

The Journal



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For to us a child is born,
to us a son is given,
and the government will be on his shoulders.

And he will be called
Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God,
Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace.

Isaiah 9:6

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Editor's Musings

Dear Friends,

As the year 2005 comes to a close, we look forward to the holidays and festivities that will crowd into these last weeks of the year. As we think of the gifts we will give to those we love, I would like to challenge each one of us as ministry wives. Will you give another ministry family the gift of your prayers? Will you add to your prayer list a fellow pastoral family and pray for them every day? You might choose those you know personally within your own conference or you might just glance through the world *Yearbook* and choose a name from far away that you don't know. Either way, God does and will honor your prayers for them. As ministry families we first need the Lord, but we also most desperately need the support and fellowship of each other. Jesus is the only answer to the attacks of Satan, and our prayers invite His protection.

One of my favorite writers made this statement:

"The ministry is one of the most perilous of professions. The devil hates the Spirit-filled minister with an intensity second only to that which he feels for Christ Himself. The source of this hatred is not difficult to discover. An effective, Christ-like minister is a constant embarrassment to the devil, a threat to his dominion, a rebuttal of his best arguments and a dogged reminder of his coming overthrow. No wonder he hates him. Satan knows that the downfall of a prophet of God is a strategic victory for him, so he rests not day or night devising hidden snares and deadfalls for the ministry. Perhaps a better figure would be the poison dart that only paralyzes its victim, for I think that Satan has little interest in killing the preacher outright. An ineffective, half-alive minister is better advertisement for hell than a good man dead" (A.W. Tozer, *God Tells the Man Who Cares*, p. 76).

Right now Jesus is waiting to guide us as ministry families through this most perilous profession. As we pray for each other, may God continue to bless us every one.



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Christmas Story

Sue Chastain



It's just a small white envelope stuck among all the branches of our Christmas tree. No name, no identification, no inscription. It has peeked through the branches of our tree for the past 10 years or so. It all began because my husband, Mike, hated Christmas—oh, not the true meaning of Christmas, but the commercial aspects of it—overspending, the frantic running around at the last minute to get a tie for Uncle Harry and the dusting powder for Grandma—the gifts given in desperation because you couldn't think of anything else.

Knowing he felt this way, I decided one year to bypass the usual shirts, sweaters, ties, and so forth. I reached for something special just for Mike. The inspiration came in an unusual way. Our son, Kevin, who was 12 that year, was wrestling at the junior level at the school he attended. Shortly before Christmas, there was a non-league match against a team sponsored by an inner-city church, mostly black. These youngsters, dressed

in sneakers so ragged that shoestrings seemed to be the only thing holding them together, presented a sharp contrast to our boys in their spiffy blue and gold uniforms and sparkling new wrestling shoes. As the match began, I was alarmed to see that the other team was wrestling without headgear; a kind of light helmet designed to protect a wrestler's ears was a luxury the ragtag team obviously could not afford. Well, we ended up walloping them. We took every weight class, and as each of their boys got up from the mat, he swaggered around in his tatters with false bravado, a kind of street pride that couldn't acknowledge defeat.

Mike, seated beside me, shook his head sadly, "I wish just one of them could have won," he said. "They have a lot of potential, but losing like this could take the heart right out of them." Mike loved kids—all kids—and he knew them, having coached Little League football, baseball, and lacrosse. That's when the idea for his present came. That afternoon, I went to a local sporting goods store and bought an assortment of wrestling headgear and shoes and sent them anonymously to the inner-city church. On Christmas Eve, I placed the envelope on the tree, the note inside telling Mike what I had done and that this was his gift from me. His smile was the brightest thing about Christmas that year and in succeeding years.

For each Christmas, I followed the tradition—one year sending a group of mentally handicapped youngsters to a hockey game, another year mailing a check to a pair of elderly brothers whose home had burned to the ground the week before Christmas, and on and on. The envelope became the highlight of our Christmas. It was always the last thing opened on Christmas morning and our children, ignoring their new toys, would stand with wide-eyed anticipation as their dad lifted the envelope from the tree to reveal its contents. As the children grew, the toys gave way to more practical presents, but the envelope never lost its allure.

The story doesn't end there. You see, we lost Mike last year due to dreaded cancer. When Christmas rolled around, I was still so wrapped in grief, I barely got the tree up. But Christmas Eve found me placing an envelope on the tree, and in the morning it was joined by three more. Each of our children, unbeknownst to the others, had placed an envelope on the tree for their dad. The tradition had grown and someday will expand even further with our grandchildren standing around the tree with wide-eyed anticipation, waiting as their fathers take down the envelope.

Mike's spirit, like the Christmas spirit, will always be with us. May we all remember the Christmas spirit this year and always.



This article appeared in the Minnesota Conference newsletter for pastor's wives.

It Is Difficult To Please Everyone

Teodora Nikolova

Teodora Nikolova has been a minister's wife for 12 years. They have two children: their 11-year-old son, Angel, and 3-year-old daughter, Maria Virginia. Teodora is responsible for the Bulgarian issue of the Shepherdess called Hand in Hand, which comes out quarterly. She is also part of the children's ministry team.



At noon, in the scorching sun, a father, his son, and a donkey were walking along the dusty streets of Keshan. The father was sitting on the donkey and the son was leading it. "The poor child," said a passerby. "It's so difficult for him to walk with his small legs beside the donkey. How can that lazy man sit on the donkey and see his child so tired of walking?" The father took the criticism very much to heart. At the next corner he jumped off the donkey and lifted the child to sit on the back of the animal. But soon another passer-by said indignantly, "What a shame! This little slug-gard is sitting like a king on his throne, while his poor father is running beside." The boy was hurt by what he heard and asked his father to sit on the donkey just behind him. "Have you ever seen such a nuisance?" a veiled woman reproached them. "How can they be so cruel to this animal! The back of the poor donkey can hardly endure the weight, and this little lazybones and his father are lying there comfortably as if on a sofa. Poor creature!" The father and son looked at each other and, without saying a word, dismounted from the donkey. They had hardly taken a few steps beside the donkey when a stranger ridiculed them: "Thank heavens I am not so stupid! Have you taken

this donkey for a walk or what? It doesn't serve you at all. It isn't even carrying one of you!?" The father took some straw and put it in the donkey's mouth. Then he laid his hand on the boy's shoulder and said, "Whatever we do, someone is always displeased with us. I think we'd better decide ourselves what is good for us."

This oriental story, told by Nosrat Peseshkyan in his book *The Merchant and the Parrot*, asks the question: To what extent should one consider the opinion of the people around him or her? This question is rather painful and has its specific place in the life of the minister's family.

How can we serve the church without being too self-confident, being true to ourselves while paying attention to other's opinions and yet not feeling compelled to conform to it, and at the same time not being so dependent on our view that we always conform our service and behavior to it?

As a minister's wife, I often receive calls or have conversations in which church members advise me to suggest my husband to do this or that, to talk with this or that man about this or that problem, to preach on this or that topic, not to take the risk of doing this or that, to summon the church council to discuss a particular problem, to change some

things in the church or to stop the changes from taking place. Some advice is really valuable, and it is a blessing to take it into consideration. But other advice is totally contradictory and inconsistent. In most cases, people offer their ideas in an insistent way, thinking that the church's destiny depends on their opinion. They not only want to be heard, they want to see immediate action taken in the direction of their expectations. Is not the minister on his post to serve the church members and solve their problems? As you know, it is not easy to resist such pressure.

So why do we sometimes give in to it? There may be many different reasons. Sometimes it might be insecurity. We feel insecure in a new church environment, and we do not have enough information about the problems and relationships there. Then comes the temptation to take into consideration the directions that someone insistently gives us. We even have an excuse to calm down our conscience if it turns out that the decisions we make are not the best. We did not know the situation, we were misled, that was the only possibility we could grab.

Another reason for conforming to people's opinions can be the fear of making enemies. One of the worst things in the minister's service is to have enemies who hinder his work. That often puts us in a lot of trouble and creates tension in our family life. Why must we tease the people when we express disagreement with them? Won't we win followers and support if we just please them?

The desire to be liked by everyone can be another reason. It is easy to win the sympathy of a small circle of people. Every minister, no matter how mediocre he may be, has his followers. But wouldn't it be great if everyone liked you? And if you truly serve and pay attention to everyone, they will like you. It will be easier for them to follow you, and it will be easier for you to motivate them for work. But the desire to be liked by everyone can be a sign of immaturity and low self-esteem, and it is an egotistic

motive for serving others.

A fourth reason can be the awkwardness of expressing disagreement or, even worse, the lack of personal opinion in combination with a wrong understanding of the minister's service in the church. There are ministers who may be flattered by the thought that they have never expressed their personal position in the work with their church. They believe that their responsibility as leaders is to maintain the status quo, to accept ideas that others give them but not to actively influence church life. Such a position can be caused by a fear that the ideas we have supported might fail, or just because we lack of ideas and position.

Why is it wrong to give in to the pressure of others? Before answering this question, we should once again underline the fact that there are and always will be many valuable and useful opinions and positions which people around us will express. It is unwise and pre-



sumptuous to think that as ministers, we are those who must teach others, and that no one can teach us as far as our ministry is concerned.

The Bible tells us that our personal development is closely connected to our readiness to accept advice (Proverbs 19:27). It describes the unwillingness and impossibility to accept such as a sign of recklessness and pride (Proverbs 12:15; 13:10; Ecclesiastes 4:13) leading to failure (Proverbs 11:14; 15:22).

But the Bible also warns that there might be advice that is dangerous for us: "Cease, my son, to hear the instructions that causeth you to err from the words of knowledge" (Proverbs 19:27,

KJV). We should be ready to decline the pressure exercised on us, especially when the perspective is rejecting decisions that are wise and good for the church. Sometimes to distinguish between these two, we will need a lot of sagacity which God is ready to give us whenever we ask for it.

Trying to take into consideration all the views in your service is an impossible task. Those who try to do that will soon realize that they are victims of an enchanted circle from which there is no escape; there will always be people who are not content. That can lead to constant worry caused by a feeling of guilt because you have not completed your work and a feeling of dissatisfaction because you have not reached your goals. But besides being an impossible task, yielding to outer pressure can be dangerous for the minister and the church. When the minister is more concerned with how to please the church members, he/she takes the risks of being unfaithful to God. This way he/she misses the opportunity to develop as a mature person and leader. The church needs a minister who knows what is right and how to do it, not someone who always hesitates and is constantly influenced by people.

Ellen White writes in *Special Messages for Ministers*, p. 271-273: "People who conform to others and want the others to think instead of them are not able to take responsibilities." Today, there are men who could be open-minded, wise men, reliable men, but who are not because they have been taught to follow someone else's plans. They allow others to tell them what to do, and this is why they haven't developed their minds.

If you constantly conform to others, you will not be able to develop your own individuality, you will not know who you are; in fact, God will not be able to use you sufficiently, because you will be more attentive to people than to Him.

"You were bought at a price; do not become slaves of men" (1 Corinthians 7:23, NKJV).

"Am I now trying to win the approval of men or of God? If I was still trying to

please men, I would not be a servant of Christ" (Galatians 1:10, NKJV).


Here is some advice:

1. The work you do in the church is God's deed, not yours. Do not be afraid that someone will spoil it. God Himself can defend you. Do not be afraid of the bad consequences for you when you have acted with conscience and you are faithful to God. "In God I will trust; I will not be afraid. What can mortal men do to me?" (Psalm 56:4, NKJV).
2. Get used to the thought that not ev-

eryone will like you. Do not be so conceited. Your efforts to win the sympathies of people at any price will be in vain. And your goal is not to please people but to do God's will. God, not man, has called you. You'd better direct your efforts and attention towards loving the people in the church, no matter what their attitude is toward you.

3. Learn not to agree with everything. It is a whole new art. To disagree and say "No" is not an expression of disrespect.

4. Know that you are a leader in your church. You are there because God wanted you to be there. God wanted you to lead. Do not hesitate to do that in a brave, but at the same time, tender way. Your church needs a leader, not someone who is easily influenced and manipulated.

Only when we build a strong identity, can make decisions ourselves, and hold onto our position, will we be able to consider the advice and opinions of others without the danger of risking God's deed. 

The star they had seen in the east went ahead of them until it stopped over the place where the child was. When they saw the star, they were overjoyed. On coming to the house, they saw the child with his mother Mary, and they bowed down and worshipped him. Then they opened their treasures and presented him with gifts of gold and of incense and of myrrh.

Matthew 2:9-11



Don't Be An Exhausted Martyr

Delores Bius

We tend to think of burnout as being a modern-day syndrome. However, if you read the Old Testament, you will discover that Moses was on the verge of becoming an exhausted martyr by taking on too many duties. Fortunately, his father-in-law, Jethro, came to his aid with a cure for perfectionism.

In Exodus 18:13-24, we read that Moses was the only judge of his people and was thus overworked. His father-in-law inquired, "Why sittest thou alone judging from morning unto even?" (verse 14). He then warned Moses, "Thou wilt surely wear away, for this thing is too heavy for thee" (verse 18).

Next Jethro advised Moses to appoint other judges to settle the smaller matters and reserve his own strength and time for more important cases (verse 22). Wisely, Moses listened to Jethro and thus avoided burnout. Delegation is the cure for perfectionism.

Whether you are the CEO of a company or just the head of your household, the secret is delegating, pacing yourself, and setting priorities. Many mothers of large families soon learn that dividing up household chores among the children leads to a happier home. Even toddlers can be taught to dust and to pick up their toys. Teenagers who have regular duties grow up to be better parents themselves.

One 16-year-old young man I know loves to cook and regularly prepares Sunday-morning breakfast for his family. His 17-year-old sister learned to care for her younger siblings and, over the years, began babysitting for family and friends; now she has a tidy sum put away in a college fund.


Setting priorities is another method of avoiding exhaustion in our busy lives. Even the good can become the enemy of the best. When my five children were small, I had to choose between keeping a spotless house and making time for family fun. At nap time I could opt for more cleaning or instead spend an hour in prayer and Bible study and thus nourish my soul. In the evening, I read bedtime stories to my children instead of resting myself. It had the effect of quieting them so that they went to sleep at bedtime more readily. Once my children were all in school, I had the option of getting a part-time job or doing volunteer work. I chose to volunteer for hospice work rather than work for pay, figuring that the eternal rewards would be greater.

Dr. David Jeremiah, in his *Turning Point* publication, wrote, "When God is our top priority in life, we will be ruthless about cutting out those things that destroy the pacing of our journey toward godliness. When your life is rerun by foes or friends after your funeral, how

many scenes will you wish had been left on the cutting room floor?" (December 28, 2004).

In addition to setting priorities and delegating jobs, a third remedy for burnout is handling worry properly. Rick Warren, author of *The Purpose-Driven Life*, a bestseller, wrote: "If you're a worrier, there's hope for you, too. When you think about a problem over and over in your mind, that's called worry. When you think God's Word over and over in your mind, that's meditation. If you know how to worry, you already know how to meditate." The more we meditate on God's Word, the less we need to worry. In Psalm 23, David meditated on his great Shepherd instead of worrying.

My mother taught me a simple antidote to worry. She kept a jar in her cupboard labeled "Worries." Whenever she was concerned about something, she wrote it on a slip of paper and put it in the jar. She once told me, "When I get out those worries periodically, I find that most of the things never came to pass or the Lord just took care of them!" Last Christmas, a friend gave me a jar marked "Answered Prayers." That, too, is an ideal solution to worry.

In our fast-paced life today, it is easy to become an exhausted martyr! Like Moses, though, we can avoid that pitfall by learning to delegate, prioritize, and trust in our Heavenly Father! 

The Day God Sent Me Flowers

Karen Carlton

Karen Carlton is a stay-at-home mom of two daughters. She grew up in a pastor's home and loves the heritage she has from those years. Karen loves to sew, bake, scrapbook, and write children's stories. Her husband pastors two churches in Wisconsin.



It was another wintry day. My pre-school-aged daughter and I were doing the grocery shopping. We had rushed into the store from the car to try to stay as warm as possible. Winter in the midwest was at its best. Snow swirling and temperatures dropping, it promised to be another frigid, gray day.

When we entered the store, I noticed immediately the beautiful display of African violets. All in full bloom in varying shades of pink, purple, and blue, they were breathtaking compared to the white outside.

It was at that moment that I started to pray for a violet. I have a very loving husband who goes the extra mile to help clean the house on Friday afternoons and helps out in many other ways throughout the week. But he's not usually one to buy flowers.

We had recently moved to a new district during the middle of the winter, so we had once again given all of my prized houseplants to neighbors and friends in the last district; now my kitchen was devoid of friendly, growing flowers. So when I saw the violets,

I sighed a deep sigh. I wanted a violet very much!

I thought about the violet all week and even hinted at it to my husband. Then I outright told him that I'd really like a violet, to no avail. He had actually looked for them at the store but they were all gone! Somehow this wasn't the answer I had expected from God! I felt that He did want me to have those little flowers as a reminder of His great love for us!

The next week I had to return to the grocery store. I looked when I first came into the store and, sure enough, the display was gone. I went through the store putting things into my cart and crossing off the items on my list. Soon I was at the checkout stand, ready to pay for my purchases. I had prayed in the store that if God wanted me to have a violet, that I would have enough money after getting all the things on my list to buy one. There must be a violet somewhere in the store! I had also shared with my daughter that I was praying that we'd have enough money to buy a violet after we got our groceries. She too had seen the pretty flowers the week before and knew my love for plants.

Now these violets cost less than \$2 and certainly wouldn't break the bank. But I had determined to only use the money in my wallet and not to charge things on my credit card, so I felt that God would honor that, if it was His will. I had felt a bit silly bothering God with a request for a little flower. That was rather selfish, wasn't it? Nevertheless, I still wanted a pretty flower to brighten up my kitchen in the winter. So I continued to pray as we filled our cart.

We checked out, and I was amazed at the total because the checker gave me \$2.25 back! I was so excited I could hardly stand it! We pulled out of the checkout lane with our full cart of bagged groceries, and I told my daughter with tears in my eyes that Jesus wanted us to have a flower because He had made sure we would have enough money for a violet!

Now we started looking for a store employee who we could ask where to find the violets. The first employee told us that the violets were all gone and that they wouldn't have any more flowers until the garden center opened again in the spring. They were sorry.

I chose not to accept that answer because I had the money in my pocket to buy a violet—a direct answer, I felt, to my request from God! The second employee told us that the violets had been moved back by the greeting cards!

My daughter and I quickly pushed the cart over to the greeting card section and found a huge selection of beautiful African violets! They were gorgeous purple, blue, pink and white flowers. My heart was pounding as I thought about this answer to prayer. God is such a Master at creating beauty even on a wintry day! These flowers were so beautiful!

My daughter carefully picked out the perfect plant as we admired the vivid colors and diversity. We solemnly paid for our purchase and carefully protected the plant from the cold as we dashed out from the store to the car.

My daughter held the answer to prayer on her lap all the way home and carefully carried it into the kitchen when we got home.

As I unloaded my groceries, I stared again at the beautiful deep purple flowers and thought, amazed, that I serve a God who is interested in a \$2 little flower to make me happy! How much more is He ever willing to answer our prayers when they include life-changing issues or decisions or just wisdom for the day! So often I forget to ask Him for His guidance and help and then, of course, I miss His answers since I wasn't looking for them in the first place.

That evening at supper, I told my husband about my answer to prayer and how God had sent me flowers that day. While it sounded sort of silly, it had made such a huge impact on me that day! My husband didn't laugh, and we sat around the table and talked about the things that God was doing in our lives. Big things and little things!

So often we get so busy doing the good things that we do as pastors' wives. We get tired of sharing our lives with everyone else in the church and losing our privacy or our husbands. God knows the individual needs we have, and He has promised to give us "the desires of our hearts" (Psalm 37:4-6) when we commit our ways to Him. But sometimes I have a tendency to let the things that other people think of me take precedence over what God thinks of me. He values me so much more than rubies or diamonds, and yet I forget to ask Him daily to be a part of my life or I think that my life is insignificant to Him!

My little violet has finished blooming for now, but it sits on my kitchen counter as a daily reminder of how much God desires to be a part of my every day life. He wants us to come to Him with even the seemingly insignificant things of life so that He can bless us beyond our wildest dreams!

A Pumpkin

A woman was asked by a co-worker, "What is it like to be a Christian?"

The co-worker replied, "It is like being a pumpkin. God picks you from the patch, brings you in, and washes all the dirt off of you. Then he cuts off the top and scoops out all the yucky stuff. He removes the seeds of doubt, hate, greed, etc., and then He carves you a new smiling face and puts His light inside of you to shine for all the world to see."



Confessions of a Quarrelsome Woman

Vashti Reyes Acosta

I was in the car with my husband going to meet our family for lunch. My husband chose a route to the restaurant that, in my opinion, took more time. I knew we had time constraints because we had to meet friends after lunch. I sat in the car fuming, *After driving in this area for more than 20 years, why does he still take the longest route? Do I have to do all the thinking in this family?* Before long, I had whipped myself into a quarrelsome attitude because of something as inane as the driving route to a restaurant. Meanwhile, my husband and children knew that Mom was in one of her “moods.” They didn’t know if they had caused it; they just knew to be very cautious. I had just become a “constant dripping,” and my family was living on the corner of the roof:

“Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife” (Proverbs 21:9).

“Better to live in a desert than with a quarrelsome and ill-tempered wife” (Proverbs 21:19).

“A quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping” (Proverbs 19:13).

It was a clear picture of who I was. I stared at those verses and remembered scenes at work or home where someone around me whispered, “She’s in one of those moods,” and I could sense they’d rather be anyplace else but near me. My family and friends were often walking

on eggshells, afraid to say or do anything.

The verdict was in: Guilty. I was a quarrelsome, ill-tempered woman. Even *I* hated being around me. I cried out, “Lord, why am I like this? Help me. Change me.”

God showed me the three culprits at work in my life: pride, discontent, and pleasure-seeking.

Pride

Proverbs 21:4 says, “Haughty eyes and a proud heart, the lamp of the wicked, are sin!” Pride was footloose and free in my heart. I wanted control. I thought I was better at deciding the route we should take. And my desire for control mushroomed into believing that I always knew better than my husband. This is a common disease among wives, even when our husbands have proven themselves to be responsible, thoughtful, and intelligent men. Why else would we have married them? Still, we want to believe that we know everything.

Discontent

Discontent is a sneaky one. It creeps into our thoughts without much warning. I was discontent with the route taken to a restaurant. How silly is that? Yet it was powerful enough to ruin my family’s lunch date.

A quarrelsome woman who harbors discontent is never satisfied. She wants

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her husband to bring her flowers. One day he does. Oh, but they weren't red roses. She is never satisfied. She is always craving more.

Yet the truth is that "...all day long he craves for more, but the righteous give without sparing" (Proverbs 21:26). Why not stop thinking of what we can get and think of what we can give?

Pleasure Seeker

Proverbs 21:17 says, "He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich." I love pleasure. Who doesn't? Is that your goal in life? Are you constantly planning and thinking about your next vacation? Is pleasure your focus? And if you don't get what your heart is set on—watch out, world!

You didn't get to see your favorite TV show or you didn't get to go to the gym or you didn't have lunch. Instantly you put on your quarrelsome face, and no one can stand being near you. The world owes you.

This seeking of pleasure can lead to becoming what the Bible labels a *slug-gard*. "The sluggard's craving will be the death of him, because his hands refuse to work" (Proverbs 21:25). We become lazy. We don't feel like cleaning, cooking, teaching, studying, or going to church. We crave only pleasure and become sluggards at our responsibilities. We all have duties to perform, given to us by God in His ultimate wisdom. We are to do the work every day that He places in our hands and with an open and grateful heart.

What must I do to leave this quarrelsome woman behind?

Once I recognized I was a quarrelsome woman and that these three culprits were wreaking havoc in my life, I determined to change and become a woman who is pleasing in God's sight. The Holy Spirit helped me focus on humility, contentment, and trust.

Humility

"Before his downfall, a man's heart is

proud, but humility comes before honor," says Proverbs 18:12. "Humility and the fear of the Lord bring wealth and honor and life" (Proverbs 22:4).

It's hard for me to be humble. It's so easy to think more of ourselves than is true. How can we stay humble? I found it helpful to make a list of things God had given me. When I consider the magnitude of God's gifts in my life, I feel humbled. This same list can be written about the key people in your life. When I look at the blessings these people bring to my life, I have a quick attitude change.

Are You A Quarrelsome Woman?

- * Are you content or complaining?
- * Are you rejoicing or miserable?
- * Are you trusting or maneuvering?
- * Are you giving or craving more?
- * Are you busy doing God's work or seeking your own pleasure?

Contentment

I think of contentment as coming to terms with what God has given to us. "A man's steps are directed by the Lord. How then can anyone understand his own way?" (Proverbs 24:24). If you believe His Word, then why do you fuss? It's time to put God's Word to the test. Stop fussing and craving for more, and begin to look at what you *do* have.

Be still and know that your life is in

His hands and rejoice. Rejoice in what He has given you. Rejoice in where He has you. Rejoice if you have a job. Rejoice that you have a family who loves you—even when you have them living on the corner of the roof. Rejoice that you have life. Rejoice in the awesome God you serve. Rejoice in the work He has given you to do—it is a privilege.


Decide today what kind of woman God wants you to be. Then take the necessary steps to become a woman who is pleasing in God's sight.

Meditate and think about these verses: "A wife of noble character who can find? She is worth far more than rubies. Her husband has full confidence in her and lacks nothing of value. She brings him good, not harm, all the days of her life.... She is clothed with strength and dignity; she can laugh at the days to come. She speaks with wisdom, and faithful instruction is on her tongue" (Proverbs 31:10-12, 25-26).

Trust

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding" (Proverbs 3:5). Place all your trust in God, not your own thinking. Look where my thoughts got me. Don't trust your feelings, opinions, or rights. Trust in God and His Word. God has ordained even this hardship in your life. Accept it and move forward in His strength. "There is no wisdom, no insight, no plan that can succeed against the Lord" (Proverbs 21:30).

How reassuring! What a solid foundation to stand on! Trusting in God will lead you to obey His Word. Obedience to His Word will help you be humble and find contentment. The quarrelsome woman will be banished.

The next time my husband took the long way to a destination, I took a deep breath and enjoyed the beautiful scenery along the way—scenery I had never noticed before! I chose not to be in control of every little thing and accepted the freedom of not making every little decision. What a difference it made! 

Reborn Rich!

Muriel Larson

Did you ever read Robert Louis Stevenson's *Treasure Island*? A boy named Jim discovers a map in an old pirate's chest after the man dies. He and two friends set sail on a ship for an island where a treasure chest had been buried by pirates. Jim discovers that the one-legged cook named Long John Silver and other crew members want the treasure for themselves. Eventually Jim outfoxes them and sails home with the treasure.

Have you ever imagined becoming suddenly rich beyond your wildest dreams? Well, if you have been born again through trusting in Jesus Christ as your Savior, you are rich! For God's spiritual blessings for His children are more precious and lasting than any earthly treasures. Have you been enjoying them? Well, let's open His treasure chest—the Word of God—and see what great things are ours in Christ.

Our Lord Jesus Christ

Jesus Christ redeemed us by His blood, far more precious than corruptible things like silver and gold (1 Peter 1:18-19). When we truly come to know Him, everything else in the world seems valueless!

If you're a Christian, can you remember the day you repented of your

sins and gave your heart to Christ? Peter describes how we feel when we find Him: "Though you have not seen him, you love him; and even though you do not see him now, you believe in him and are filled with an inexpressible and glorious joy" (1 Peter 1:8). If Christ is first in our lives, we keep feeling that way about Him. If you've never felt that way, check out < <http://www.journeyofjoy.com>>.

Christ's Indwelling Presence

Once we have come to know the Lord Jesus, His indwelling presence is a spiritual blessing that truly makes life worth living! Jesus said, "If anyone loves me, he will obey my teaching. My Father will love him, and we will come to him and make our home with him" (John 14:23). Are you aware of Christ's presence in your life? Do you look on Him as your best Friend? Do you talk to Him, discuss your problems with Him, ask for His help? A Christian need never be lonely. Jesus is the best Friend, Companion, and Helper that anyone could ever have!

Christ's Intercession and His Righteousness

Jesus also intercedes for us with God the Father. His righteousness is credited to us (2 Corinthians 5:21). Thus our sins

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can be forgiven and cast into the deepest sea. We can't see this, but when we repent of our sins, we can feel that a great burden is lifted.

Forgiveness of Sin

Isn't forgiveness of sin a wonderful spiritual blessing? First John 1:9 says to Christians, "If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness."

Reconciliation with God

When your sins are forgiven, you enjoy reconciliation with God. Isn't it great not to have anything standing between you and God? You don't need to feel guilty or lack peace or have the impression that when you pray, your prayers don't go any farther than the ceiling!

The Peace of Christ

Peace is another treasure Jesus gives us. He said to His followers, "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give you. I do not give to you as the world gives. Do not let your hearts be troubled and do not be afraid" (John 14:27). If we walk with the Lord and trust everything to Him, He gives us incredible peace (Philippians 4:6-7). That's a terrific blessing in this troubled world today! Sometimes it seems as if everything is going haywire, doesn't it? But that supernatural peace can lift us Christians above any trouble we may encounter.

The Joy of the Lord

Christ also promised His followers joy. "I have told you this so that your joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete." Read what He said in John 15:9-14. Having Christ's joy is more wonderful than finding the largest sparkling diamond in the world! If we have His joy, it will radiate from our faces, making us beautiful. It will flow out from us like a river of living water to enrich others (John 7:38). So the Bible tells us, "Rejoice in the Lord always" (Phil. 4:4).

The Love of Christ

Love is another great spiritual blessing for Christ's followers. As long as we know the Lord loves and values us, how can we ever feel completely desolate in this life? Though at times we may feel unloved in this world, the Lord always cares for us if we belong to Him. After all, He died for us! When we know we are

*Seek all
the spiritual
treasures
that are
rightfully
yours as a
child of God.*

loved, we find it easier to love others. Love overlooks slights; it is kind and considerate. So in the long run, the person who loves other people has a much happier life, not beset by the quarrels, hurt feelings, and broken friendships others may have.

Deliverance From Old Things

Deliverance is another spiritual blessing. The Bible says that if we are in Christ, we become new persons (2 Corinthians 5:17). When we become Christians, our desires and interests are changed. This makes it possible for us to overcome things that enslave or hurt us. As Paul said, "But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Corinthians 15:57).

Developing Faith

Faith is another spiritual treasure. God's Word says that a Christian's faith is much more precious than gold (1 Peter 1:7). Faith protects us from the fiery darts of Satan, man's enemy. Since faith is the opposite of fear, it delivers us from fears of all kinds as we trust in the Lord (Psalm 34:4; Philippians 4:6-7; 2 Timothy 1:7).

God's Word


God's Word is the spiritual blessing that shows us how to appropriate all the others and can lift us up daily. When we receive Christ, the Holy Spirit helps us understand His Word.

God's Promises

The promises of God are treasures only available to Christians. God promises that all our needs will be supplied (Philippians 4:19); wisdom for the asking (James 1:5); mercy, grace, help, and understanding (Hebrews 4:15-16); comfort and guidance from the Holy Spirit (John 14:16; 16:13); strength (Philippians 4:13); and answers to prayer (John 16:24).

God's Protection

Just as Jim in *Treasure Island* had an enemy who sought to rob him of his treasure, so we have an enemy—Satan—who would rob us of the spiritual blessings God has for us. Our protection is God's spiritual armor (See Ephesians 6:10-18).

Seek all the spiritual treasures that are rightfully yours as a child of God. Then you will enjoy one of the ultimate blessings: the abundant life Christ promised (John 10:10b). 



The Greatest Prize

Mrs. V. Kuhu



I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith: Henceforth there is laid up for me a crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the Righteous Judge, shall give me at the day: and not to me only, but unto all them also that love His appearing.

2 Timothy 4:7

On April 11, 2004, the shepherdesses and members of the BWA (Bakti Wanita Advent), the Seventh-day Adventist Women's Department, from the whole Ambon Island held a meeting at Suli congregation. This congregation is known as the BWA congregation because most of its members are women. According to the schedule, that program would start at 11:00 a.m. The first program was worship, and the second program was a skills training program which would be presented by the BWA Skills Training Section and the Ambon Industrial Department.

We planned to leave Wayame at 10:00 a.m., since it takes about 45 minutes to get to Suli. Besides, we had to travel with several other groups. But, as we were getting ready to leave, unexpected guests arrived. We had to host them because there were some important things to discuss. Our travel was delayed and we arrived in Suli at several minutes before noon.

Mrs. V. Kuhu is the Shepherdess Coordinator at Maluku Mission Region and also the BWA/Children/Adventist Home Director. Her husband is the treasurer for that region in Indonesia.

When we arrived, the BWA members who had been waiting for us looked disappointed. We tried to explain the problem, but some of the ladies could not hide their disappointment. We first started with the worship and went on with the skills training program.

The first skills training, making cakes, was easily followed and practiced by the trainees. The trainees enthusiastically practiced the recipes they had gotten from the first trainer. The second trainer then explained how to make plates using palm leaf ribs. The trainees listened enthusiastically and followed the directions given until they started to make plates on their own. At first everything went smoothly but they kept asking their trainer for help. However, as the activity went on, some of them stated that they had been left far behind or gotten bored. Several of them even left the place and went home with other excuses. I then noticed the rest of the trainees. Somebody asked her friend next to her for a further explanation, but she looked unsatisfied and consulted another friend beside her. I also noticed some other trainees who were standing in a line to ask their trainers. I really admired and appreciated the patience and diligence of the trainer to answer all questions asked of her. She sometimes had to break the palm leaf rib plates made by the women and rebuild them using the true steps. She kept on giving instructions though she had to say and do the same things repeatedly. Sometimes she had to direct the trainee's hand so that the person

knew what to do. Finally, two women successfully accomplished this task. Both of them confidently showed their handmade plates to every woman and even to the men who were there.

Our spiritual life journeys are much like the above story. We might think that the relationship between God and us is very well-done. However, stumbling blocks suddenly appear in that relationship. We might have committed to do something, but when the results do not occur as what we expect, we start complaining. But remember this: those who neglect to build a good relationship with God would be considered late. There may be times when we want to quit. Yet, we should not forget that we still have people around us who are willing to help us. Above all, just as the instructor helped the ladies in the story, God will surely help us. He holds us, protects us with His angels, enables us, and gives us strength to end this competition. Sometimes Jesus has to block our ways in this life because He knows that those ways are not the best ones. If we fully surrender to the Lord, we will have great joy just like the two women (the members of BWA) who successfully accomplished their work.

Sometimes we fail or do something wrong, but Jesus humbly and gently helps us improve all our weaknesses, as long as we always depend on Him.

Surely God will help us to finish the competition and have a victorious crown on our heads, along with all His chosen people. It will be our greatest prize. Amen.



Jimmy's Wish

Mary Welker

NO one wants to pull hospital duty on Christmas Eve, or Christmas Day either, for that matter. Working as I do in a children's hospital, Christmas duty can be both a heartbreaking and heartwarming experience. But when I drew the assignment for both Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, I tried to make the best of it. We hosted a visit by a merry Santa Claus who spread cheer throughout the hospital as he distributed gifts to delighted youngsters, and we stuffed stockings with toys that the patients would wake up to the next morning.

As we worked busily in the staff office, there was a knock on the door. It was a teenage patient who was familiar to us all. He had been in and out of the hospital several times during the past year, and we had grown very fond of him. Despite his own serious condition, he was a warm and generous-hearted boy. He always took the time to scoop the younger patients up in his arms and give them rides in his wheelchair, read bedtime stories to them, or initiate water-gun fights, which distracted the children and filled them with glee.

Jimmy had just been readmitted to the hospital and had come to our office to offer his help in stuffing the stockings. We were taken aback that this feisty teenager had allowed himself to be admitted—at all times!—on Christmas Eve.

Why hadn't he waited until the following morning? Didn't he want to stay home with his family and open presents?

A sad expression stole over Jimmy's face. "No," he answered, "it would be worse for me to stay home." He explained that his parents couldn't afford what he really wanted for Christmas.

"What do you want?" we asked, hoping against hope that it was something we had already heaped in one of the overstuffed stockings.

"A Nintendo 64," he answered.

Our shoulders sagged in disappointment. It was certainly not among the items we had amassed in our office. We gently reminded him that the Nintendo 64 was the hottest-selling Christmas item that year.

"I know," he said wistfully. "It's just that I thought if I got one, then maybe my brothers would stay home more often and play the games with me, instead of leaving me alone."

Our hearts broke for Jimmy, but we couldn't fulfill his one—maybe his last—holiday wish: Even if the toy had been available, every single store in our neighborhood was closed.

Christmas morning, my department beeper went off at 6:30. Surprised, I called in to see what was up, and the secretary in the emergency room said that she was going off duty and wanted to give me a gift that had been dropped off during

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the night. I asked her to open the wrappings in order to determine whether the gift should be left at Security or remain in the ER. She could not fathom why I started sobbing when she told me it was a Nintendo 64.

"How did it get to the emergency room?" I sniffled.

"Some people dropped it off at about 1 a.m.," she said. "They asked us to give it to a patient in the hospital who would enjoy it."

There are no words to describe Jimmy's face when he opened that package or his smile as his brothers sat with him in his room for hours playing Nintendo.

*No words [can]
describe Jimmy's face
when he opened that
package!*

I rummaged through the bag in which the Nintendo had been left and found a credit card receipt. I called information and found a listing. A woman answered the phone, and when I asked if she was the one who had dropped off the Nintendo the previous night, she answered yes. Together, she and her son had stopped at the hospital with the gift.

How did they come to bring a Nintendo 64?

"Oh, it's a long story," she said.

"Please tell me," I begged.

"Well," she began, "my son is engaged to a woman who lives in a different state. She has two boys by a previous marriage, and they wanted a Nintendo 64 for Christmas. Because the toy is so popular, it wasn't readily available in the small town where she lives, so she asked my son to try to get one for her here. He, too, experienced difficulty in obtaining one—it seems to be quite a hot item this


year. When he called her a few days ago to announce triumphantly 'Mission Accomplished!' he had finally bought one, she laughed and said she had just bought one too, that very same day!

"We were returning from services last night when I noticed the Nintendo on his back seat. I asked him what he was planning to do with the extra one, and he said, 'Return it when I get the time.' Just then, we happened to be passing the children's hospital so I impulsively said, 'How about donating it to a sick child instead?'"

I told the woman a little bit about Jimmy, the patient who had been the thrilled recipient of her special generosity. She asked me about his illness, and I told her that he had cancer. She started to cry. Then she asked what type. When I answered, she cried even harder. She told me that she herself had been diagnosed with the same type of cancer the year before, and she had had a very rough time with the debilitating treatments.

She had suggested to her son that they donate the Nintendo 64 to the children's hospital because of her tremendous empathy for the little patients confined there. If she, as an adult, had had such a hard time, she told her son, imagine how tough it must be for a child.

We used to have a lot of skeptics on staff at the hospital. We now have a lot of brand-new believers who have witnessed firsthand how wonderfully connected all of us are by the spirit of friendship and love.

And I am very glad, after all, that I drew hospital duty that Christmas shift, so that I could witness this wondrous miracle myself. 



What Thanksgiving Means

- T Treasures in heaven, not on earth.
- H Humble before our God.
- A Answers to our prayers.
- N New life in Christ.
- K Kindness to our fellow man.
- S Singing praises to our Savior.
- G Give love generously to our friends.
- I Intimate with our Lord to draw closer to Him.
- V Victorious in our walk with the Lord.
- I Insights we get as we lift up Christ.
- N Necessary to be ever mindful of God's blessings.
- G Glory in the knowledge of God.

Extol, Magnify and Exalt Him—Jesus!



Ernestina Sarfo

Bible Texts:

Psalm 34:3; John 3:22-36; Matthew 3

Hundreds of people—princes, rabbis, soldiers, publicans, peasants, scribes, and Pharisees—were all flocking to the place, eagerly pressing to know His identity. All eyes were curious to see what was the matter. For someone had emerged in the wilderness in strange attire (camel's hair) with a special message so startling, "Prepare ye the way of the Lord, and make it straight his path." Who then, was this man?

This personality was none other than John the Baptist. He had come to pave the way for the first advent of the Messiah as prophesied centuries before by the prophet Isaiah (Isaiah 40:3, 4, KJV). His message was simple and to the

point—a call to repentance. He had come to direct the minds of the people of his day, including his own disciples, to the expected Messiah.

To his disciples and the masses, John had declared that he was only a forerunner sent to introduce and uplift Christ to the world (*Desire of Ages*, p. 179). He also explained Jesus' mission. To John, Christ had come for baptism in fulfillment of prophecy. Indeed, John had given the people, including his own disciples, ample evidence to help them recognize Christ's work and baptism as heaven-ordained (*ibid.*, p. 181).

Why then the dispute between John's disciples and Christ's over the issue of purification? Certainly the disciples of John the Baptist were filled with jealousy seeing that Christ was gaining more popularity. They had forgotten his testimony about Jesus and had fixed their gaze upon the Baptist as being superior to Christ, forgetting that John was a mere instrument through whom God was working (*ibid.*, p. 181). They were too slow of heart to believe and so doubted the authority of Jesus' mission.

Commenting on this by the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, Sister White says, "Soon they [John's disciples] were in dispute with those of Christ in regard to the form of words proper to use at a bap-

tism, and finally as to the right of the latter to baptize at all" (*ibid.*, p. 178). It is interesting to note how the Baptist humbly exalted Christ, declaring the source of His authority as heaven-ordained. Thus, John placed himself lower as he lifted Christ up.

Fellow Shepherdesses, how many among us today, like John, are willing to shun the applause of men concerning our good performances when such opportunities avail much and ascribe the honor and glory to Christ? Haven't we, on many occasions, trusted the abilities of other men more than Christ who works through them?

Beloved, what we need now is the actuating Spirit of the Baptist, who alone can help us acknowledge Christ's superiority and man's nothingness without Him. As present-day disciples of Christ, like John, we are to make Him the head and not the tail. For He promises to confess us before our heavenly Father and His angels, if we so lift Him up to the world.

No doubt, our Lord is unique above all else in power, knowledge, authority, and wisdom. He is the provider of gifts for the accomplishment of all good things. Like John, and with the Psalmist, let us extol, magnify, and exalt Him—Jesus, Lord of all.



Ernestina Sarfo is a pastor's wife from Ghana with four daughters. She enjoys reading Bible stories, listening to Christian music, and corresponding. She also conducts seminars for ladies, teaches Sabbath School, and shares the gospel with others.

Ten-Year-Old Ulcer Cured

Usha Baidya

*“Who forgiveth all thine iniquities;
Who healeth all thy diseases.” Psalm 103:3*

In 1988, it was just a few months after I came with our little girl, Purnima, to the Khulna Adventist School on the bank of the Rupsha River in Khulna District with my husband.

One day, within two hours' time, a tidal wave flooded our house with two feet of water. It was nothing to the Khulna city-people, but it was a very new experience for us. Within 45 minutes the water began to go down, and we were busy cleaning and drying inside and outside the house. After finishing all the cleaning and drying, I took a bath and was mending some leftover things. I realized that my left toe was itching. I started scratching it with my right heel. I was feeling good! Soon I recognized my toe was burning so I looked down. There was no skin at all and my toe was bleeding. At once I ran and cleaned my foot with warm salt water and put ointment there and went to see a doctor. I didn't get good results.

The treatments continued one after another—allopathic, ayurvedic, homio—nothing was left. In 1991, with

a three-month-old baby boy, our second child, we went to Bangladesh Adventist Seminary and College (BASC) so my husband could complete his college education as a married student. It was a great blessing from God for which we had been longing for for many years.

At BASC, I decided to get medical treatment from a special doctor at Kanta Homeo Hall in Kaliakoir. But the infection grew bigger and bigger.

When my husband finished college, he was transferred to a village mission school named Bisherkandi SDA School in Barishal District. The water was very poisonous for my foot. Within seven days, my two legs were very uncouth, loathsome to look at. I couldn't believe those were my legs! My feet were now ulcerated.

Prayers, crying, and treatment continued, but there was no cure. The ulcer spread to my hands. The sore became worse. I can't explain how dreadful it was. Often I used to roll myself on the floor and look at the picture “Jesus on the Cross.” I found His stretching hands willing to help me. His sympathetic eyes were upon me. I found a touch of comfort. I stared at fearful and doubtful Peter who was drowning in the water, whom Christ held up and saved from drowning. At

Usha Baidya is a pastors' wife in Bangladesh.

once I felt that if Peter was saved, why not me! Yes, He never wants me to be lost. So I told my Savior that just as Peter was drowning, I'm also drowning in the abyss of sin and staggering faith, and that's why I'm not getting cured. But You didn't let Peter be lost forever. I know You would never let me be lost in the abyss of my sin. I saw myself in the place of the woman who had the issue of blood for 12 years. Certainly I would be cured by my Lord Jesus.

It was Saturday. We had just gotten home from church when our children turned on the television. I reminded them that it was Sabbath. They replied, "Yes, Mother, but there is a Jesus film on TV now, from His birth to His death." All of our family joined the children. I watched every scene very attentively. Each scene touched my heart, especially the one where Jesus walked with the heavy cross on His back on the way to Golgotha. I was strongly moved by the story of the lepers who were out of society until they were cleansed from sin and had no sores or ulcers on their bodies. My heart was broken and tears came down my cheeks. Lord, I'm a sinner, and for me, You are on the cross. It's me for whom You shed every drop of Your blood on the cross. I know You will make me whole because I'm Your prodigal daughter.

Two days later, Mr. D. Samadder, father of a student named Santo, came to my husband and said that my husband should talk with Santo's mother. My husband forgot the matter. Then Santo's mother came to me in the classroom where I was checking student's CT notebooks and talking with guardians. Mrs. Nomita told me that her child Santo always requested her to pray for his teacher so Jesus would cure her painful legs. If she forgot to say Madam's name in prayer, Santo would whisper in her ear, "Mother, please pray for my teacher." Also, Santo requested that she should take his teacher to the hospital and talk to her doctors. And so I talked to my husband and set dates to go to the hospital where Santo's mother worked. First, she took

me to her ward-doctor in charge, Dr. Sagir. He was a nice man. Though I was a nurse and a teacher, still I didn't hesitate to say that I really had lost my faith in doctors and medicine during the ten years of experience. The doctor was very hospitable and respectful. He did not show any displeasure with me. But he was very humble and asked me to take his treatment for one week. If that failed, he would refer me to a skin specialist. After one week, I was referred to Dr. Nazrul Islam. Sister Nomita explained everything beforehand to Dr. Nazrul, that I was very irritable with doctors and medicine. She mentioned that I was the teacher of her husband and at present was her child's class teacher.

Dr. Nazrul was very sympathetic and agreed to take a biopsy before he gave me any medical treatment. Three times he did the biopsy test to be very sure that he was right. After the final test, he told me that he could give me a treatment. He gave me a tablet and an ointment to use for one month. The doctor was very pa-

tient with me. You can't imagine God's kindness and boundless love and mercy. Miraculously, my ulcerated feet dried and cleared up. I was full of gratitude for my loving God. And it's my gratitude saying for the Lord:

When I remember you
In all my distress and sorrow,
You just stretch out your hands;
I stay at peace in your soft lap.

When I was without food,
You gave me all I needed—
Endless love forever,
Always found everywhere.

Though it's ten years of time
Stricken with dislike, shame, a squalid life
Never hurt, never refused
The only face I ever found.

Now as it's my turn out
I'm to leap and shout
It's me that
His touch made me healed.



You cannot do a kindness too soon
because you never know how soon
it will be too late.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson



A Cambodian Widow's Story

*In Sokun as told to
Mrs. Bun Sokhom*

My name is In Sokun. I'm a Global Mission Pioneer in Phnom Penh City. Before I believed in God, I got seriously sick for five years; I could not eat food and I could not sleep well because of trouble from the devil. I ate only rice soup and water. My great-grandmother was possessed of a devil that cared for an idol god. She wanted me to be the next keeper of the idol god. I did not want to do anything with the idol, but my parents told me that the idol god wanted me to replace my grandmother's generation. If I did not accept it, I would die.

One day my friend came to visit me, and she told me not to let the devil rule on my life and not to worship an idol god. She said that I was to worship only Jesus, and she gave me a Bible. I read Genesis 1:1 three times. I did not believe that God created the world. I thought that the earth evolved by itself. Not long after I read the Bible, I decided to go to church because I wanted to know clearly about God and see if Jesus could heal me from my sickness. Therefore, my friend asked the pastor and the church members to pray earnestly for me. The Holy Spirit led my heart to God, and I got better from my sickness.

Not so long after I accepted the Lord Jesus as my Savior, I felt hungry and wanted to eat rice and other foods as well. How wonderful is the almighty God! He helped me to be able to eat two plates of rice after five years of my sickness. Thank God for giving me good health and saving me from the evil spirit. The same day before I went to bed, I prayed to God, and that night I slept well—nothing disturbed me like before. I love God so much because He has great power in my life.

My husband died in 2001; I felt hopeless because there would be no one to support my family. Pr. Hang Dara and his wife encouraged me to trust in God, and they prayed for me. God answered my prayer. Several months after my husband died, Sharon Roger asked me to work at the SDA school part-time and look after the students; in the evening, I went to visit the church members with Pr. Hang Dara and church elders.

When the mission chose 30 Global Mission pioneers in Phnom Penh in April 2002, God called me to work with them. Now I have 32 students who are studying the Bible with me, and 25 students preparing for baptism.



In Sokun is a widow with five children who led her family to become Christians.

Suggestions to Spice Up Your Season



Delores Bius

Do you ever feel bored during Christmas break? Are you tired of the same old traditions? Try something new this year!

1. Take part in a church or community presentation of Handel's *Messiah*. Attend a candlelight Christmas Eve service at church. Brad remembered the Christmas programs he'd been in as a kid. Sure, he used to dread having to dress up in his bathrobe, put a dish towel on his head, and be a shepherd. But at least he'd felt a part of things. So this year he volunteered to play Joseph in his church's Christmas program. He had a blast, and his participation made the small children more enthusiastic.
2. Instead of using the same old holiday gift wrap, go for something different. Try wrapping presents in scraps of material, old road maps, Sunday comics, or colorful posters.

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3. Or take construction paper or shelf paper and draw your own design. Or use the box-in-a-box trick.
3. What about filling a Christmas stocking for your mom? Think about all the years she's filled one for you. If she doesn't have her own stocking, you can make or buy her a personalized one. Fill it with all sorts of useful trivia. Dawn surprised her mom by buying a pair of red pantyhose and filling both legs with gifts—everything from dish towels and notepaper to hand lotion and rubber gloves.
4. Make up a treasure hunt with a series of clues leading someone to his or her gift. You can even make it a Scripture hunt, using Bible verses with allusions to places or things.
5. Remember a missionary or student missionary with a holiday card, letter, or gift. One Christmas Sue sent a missionary friend in Africa a Christmas card with a snow scene on it. The missionary wrote that she hung the card on her wall as a reminder of the beautiful winters in her native Minnesota. (That's different from the Christmas summers they enjoy in Australia!)
6. Add an ethnic touch to your

Christmas. You might buy or make a piñata out of papier-mâché. Learn what special foods your grandparents ate and try making them. Ben's grandparents were Lithuanian and loved beet soup at Christmas. Anne's were Ukrainian and always had a kind of raisin bread.

7. Invite someone outside your family to share your Christmas. It might be a classmate whose parents will be out of town, a neighbor who has lost a mate, or a church friend. If your parents don't okay the hospitality idea, then visit the person in his or her own home and bring a little Christmas there. Mike discovered a lonely widow on his paper route. She always seemed eager to talk when he collected each week. He sensed that she didn't have many relatives or friends. When she confided that she was spending Christmas alone, Mike visited her on Christmas Eve and took her a little basket of Christmas goodies.

The most important thing you can do is to remember what Christmas is all about and find new ways to spread God's love to those around you. ☺

Christmas Traditions

Tim Smith

It has been our family tradition to have calico bean chili the night we decorate our Christmas tree. It began 14 years ago when all we had in the kitchen that night was kidney beans, hamburger, and bacon. My wife, Suzanne, decided to improvise because neither of us wanted to go out into the wintry weather again. Her tasty recipe stuck as tradition—until a few years ago. Our daughter Brooke and I brought home a beautiful fir. And I noticed Suzanne fixing dinner.

“Calico beans?” I assumed.

“No, I thought we’d take a break,” said Suzanne. “I don’t like beans. Besides, Brooke doesn’t like them either.”

Then our other daughter, Nicole, entered the kitchen: “Calico beans, Mom?” She looked at the stove.

“No, I thought we’d try something different. I don’t feel like calico beans.”

“But it’s . . . a tradition. We always have calico beans the night we decorate the tree,” she said.

Here was our tall 16-year-old begging for beans. Suzanne had underestimated the power of tradition. (We finished decorating the tree the *next* day—after a meal of calico beans!)

Besides creating memories, traditions are also the avenue of walking and talking spiritual truths. We need to evaluate our holiday traditions to see if they affirm our children and help them grow in their relationships with Christ. Here are some ideas you might try this season:

Nativity Scene

Purchase a simple nativity scene for little ones to play with. Tell the Christmas story the night you get it out, illustrating with the animals and figures.

A Holiday Activity Plan

In the late fall, ask each family member to write (on a 3x5 card) a few events, activities, or ideas they would like to do during the season. Call a family meeting. Say, “We want to plan Christmas to be an enjoyable and peaceful time. We want to do some special things, but we can’t do everything. So let’s decide, as a family, on a Christmas plan.”

Go through all the cards and place a

cross next to ideas that focus on Christ—after all, it is His birthday. Make sure each person has at least one idea selected. Say, “We want to have our minds on Christ at Christmas. Here are the ideas that seem to do that best.” Include them on a master list on green construction paper cut to look like a Christmas tree.

Christmas Card Prayer Box

Have your children decorate a shoebox. Place it on your dining table. As you receive Christmas cards, place them in the box. Before meals, take out one card and pray for the family who sent it.

The Love Gift

Open one gift each on Christmas Eve. It could be a low- or no-cost gift like a special photo in a handmade frame; a coupon for a free back rub, chore, popcorn date; or a promise of a shared activity. It might be a fishing day, bike ride, or three hours in the mall for after-Christmas sales. Be creative. The point is to communicate love in a way that is meaningful to the recipient. This might be a good time to pass along family heirlooms—those with real or sentimental value. It could be a rite-of-passage occasion when an older sibling passes on to a younger sibling something he has outgrown.



The Secret of the Gifts

Paul Hucke



The story has been told for centuries now—how Gaspar, Melchoir, and Balthasar brought gifts to the newborn king. Ah, you say, everyone knows. They brought gold, frankincense, and myrrh. So it has been told.

But the story is incomplete. Listen to the rest. You shall learn the secret of the gifts.

Those who watched saw the first of the three visitors pause at the door: Gaspar, a wealthy man with a cloak of fine velvet, trimmed in flawless fur. They could not see that it was the Angel Gabriel, guarding the holy place, before whom Gaspar stopped.

"All who enter must bring a gift," Gabriel told Gaspar.

Struggling to lift a finely wrought box, Gaspar said, "I have brought bars of the finest gold."

"Your gift," Gabriel said, "must be something of the essence of yourself, something precious to your soul."

"Such have I brought," Gaspar said.

But as he kneeled to lay his gold before the child, he stopped and stood erect. In his outstretched hand lay not gold, but a hammer. Its scarred and blackened head was larger than a man's fist; its handle, of sinewy wood, as long as a man's forearm. Gaspar stammered, dumbfounded.

The angel said softly, "What you hold in your hands is the hammer of your greed, used to pound wealth from those who labor so that you may live in luxury, to build a mansion for yourself while others dwell in hovels."

Gaspar bowed his head in shame and

turned to leave. But Gabriel blocked the way: "No, you have not offered your gift."

"Give this?" Gaspar blurted in horror. "Not to a king!"

"This is why you came," Gabriel said. "You cannot take it back. It's too heavy. Leave it here or it will destroy you."

"Why, the child cannot lift it," Gaspar protested.

"He is the only one who can," replied the angel.

Next to step to the door was Melchoir, the scholar with the length of his beard and furrows of his brow to bespeak the wisdom of age. He, too, paused before the door.

"What have you brought?" asked Gabriel.

"Frankincense, the fragrance of hidden lands and bygone days," Melchoir replied.

"Your gift," cautioned Gabriel, "must be something precious to your soul."

Melchoir stood breathless, kneeling reverently down to draw from beneath his robe a silver flask. But the vessel in his hand was not silver at all. It was common clay, tough, and stained. Aghast, he pulled the stopper from its mouth and sniffed the contents.

"This is vinegar!" Melchoir snarled.

"You have brought what you are made of," Gabriel said. "Bitterness. The soured wine of life turned grim with jealousy and hate; carried within too long, the memory of old hurts, hoarded resentments, and smoldering anger. You have sought knowledge but filled your life with poison."

Melchoir's shoulders dropped. Turning his face away, he fumbled to hide the earthen jar. Gabriel touched Melchoir's arm: "Wait, you must leave your gift."

Melchoir sighed with pain deep from

within. "But this is vile stuff," he protested. "What if the child should touch it to his lips?"

"You must leave that worry to heaven," Gabriel replied. "There is use even for vinegar."

One more visitor strode forward. Balthasar, the leader of many legions and the scourge of walled cities. He grasped a brassbound box.

"I bring myrrh," he said, "the most precious booty of my boldest conquest. Many have fought and died for such as this, the essence of a most rare herb."

"But is it the essence of yourself?" Gabriel asked.

The soldier shuffled forward, bowing his head near the ground and releasing his grip on the handle of the box. But what he lay before the baby's feet was his own spear.

"It cannot be!" he whispered hoarsely. "Some enemy has cast a spell."

"That is more true than you know," Gabriel said from behind. "A thousand enemies have cast their spell on you and turned your soul into a spear. Living only to conquer, you have been conquered. Each battle you win leads only to another."

Balthasar grasped the weapon and turned to the door. "I cannot leave this."

"Are you sure?" Gabriel asked.

"But here?" the warrior whispered. "He is but a child. The spear could pierce his flesh."

"That fear you must leave to heaven," Gabriel replied.

What of the gifts, you ask—the hammer, vinegar, and spear. Another story tells how they were seen once more, years later, on a lonely hill outside Jerusalem. But do not worry. That is a burden heaven itself took care of as only heaven can.



This article appeared in the Minnesota Conference newsletter for pastors' wives.

Ten Commandments For A Pastor's Wife

Dollie Gonzales-Franche

- I Thou shalt always think that you are a pastor's wife, "a woman blessed of God."
- II Thou shalt make thyself friendly and accommodating; thy home neat and orderly, where guests find comfort in their stay.
- III Thou shalt involve thyself in church-related activities such as outreach programs, seminars, fellowships, and the like.
- IV Remember to take 30 minutes daily to commune with God. This will refresh thy mind, invigorate thy body, and enliven thy soul.
- V Honor thy parishioners that thy days may be long upon the district you are assigned.
- VI Thou shalt conceal idle talk and or negative criticisms about thy husband, thy husband's co-workers, and thy parishioners. Neither shall ye fabricate issues that may stir up discord among thyselfes.
- VII Thou shalt live within thy means. Never indulge in a luxurious lifestyle which leads to debts and cash advances from the local mission or conference.
- VIII Thou shalt not steal the role of thy husband. Be content to sit still and meditate on God's Word as your husband delivers his sermon. Bear in mind that behind every successful man is a woman.
- IX Thou shalt have a regular time for the family. Take your husband and children to an exciting place where you can relax and enjoy each other's company.
- X Thou shalt not covet thy co-shepherdess' nor parishioners' looks, talents, or material possessions. Just be yourself. Accept what the Lord hath given thee and try to cultivate it.



Dollie Gonzales-Franche has been a pastor's wife for 11 years. She is actively involved in team ministry with her husband Edgardito, who is the youth director for Southern Luzon Mission in the Philippines. They have two daughters, Gretdelaine and Glaidel. Dollie serves as a lecturer during campouts and other Adventist youth-related activities. She is also a public school teacher and has written several articles for the journal Modern Teacher. Some of the articles deal with health principles and child discipline. This is a way for her to share the good news with non-believers.