewitness accounts and personal testimonies will hold up in God's courtroom.

We are called to represent the character of our Master to a world in which the light of truth has become a rare commodity. "Through the ages that have passed since the days of the apostles, the building of God's temple has never ceased. We may look back through the centuries and see the living stones of which it is composed gleaming like jets of light through the darkness of error and superstition. Throughout eternity these precious jewels will shine with increasing luster, testifying to the power of the truth of God."<sup>1</sup>

The world is watching to see how the professed people of God are dealing with the pressures of an ever-changing world. At the height of our greatest struggles, our lives will bear their greatest testimonies. When the world laughs as you cry, will you say, "Curse God and die!" (Job 2:9, NIV), or will you glorify your Maker?

All must bear their testimony before humankind and angels. "God has put us apostles on display. . . . We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to

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## **Only eyewitness accounts and personal testimonies will hold up in God's courtroom.**

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angels as well as to men" (1 Cor. 4:9, NIV). When the Savior is lifted up in our lives, those who are looking on will truly glimpse the love and compassion of God. "As a witness for Christ, John entered into no controversy, no wearisome contention. He declared what he knew, what he had seen and heard. He had been intimately associated with Christ, had listened to His teachings, had witnessed His mighty miracles. Few could see the beauties of Christ's character as John saw them. For him the darkness had passed away; on him the true light was shining. His testimony in regard to the Saviour's life and death was clear and forcible. Out of the abundance of a heart overflowing with love for the Saviour he spoke; and no power could stay his words."<sup>2</sup>

Jesus is calling to those who are willing to take up their cross and follow Him. "God will make the young men of today heaven's chosen repositories, to present before the people truth in contrast with error and superstition, if they will give themselves to Him."<sup>3</sup>

At our every prayer Christ is present, waiting and yearning to fill us with His love and power. Without him every word and action would be self-motivated (John 15:5). Because He lives, we are alive—witnesses in Christ.

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1. *The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 598.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 555.

3. *Evangelism*, p. 24.

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*By Rick S. Ramdon, a college student and salesperson in Long Island, New York.*

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# Witness for the Prosecution?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts: Isa. 42:6; Mal. 3:13-18**

God chose Israel, the least populous of ancient nations (Deut. 7:6), to be in a covenant relationship to witness of His supreme lordship; “‘a light for the Gentiles’” (Isa. 42:6, NIV).

Covenants, or contracts, were common in the ancient Near East. “Covenant” (Hebrew *berith*) means “to be in league with.”

God wanted to be in league with His people. Our God of order (1 Cor. 14:40) established clearly the terms of the contract. He offered His Sovereign protection and providence; Israel, in turn, was to obey His “commandments,” “judgments,” and “statutes” (Deut. 8:11, KJV).

His divine intervention and miraculous signs and wonders that repeatedly delivered His outnumbered people from their polytheistic foes, coupled with their loyalty to God would bear vivid testimony (Hebrew: *edah*, “witness”) that their God is the “great King above all gods” (Ps. 95:3).

God’s promises notwithstanding, the Bible is replete with accounts of Israel’s ignoring God’s prophets and disobeying His commands. Thus the covenant lapsed by default.

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## God wanted to be in league with His people.

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Even after the Babylonian exile, worship continued to decline. The priests were corrupt; there was heathen intermarriage and tithe withheld.

Tithing then, as today, is a form of witnessing: of faith in God’s provision, thankfulness for His grace, and an expression of desire to further the gospel.

Israel began to speak “harsh things” (Mal. 3:13, NIV) against the Lord, which they arrogantly disputed when confronted by God’s messenger (verse 13). They in effect said, “Why serve God and give Him our money? Look how the rich prosper and they don’t even acknowledge God” (verses 14, 15).

This mind-set still persists, even in our churches. Those of the world meander amidst the maze of the millennium, working to gather into their *own* storehouses, envying the rich, pocketing God’s tithe, or giving it grudgingly. These are they who witness to the lure of the good life *now*.

It is God’s remnant today who draw together to witness Him (verse 16). Their testimony is a light for the Gentiles that refracts through the morass of modern morality and glistens like jewels, by which name God calls them (verse 17).

## REACT

1. Identify those aspects of your daily life that are prime avenues for witnessing.
2. Compare and contrast the effectiveness of verbal witnessing versus active witnessing.

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By Colson Logan, a teacher and writer, Uniondale, New York.

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# Witnessing in Sickness and in Health

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Josh. 24:1-21**

As we contemplate our lives in response to God's desire for our fellowship with Him, we may witness a small part of the incredible mastery of His ongoing plan. Creation witnesses of His majesty, the overwhelming intricacies of scientifically perfect results in beautiful flowers and the magnificent structure and physiological function of animal and human life.

It may be much more difficult, on the other hand, to appreciate the equally involved working of our Creator in disease and destruction of an apparently healthy organism. Those of us who may have experienced an assault on our health and find ourselves in a "life fight" may, upon further thought, find imperfections that indeed require intervention that will help to correct the entire organism.

The truth is that each of us is involved in a continual life fight for salvation. Let us remember that God's greatest desire is to restore us fully to the perfect Edenic creation. Jesus intervened in the only completely divine way that allows this to happen. Recall that He is "like a refiner's fire" (Mal. 3:2, NIV), peeling all the dross and alloy from us in order that we may return to that perfect fellowship which, upon our loyal acceptance, we will enjoy in heaven for eternity.

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## **Each of us is involved in a continual life fight for salvation.**

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Therefore, brothers and sisters in Christ, rejoice that our God loves us so much that He allows us to be touched with infirmities in a way that turns a curse into an eventual blessing—to serve Him better. Witness in all situations. Trust Him! He loves us.

## **REACT**

1. Today's key text recounts a specific history of how God led the people to where they were that day. How has God specifically led in your life to get you where you are today?

2. God sent hornets (Josh. 24:12) to help the chosen people settle in the Promised Land. What "hornets" has He used to prepare and clear the way before you?

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*By Roy DeBeer, an osteopathic physician practicing in the New York area.*

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# Hope Is a Four-Letter Word

## OPINION

**Key Text: 1 Pet. 3:15**

H - Happiness

O - Opportunity

P - Persistence

E - Execution

Before I knew Christ personally, I was for myself. Hope was not a notion I believed in; I relied on my smarts to get on. I asked the Lord to come into my life and forgive me of my sins. Then my heart wasn't heavy or burdened anymore; it became soft and caused me to become mellow, loving, caring—and to depend on my Lord and the Holy Spirit.

When this happened, the Holy Spirit led me to wherever there was a need. If people are hungry, I will see that they are fed. If some are homeless, I will help to find a place for them to stay. If someone is out of work, I will help them find a job. If someone is sick, I will pray with them and for them. If someone is lonely, I will pray for them and comfort them. If someone is lazy, I will show them that by making an effort, their feelings about themselves and their lifestyle will improve. Hundreds of people have been sent my way, and God has used me to do His work in caring for them. I am happiest when helping others, and it has become a way of life for me.

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## Before I knew Christ personally, I was for myself.

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Many have asked me why I should have hope that each day is a new time span in which great things may happen; where all that went wrong yesterday can reverse. My answer is that without hope there is no help; and God is the source of all help; thus of all hope.

By my actions, the light that God has placed on me directs others my way to seek help. Sometimes people close to me fear that I do too much. This is my God-given witness in life. I am grateful for the job and do it gladly. I do not believe I am being used or am a soft touch.

I know the Messenger, and He is the truth that has set me free. My spirit is *happy* that I have the *opportunity to persist in executing* God's work. Hope is the gift; the Lord is the Provider; I am the witness.

## REACT

1. Analyze the things you hope for and decide which of these lead to a closer walk with Jesus.

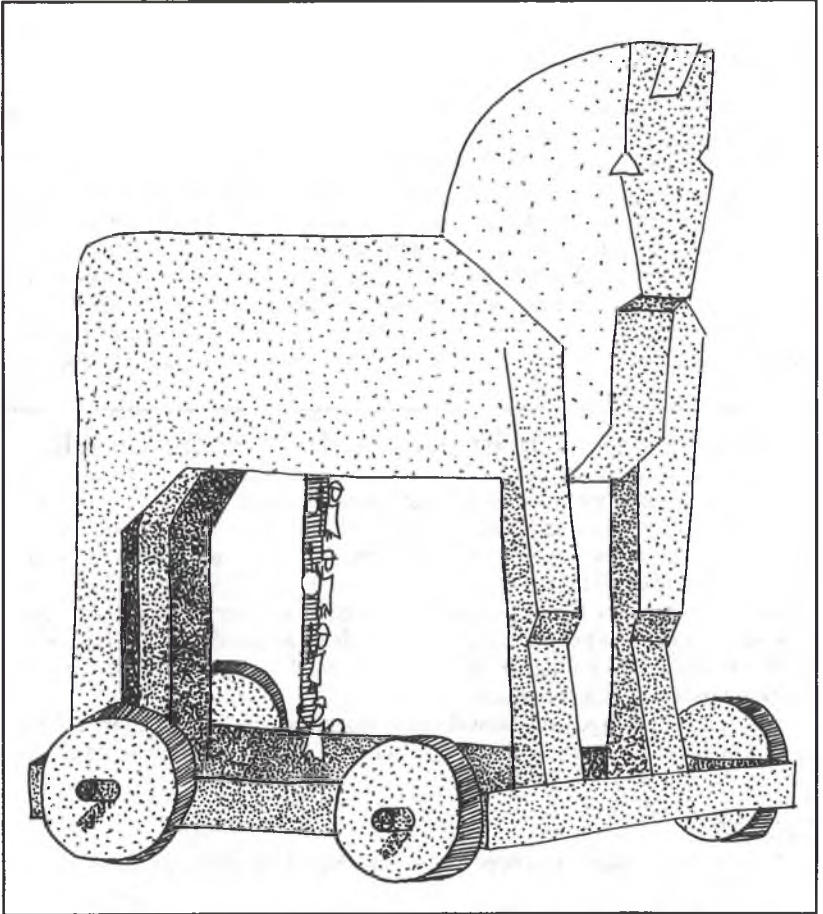
2. Generate a list of things that make you feel hopeless and explain your coping mechanisms during those times.

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*By Bobby Logan, a career coordinator for the Uniondale (New York) School District on Long Island.*

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# THE BIGGEST PARTY EVER



**“Behold, I come like a thief! Blessed is he who stays awake and keeps his clothes with him, so that he may not go naked and be shamefully exposed” (Rev. 16:15, NIV).**

# People, Get Ready

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rev. 1:1-3**

The Trojans awoke on a dark night to screams. Out of the darkness the forms of Greek soldiers spread throughout the city. Behind them Troy burned and died. Like thieves in the night, the Greeks caught the people of Troy totally unaware. How could this be happening? Hadn't they defeated the Greeks? For days the Greek soldiers had been loaded onto ships that had sailed away. The Greeks had even left a gift. How could the Greeks be here now, destroying their city? Many people died that night; only a few, those who were ready to flee at a moment's notice, managed to escape.

The book of Revelation warns us that at the end of time we will face a similar series of events. If we are not ready, we will have no escape. Read Revelation 16:15. We should be keeping ourselves in constant readiness. Who knows when we will be faced with death, Christ's coming, or the final judgment?

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## **The horse was more than just an empty wooden structure.**

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The Trojans, thinking they had won the war against the Greeks, had looked out over the impregnable walls of their city and seen a great wooden horse standing in front of their gates. Some probably claimed it to be a trick by the Greeks. But the optimists drowned them out, shouting that they had won. Had not the Greeks departed from their walls in defeat? Obviously, the horse was a token left by a gallant foe to mark their victory.

So the Trojans had put aside their natural scepticism and brought the wooden horse inside their city, even pulling down part of the wall to get it through the gate. But like a wolf in sheep's clothing, the horse was more than just an empty wooden structure. Inside, a small number of Greek soldiers waited for night to fall, so they could sneak out and open the gates for the Greek army which had returned under cover of night. And so it was that after years of fighting to get through the walls of Troy, the Greeks had finally succeeded. In one night Troy fell.

So what is the moral of this story? Be ready. Never let your guard down, no matter how good something looks. Pay attention to warnings that come your way. The smallest thing might mean the difference between life or death. Can you afford to be complacent?

Revelation is a book that says "Be warned." At its very beginning it states that anyone who heeds the warnings is blessed (1:1-3). It is saying, "Here's what's coming. Pay attention!" Near the end of the book, Revelation 22:7 confirms this statement as being so important that if it is ignored final death is the result.

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*By Shane Ward, a tertiary student in Geelong, Australia.*

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# Revelation's Beatitudes

## LOGOS

Rev. 1:1-3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14

Revelation is not just a complex prophetic writing about history and end-time events. It is written to offer assurance to God's people. John himself needed the assurance while exiled on Patmos, and the developing and persecuted church needed assurance too. Through the visions John saw the final victory of God's people and the destruction of Satan. Some of the assurances came to John and the readers through the seven blessings of Revelation. These beatitudes will be examined briefly in the order they are found in Revelation.

### Revelation 1:1-3

This Revelation has urgency "because the time is near" (verse 3, NIV). The Christian could listen to many different voices from within and without. But Revelation invites blessing if the Christian chooses to focus on God. As one progresses to each of three levels of listening, further blessing is promised.

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## **It is not lack of prophecy that catches people unaware.**

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First, read the words. Get generally acquainted with the message. Second, hear the words. The seven churches are to hear what the Spirit says. This kind of hearing suggests an understanding and believing that the Holy Spirit is the agency through which Revelation is understood. Third, take the words to heart. This means to cherish the belief so that the Revelation of Jesus is central to life.

### Revelation 14:13

This blessing is given after John is shown much of the church's history with its belief and endurance during times of persecution and its proclamation with the three angels of the warning message to the world. In this crisis time God calls for "patient endurance on the part of the saints who obey God's commandments and remain faithful to Jesus" (14:12). These characteristics that come from a relationship with Jesus Christ are always important. But when facing death through persecution, assurance is vital. Death is not defeat but a victory—a blessing to those who love the Lord. They die knowing God loves them. He will judge them according to His Son. They will be resurrected to receive their reward and they receive peace and rest from struggles. Previously the angel to the church in Smyrna tells the people not to be afraid of suffering and persecution but to be faithful even to the point of death. The reward will be a crown of life (2:10, 11).

### Revelation 16:15

This blessing also comes with warnings. Christ reminds the church that He is coming and that it may take His people unawares despite their prophetic time lines and ideas. It is not lack of prophecy that catches people unaware but their lack of "consciousness" and "clothing." Staying awake will involve looking for the signs

and preparing oneself through study, prayer, and living a life close to God through the Spirit's strength. The preceding verses speak of signs and counterfeit religion that the Christian needs to be aware of. It is not the time for complacency or being drawn toward false ideas and worship.

Whenever the Bible talks about clothing, it refers to Christ's righteousness that covers our sinful state like an all-covering coat. We can picture ourselves coming to Christ as we are—sinners with worn-out clothes. Christ's love, purity, forgiveness, character, and sacrifice are like a coat or robe that He personally places over us to cover our inadequacies. When we put on this new pure coat, we begin a relationship with God the Father through His Son.

A thief comes into a house with the motive to steal. A friend may come to your house even uninvited but is welcomed because of a constant relationship. Christ wants to come as a welcomed friend. We lose eternal life with God if we're unprepared. Living a perfect life by our own efforts will be exposed. We will be revealed for what we really are in the coming judgment. In contrast, God promises blessings to those who have their hearts awake and prepared.

### **Revelation 19:9**

Christ has a celebration in mind for His people. The invitation is for those clearly chosen by God—and who are prepared to come. They have their clothes of Christ's righteousness on. At this wedding supper there is rejoicing and praise and the closeness of eating with a friend. A real blessing! In contrast, others go to God's supper of judgment, wrath, and death (Rev. 19:17). Celebration with God comes when we meet the requirement in approaching Him—we take Jesus' covering coat of righteousness.

### **Revelation 20:6**

The blessings of being part of the first resurrection are great. Eternal life is a reality. Death and personal judgment are gone forever for these people. As priests these people have direct communion with God. A God who restores people has made them part of His kingdom.

### **Revelation 22:7**

God's reign is now established. John has seen the end-time events of God's church and the battle with Satan finally resolved. For Christians to take hold of this promised blessing, they will keep the words of the prophecy in this book.

### **Revelation 22:14**

This blessing reminds us that by accepting Christ's robe and washing, we have eternal life. God calls His people to a great city. The tree of life is there. To have the right to enter and be within God's city, there has to be a change in the person. Only those who take to heart God's Word will give their heart and life to God and have real and original human life restored to them.

## **REACT**

1. What are the good deeds in Revelation 14:13?
2. How can the words of the prophecy be kept in Revelation 22:7?

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*By Jennifer Milligan, a part-time primary school teacher and homemaker in Geelong, Australia.*

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# To Be Blest or Not to Be Blest?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Texts:** Job 11:7; Isa. 55:8, 9; 46:9, 10

“Pride feels no need, and so it closes the heart against Christ and the infinite blessings He came to give.”<sup>1</sup> Jesus cannot bless those who do not desire blessings. “We are to take advantage of every blessing within our reach.”<sup>2</sup> Those who learn of God’s blessings and consider themselves already full will go away empty. If we cannot see our need for blessings, we are in a dangerous spiritual position.

The great war of this world is raging around us. In the Dark Ages the Bible was withheld from people to discourage personal investigation into the truths of Revelation.<sup>3</sup> Today we see a new strategy. I have Protestant friends who are convinced that Revelation cannot be understood without theological degrees.

The title “Revelation” suggests that we can understand the content of the book. It demonstrates how events have been guided through the ages as the war on this world has raged. No one needs to be ignorant of what is coming upon the earth. The answers are made plain in Revelation; we simply need to look for them.

Each of us can attain a measure of light from Revelation, enough to do the work

## Each of us can attain a measure of light from Revelation.

appointed to us. Are we going to understand fully every aspect of Revelation? No! Thinking that we need to understand Revelation fully before we can benefit by studying it is a grave error. Instead, we need to read it and act on its truth.

In Job 11:7 and Isaiah 55:8, 9; 46:9, 10 we begin to see that we can’t fully comprehend the wonders of God’s knowledge. A truly wise man is prepared to accept that some things the human mind cannot comprehend.

These days, there is a reluctance to investigate the book of Revelation. Yet Jesus pronounced a blessing on all who should read it.

The blessings pronounced in Revelation encourage us to:

- Read or hear and keep the words of this prophecy.
- Keep watch and keep your spiritual garments.
- Consider yourself called to the marriage supper.
- Do His commandments.
- Be willing to die in the Lord.
- Be part of the first resurrection.

You can attain these blessings yourself and also share the blessings with others by encouraging them to search for truth and light in the book of Revelation.

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

2. *Loma Linda Messages*, p. 120.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 340.

*By Karle Duke, a computer analyst for Teistra, Hoppers Crossing, Australia.*



# Armageddon

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Rev. 16:15**

The plagues, like the rest of Revelation are best understood by understanding the meaning of the symbols that are mainly found in the Old Testament. The sixth plague causes the fall of Babylon (Rev. 16:12-16). Ancient Babylon was situated on the river Euphrates. It fell when the waters were dried up and the Medes and Persians entered the city on the dry riverbed (Isa. 44:27, 28; Jer. 51:36, 37, 49; Daniel 5). Spiritual end-time Babylon falls as the waters dry up and make way for the kings of the East. The waters represent people (Rev. 17:15). Thus Babylon finally falls as its support from the people of the earth withdraw (see also Revelation 18).

Babylon consists of the dragon, the beast, and the false prophet. From these devil-allied political and religious forces in the world (17:1-6) come evil spirits like frogs. The frogs were the last miracle the Egyptian magicians were able to counterfeit in the plagues God brought on Egypt through Moses (Exod. 8:1-19). These evil spirits with counterfeit miracles entice the kings of the earth to earth's final battle: Armageddon.

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## **Armageddon will not involve nuclear arsenals, fighter jets, or armed tanks.**

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Armageddon is a Greek translation of the Hebrew "Mountain of Megiddo." Having recently visited the ruins of the ancient Israelite city of Megiddo, I know that this city is in a large valley. The closest mountains are the range in which Mount Carmel rises. In the Old Testament, Mount Carmel was the scene of a battle, but it did not involve spears, swords, or arrows. The last battle on the mountain of Megiddo was a spiritual one—between the god of Baal and the God of heaven. People had to decide who was the true God (1 Kings 17). Revelation suggests the battle is between the forces of Babylon and God's people (Rev. 12:17; 13:7; 17:14; 19:19). Armageddon will not involve nuclear arsenals, fighter jets, or armed tanks with a bloody carnage of human life but rather a blatant last-ditch attempt of the devil to capture the hearts and minds of the world's inhabitants.

In the midst of this final spiritual crisis comes the blessing of God.

Jesus is about to come "like a thief!" Then follows the twofold blessing. First, blessed are those who stay awake or are spiritually alert and aware. In battle the soldier who survives is ready for the tactics of the enemy. Spiritual alertness comes when the relationship with commander God is strong and vital. Readiness in this final struggle comes with prayer, personal devotion, and fellowship (see also 2 Cor. 10:3-6; Matt. 24:42-44).

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*By Glenn Townend, the senior pastor of the Geelong Seventh-day Adventist Church and the surrounding district churches of Colac and Camperdown, Australia.*

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# Sam's Blessings

## HOW-TO

**Key Texts:** Rev. 1:1-3; 14:13; 16:15; 19:9; 20:6; 22:7, 14

By now you have read the seven blessings of Revelation. So what? Do these verses really have much relevance to us today? Washing robes, invitations to a marriage supper, or being caught naked in public seem tied up with the symbolism of Revelation and missing practical application to daily life. Not so! In the blessings of Revelation, God reveals to the reader promises that can be claimed today when we take on the challenge. As we read through Revelation, a progression of blessings seems evident.

- The first blessing comes when you read Revelation, but don't leave it at that. Take time to understand that this is God speaking directly with us because He deeply desires our salvation. This Revelation is the testimony of Jesus Christ. If you can't trust Him, who can you trust?

- The second blessing comes by trusting God. He has given us His promises, and, provided we keep trusting in Him (remain clothed in righteousness) and keeping His commandments, He will not forsake us, even in death.

## As we read through Revelation, a progression of blessings seems evident.

- The third blessing challenges us to be ready. Jesus comes like a thief and very soon. We don't know when He is coming back, so we need to spend each day focusing on Him as if He is coming back today.

- Finally, enter His gates. Accept the blessings now. This is the hardest part of it for most of us. There is nothing that we can do to achieve salvation that Christ hasn't already done for us.

Sam had grown up in the church. Each Sabbath she would attend with her parents and even join in when her father took her to Pathfinders and other youth activities. As she got older, Sam thought church seemed less relevant, At last she drifted away from God. It was then that she was told that she had only a short time to live. Despite having turned her back on God, He had not turned His back on her. Slowly, as Sam, for the first time, began to read the Bible, she saw the promises. They meant so much to her now, and they were hers just for the asking. The blessings had always been there, but she had never truly accept them.

After accepting Him again, the closer she came to death and the more pain she was in, the more peace those around her saw in her eyes. When she passed away, she had not only assured salvation for herself but had also drawn those around her closer to God as they saw His promises fulfilled before them.

Read His Word, trust Him, and be ready for Him, for you already have the right to the tree of life. Just ask Him!

*By Colin Kolman, a social security employee of the Federal Australian government, Geelong, Australia.*

# Coming to the Party?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Rev. 19:9**

It was a tense moment for Jessica. She watched every move Alex was making. She was anxious. Hoping. Hoping with everything inside her that Alex would do it. Jessica seemed to look through all the other people in the room and totally focus on Alex. It was almost as if she were willing Alex on.

Jessica's thoughts were suddenly interrupted when the classroom teacher told everyone to sit down. Jessica walked toward her spot. Her heart leapt as she finally saw Alex slip a yellow envelope into her locker before sitting down. Jessica was ecstatic! She was barely able to concentrate for the rest of the morning. At recess, she raced to her locker and grabbed the envelope, tore it open with trembling fingers, and read: "Dear Jessica, Please come to my birthday party next week. Your friend, Alex."

Thoughts raced quickly through Jessica's mind. Who else is going? Will I be allowed to go? What present would Alex like? What sort of food will we eat there? All this combined with the sheer thrill of receiving the hoped-for invitation.

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## We don't have to wait anxiously for our invitation.

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Have you ever felt like this? Fortunately for us, unlike Jessica, we don't have to wait anxiously for our invitation. God has already invited us to spend eternity with Him. We are invited to His banquet, and we are *blessed* because of it.

If you are keeping God's invitation to yourself, you are stopping others from accepting it. God's party is not an exclusive function for a select few. God wants *everyone* to be there and, what's more, He needs us to spread the word and not keep it selfishly to ourselves.

One of Jessica's thoughts is important for us to consider. Who else is going? I have the best time at parties where I know other people. God's banquet will be no exception. If you want your friends to be surrounded with all of the wonders heaven offers for all eternity, *you* need to be the one to invite them. How would you feel if you looked around the table at the banquet and did not see anyone you knew? You can make sure that this doesn't happen by showing people today how wonderful God can be. Don't put it off. Invite them today.

See you at the banquet!

## REACT

1. What are you doing to ensure that others you know will accept God's invitation?
2. Who else can you invite? How?

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*By Jodie Kolman, a primary school relief teacher for state and private schools, Geelong, Australia.*

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## Next Quarter's Lessons

# CERTAINTY OF SECOND COMING

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for second quarter 2000, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### **Lesson 1: What Makes Christianity Christian?**

*Scriptures:* Gen. 1:26; Eph. 2:8; 3:9; Isa. 59:2; Ezek. 14:7; Hos. 2:19, 20; Rev. 19:7, 9; John 5:39.

*Theme:* The goal of Christianity is our restoration to a right relationship with God. This relationship will culminate at the Second Coming when we will have face-to-face communion with God.

### **Lesson 2: The Authority of the Bible and the Second Coming**

*Scriptures:* Deut. 29:29; Ps. 111:10; Isa. 66:2; Jer. 8:9; Matt. 7:24-29; Luke 24:25-27; John 5:39; 1 Cor. 1:20, 21; 2 Tim. 3:15; 2 Pet. 1:19-21.

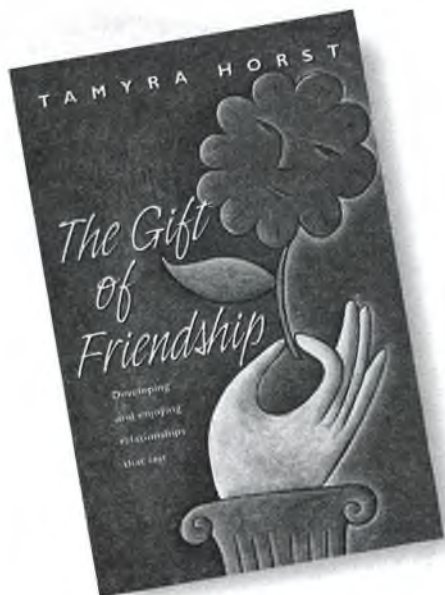
*Theme:* God reveals the promise of the Second Coming in His Holy Word. Apart from the Bible, we would be clueless about the future and God's role in it.

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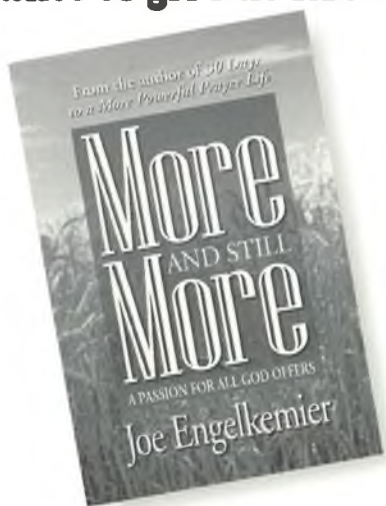


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# MISSION PROFILE

**NAME:**

Tavita Natano, age 22,  
Samoa

**BACKGROUND:**

Tavita's family was very close.

South Pacific Division

As in most Samoan families and villages, Tavita's family belonged to the church in his village. Other churches were not permitted to evangelize in his village. But when Tavita was 17, he began discussing religion with a friend. Intrigued with what he learned about the Seventh-day Adventist Church, Tavita began quietly worshipping with his new friends. All was well until the day he was to be baptized. Read Mission to find out what happened when Tavita decided to follow Christ all the way.

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