

Psalms



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Getting the Most Out of the Collegiate Quarterly

Facts You Should Know

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is based on the conviction that there is transforming power in the Word of God and that one important way of tapping into that power is through group study. It is prepared with Adventist college students and young adults particularly in mind. Its purpose is to provide this group with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed together each week in Sabbath School.

Additionally, many who use the adult quarterly find that the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY, since it deals with the same topics as the adult, enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist colleges and universities, along with young-adult church groups, work together in producing the quarterly. The writing at each school is coordinated by the campus chaplain's office. Approximately 200 individuals contribute to the quarterly each year.

Circulation of the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY is about 25,000.

Pointers for Study

1. The Bible passage to be studied for each week is indicated in bold type on the introduction page (Sunday's lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.

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

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

4. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:

Introduction (Sunday) is designed to get your attention and focus your thinking on the week's theme.

Logos (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.

Testimony (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.

Evidence (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective. It is likely to be the most scholarly article of the week.

How-To (Thursday) discusses what the "theory" in the lesson means for day-to-day living.

Opinion (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

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

The CQ and the Church

The COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY 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.* Particularly in the Evidence and Opinion sections, views that are only individual opinion, not official denominational positions, are expressed.

Lesson 1, July 1 - 7

Tehillim—Songs of Praise and Thanksgiving



“Praise him for his acts of power; praise him for his surpassing greatness. Praise him with the sounding of the trumpet, praise him with the harp and lyre” (Ps. 150:2, 3, NIV).

Sunday, July 1

Old Testament Poetry

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 2 Chron. 5:12, 13

Anyone who has studied poetry will be familiar with the use that poets make of rhythm, sound patterns, emotive language, and figures of speech—hyperbole, symbols, metaphors, and similes. The writers of the psalms were poets who loved poetry and who used the rules and mechanics of poetry with artistry and skill.

This means that in order to understand the psalms, we must read them as poetry, and be prepared to recognize the conscious exaggeration and vivid description that the writers use to convey their deep emotions as they contemplate God's intervention in their life.

Hebrew poetry is different from ours. We use word rhyme. The Hebrews used what is called thought rhyme, and thought rhyme finds its most frequent expression in parallelism.

In *synonymous parallelism* the second line of the poem repeats the thought of the first line but uses different words:

"Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment,
nor sinners in the congregation
of the righteous" (Ps. 1:5, RSV).

In *antithetic parallelism* the second line of the poem states the same truth as the first line but in a negative way:

"For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish" (verse 6, NIV).

Other more complicated forms of parallelism include *emblematic parallelism* and *climactic parallelism*. The emblematic form uses a figure of speech to develop the thought (see Psalm 129:5-8).

In *climactic parallelism* the second line of the poem repeats and adds to the first line:

"The voice of the Lord is upon the waters;
the God of glory thunders,
the Lord is over the many waters.

The voice of the Lord is powerful,

the voice of the Lord is majestic" (29:3, 4, NASB).

These easily recognized poetic forms survive in translation, but other poetic forms, the acrostic poems among them, are usually lost.

The Knox translation of the Bible has attempted to retain this form and makes interesting reading. Notice that each stanza begins with the next letter of the alphabet:

"At all times I will bless the Lord; his praise shall be on my lips continually. **B**e all my boasting in the Lord; listen to me, humble your souls, and rejoice. **C**ome, sing the Lord's praise with me" (33:1-3, Knox).

From earliest times the Psalter has been divided into five books. Most modern Bibles make this division clear. In these five books 73 psalms are ascribed to David, 12 to Asaph, 11 to the sons of Korah, 3 to Jeduthun, 2 to Solomon, and 1 each to Heman, Ethan, and Moses.

by Lyndon McDowell

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Righteousness and Wickedness

LOGOS

Introducing the Psalms

Theme: What Do the Psalms Have to Offer? *The psalms are inspired prayer-hymns spoken or sung by God's servants of old, expressing praise and thanksgiving to an exalted God and bearing reassuring testimony to His grace and power in judgment and salvation.*

The book of Psalms has been called the heartbeat of Israel's religion, for it reveals, as no other book does, the inner thoughts and feelings of God's people. We distinguish between Jew and Christian, but with God and in the experience of His people there is no difference (Gal. 3:28). If Christians could choose only one book from the Old Testament, they would undoubtedly choose the book of Psalms, for it has been a source of comfort to many for 2,000 years.

1. The Origin of the Book

We do not know when the book of Psalms was put together, but we do know when it was incorporated into the sanctuary liturgy. This took place when David brought the sanctuary to Jerusalem.

David's name is indissolubly connected with Psalms. He was known as the "sweet psalmist" of Israel (2 Sam. 23:1), whose first

songs were composed as he tended his father's sheep. Out on the Judean hills "his opportunities of contemplation and meditation served to enrich him with that wisdom and piety that made him beloved of God and angels. As he contemplated the perfections of his Creator, clearer conceptions of God opened before his soul. Obscure themes were illuminated, difficulties were made plain, perplexities were harmonized, and each ray of new light called forth fresh bursts of rapture, and sweeter anthems of devotion, to the glory of God and the Redeemer."¹

Thus by the time David became king he was the right person to organize the worship services of the united monarchy.

"He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to commemorate, to thank, and to praise the Lord God of Israel: Asaph the chief, and next to him Zechariah, then Jeiel, Shemiramoth, Jehiel, Mattithiah, Eliab, Benaiah, and Obed-Edom: Jeiel with stringed instruments and harps, but Asaph made music with cymbals; Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests regularly blew the trumpets" (1 Chron. 16:4-6, NKJV).

Other psalms were added after the time of David. We are told that Jehoshaphat, Hezekiah, and Ezra added to the songbook. And if we add the psalm of Moses (Ps. 90), the earliest psalm, the Psal-

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ter covers a span of 1,000 years.

2. The Theology of the Psalter

The psalms divide humanity into two classes—the good and the bad. Almost every psalm contributes in one way or another to the theme of the great controversy between the righteous and the wicked, between Christ and Satan.

“Virtually every poem in the Psalter contributes in some way to the overall plot conflict between good and evil. The writers of the Psalms are caught in some kind of stance relating to this pervasive conflict. There are two categories of people in the world of the Psalms—good and evil, the godly and the godless.”²

The first psalm serves as an introduction to this good-and-evil motif in the book of Psalms: “For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (verse 6, NKJV).

If the underlying theme in the Psalter is the conflict between the righteous and the wicked, how do the writers of the psalms define those groups? Why is this question of particular interest and importance to Adventists in the light of current theological tensions?

3. The Righteous Described

The righteous are, naturally, those who do right. It is “he who walks uprightly, and works righteousness” (15:2, NKJV), whereas the wicked are those who “are corrupt” and who “have done abominable works” (14:1, NKJV). But definitions are few. Rather, the psalms reveal the dynamics that move people to action, the inner aspects of character that prompt them.

Psalm 37 clearly defines the motive for right doing: “Trust in the Lord, and do good; dwell in

the land, and feed on His faithfulness.

Delight yourself also in the Lord,

and He shall give you the desires of your heart” (verses 3, 4, NKJV).

The righteous *feed* on His faithfulness. They *delight* in the Lord. They *commit their way* to the Lord. They *rest* in the Lord. And they understand that it is God who brings out their *righteousness and justice*.

Thus, the righteous are described rather than defined: they feed, they delight, they commit, they rest. They have a relationship with God, which is defined and conditioned by Israel’s religion and faith.

If we were to put this in simple terms, we would say that the righteous person is not yet perfect or sinless. Rather, in his inmost soul he is devoted to the worship of God and the good of his fellowmen, and his conduct and worship are in harmony with the ethos of the church.

The fact that the righteous stand in constant need of forgiveness illustrates their lack of perfection. The psalms reveal their deep consciousness of sin and their contrition. This is not simply because of some specific sinful act, but because they recognize that their sinful nature runs deep within them. It is part of their heritage. “Do not remember the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions; according to your mercy remember me” (25:7, NKJV).

4. The Wicked Described

In contrast to the righteous, the wicked “hate instruction” (50:17). They consent with thieves, and they share in adultery (verse 18). They are deceitful and they slander (verse 20). Above all, they “forget God” (verse 22).

The wicked deliberately put God out of their thoughts. Their life course is set on evil, and they will eventually suffer God's wrath. We should not identify a struggling youth with those who will be shut out of heaven because of their preference for remaining in sin.

In the end the righteous will be like a "tree planted by the rivers of water," but the wicked will "not stand in the judgment" and will finally perish (1:3, 5, 6, NKJV).

My college dean was fond of repeating a little rhyme: "Two men looked through prison bars. The one saw mud; the other, stars."

When we look at the church members around us, we can focus on the good or the bad. What we see depends on our perspective. As a youth I often saw the mud instead of the stars. I tended to be a black-and-white thinker, and I was sometimes disappointed and often critical of what the "saints" said and did. My perspective affected my Christian experience. As Asaph wrote in the seventy-third psalm, "My

feet had almost slipped" (verse 2, NIV).

Some years later I returned as pastor to my home church. Now things were different. My understanding of God's love had broadened, and some of the "sinners" I had judged so severely as a boy I now saw as saints. I stood at the graveside of some of them and laid them to rest with the assurance that they were safe in the arms of a loving God. Despite their human frailties they were among those whom the psalmist would have regarded as righteous. "The salvation of the righteous is from the Lord" (37:39, NKJV), and their trust was in Him.

How would you define the difference between the righteous and the wicked today? Is there room for human frailty in the righteous, or is the end-time somehow different, leaving no room for human weakness? If you answer that the end-time is different, when would you say that the end-time with its demand for perfection begins?

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 642.

2. Leland Ryken, *The Literature of the Bible* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1974), p. 125.

Tuesday, July 3

Contemplating God

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Sam. 23:1, 2

After Samuel had anointed David as the future king, David returned to his humble occupation as shepherd and awaited the development of God's plans for him. But things could never be the same again. All about him David saw the glory of God revealed.

"The communion with nature and with God, the care of his flocks, the perils and deliverances, the griefs and joys, of his lowly lot, were not only to mold the character of David and to influence his future life, but through the psalms of Israel's sweet singer they were in all coming ages to kindle love and faith in the hearts of God's people, bringing them nearer to the ever-loving heart of Him in whom all His creatures live. . . .

"As he contemplated the perfections of his Creator, clearer conceptions of God opened before his soul. Obscure themes were illuminated, difficulties were made plain, perplexities were harmonized, and each ray of new light called forth fresh bursts of rapture, and sweeter anthems of devotion, to the glory of God and the Redeemer. The love that moved him, the sorrows that beset him, the triumphs that at-

tended him, were all themes for his active thought; and as he beheld the love of God in all the providences of his life, his heart throbbed with more fervent adoration and gratitude, his voice rang out in a richer melody, his harp was swept with more exultant joy; and the shepherd boy proceeded from strength to strength, from knowledge to knowledge; for the Spirit of the Lord was upon him."¹

Most of us live in cities. Almost everything about us is of human origin. How can we contemplate the character of God in the things about us as David did?

Although our circumstances are vastly different today, David's life is representative of ours. "David was a representative man. His history is of interest to every soul who is striving for eternal victories. In his life two powers struggled for the mastery. Unbelief marshalled its forces, and tried to eclipse the light shining upon him from the throne of God. Day by day the battle went on in his heart, Satan disputing every step of advance made by the forces of righteousness. David understood what it meant to fight against principalities and powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world. At times it seemed that the enemy must gain the victory. But in the end, faith conquered, and David rejoiced in the saving power of Jehovah."²

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 642.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 3, pp. 1142, 1143.

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Poetry and Prophecy

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Matt. 27:20-25

We are separated by almost 3,000 years from the earliest writers of the psalms. We are separated by language and idiom, by social mores and ways of thinking, by forms of government and political ethics. How can we break through the barriers of time or draw aside the curtains of custom and translate their message into today's language?

The second psalm provides an excellent opportunity to attempt this, for its message clearly spans the centuries. It reaches from the time of David to Jesus the Messiah, and from Jesus the crucified to the Second Coming.

The poem is divided into three stanzas, the first of which is a poetic description of rebellion "against the Lord and against His Anointed" (2:2, NKJV). Notice the portrayal of the intention rather than the specific actions of the nations. They say, "Let us break Their bonds in pieces and cast away Their cords from us" (verse 3, NKJV).

In Acts 4:25, 26 Luke quotes Psalm 2:1, 2, applying it in verse 27 to the trial of Jesus: "For truly against Your holy Servant Jesus, whom You anointed, both Herod and Pontius Pilate . . . were gathered together" (NKJV).

Now read Matthew 27:19-25 to see how they did this. In verse 4 of the psalm David describes in highly poetic language how God

reacts: "He who sits in the heavens shall laugh; the Lord shall hold them in derision" (NKJV).

Now compare the language of the poem with what actually happened after the Temple was burned on August 28, A.D. 70.

A month later the Romans attacked the upper city with full fury, setting the houses on fire and slaughtering the inhabitants. Josephus gives a graphic account: "But when they went in numbers into the lanes of the city, with their swords drawn, they slew those whom they overtook, without mercy, and set fire to their houses."* The city was finally taken on September 20, A.D. 70.

Imagine yourself as a TV cameraman reporting the scene. The destruction of the city is too vast to comprehend. Since your viewers cannot identify emotionally with such widespread slaughter, you search to focus on the effect of the destruction on a single family. You find yourself in the upper-class section of town. In one of the better homes lives a scion of Kathros, a high priest whose name has come down in infamy.

Thirty-nine years earlier Grandfather Kathros was one of those who called out with rash, unthinking boldness, "His blood be on us and upon our children."

You are at his home when the Romans burst in with flaming torches. The 20-year-old granddaughter of Kathros is in the

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kitchen. You watch in horror as she seeks in vain to escape. You film her falling with hand outstretched, grasping for the stairway as the burning ceiling and roof fall in on her. "The Lord shall hold them in derision" (verse 4, NKJV).

Two thousand years later archaeologists find her skeleton in what they have come to call the burnt house. It stands as mute testimony to the terrible retribution that falls on those guilty of rebellion against God and His Messiah.

REACT

1. How would you explain the difference between poetic description and historical fulfillment?

2. Did God laugh at the destruction of Jerusalem? See Luke 19:41-44.

3. The last three verses of Psalm 2 are an appeal to the nations. In light of the contrast between poetic prophetic statement and historical fulfillment, how would you paraphrase these last two verses? What is your response to the paraphrased appeal?

The Wars of the Jews, 7. 8. 467.

Life's Defeats and God's Protection

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 13:5

In the Introduction we stated that in biblical poetry the author uses conscious exaggeration, vivid description, and emotive words to convey his deep emotions as he contemplates God's intervention in his life. Those psalms with clear historical associations illustrate how the poet's emotions responded to the experience through which he was passing. Notice the following examples:

1. Poetry and Life's Defeats.

The superscription of Psalm 3 informs us that David wrote it when he fled from Absalom. "Lord, how they have increased who trouble me! Many are they who rise up against me. Many are they who say of me, 'There is no help for him in God.' But you, O Lord, are a shield for me" (verses 1-3, NKJV).

Notice how the historian records the account: "And a messenger came to David, saying, 'The hearts of the men of Israel are with Absalom.' So David said to all his servants who were with him at Jerusalem, 'Arise, and let us flee; or else we shall not escape from Absalom. Make haste to depart, lest he overtake us suddenly and bring disaster upon us, and strike the city with the edge of the sword'"

(2 Sam. 15:13-15, NKJV).

When Zadok and the Levites fled with David they brought the ark of the covenant with them. But David said to Zadok, " 'Carry the ark of God back into the city. If I find favor in the eyes of the Lord, He will bring me back and show me both it and His habitation. But if He says thus: "I have no delight in you," here I am, let Him do to me as seems good to Him.' . . . So David went up by the ascent of the Mount of Olives, and wept as he went up; and he had his head covered and went barefoot" (verses 25-30, NKJV).

2. Poetry and God's Protection.

"The angel of the Lord encamps all around those who fear Him, and delivers them" (Ps. 34:7, NKJV). This is a well-known and beloved verse in the book of Psalms. Many missionaries have believed this promise in a personal way and been miraculously preserved from danger.

The circumstances that led David to write the psalm are interesting. Having learned from Jonathan of Saul's intention to kill him, David fled. His faith and trust faltered. He lost sight of God's providential care, and in the extremity of his fear he lied to Ahimelech and then unwisely placed himself in the hands of Achish, king of Gath.

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The Apple of God's Eye

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 79:13

The psalmists make no apology about it. The people of Israel were worshipers of the true God, and they were the people of God. Because of that special relationship, they could pray with confidence: "Keep me as the apple of Your eye; hide me under the shadow of Your wings" (Ps. 17:8, NKJV).

This sense of belonging to God in a special way characterized the Adventist Church from its Millerite roots. The parable of the 10 virgins depicted *their* experience. August 1844 was the "midnight" of the parable. The message that spread from the Exeter camp meeting was a fulfillment of the "midnight cry" of the parable: "Behold, the bridegroom is coming; go out to meet him!" (Matt. 25:6, NKJV).

The visions of Ellen Harmon confirmed that the Advent people had a special place in history and in the purposes of God: "God has shown me the travels of the Advent people to the Holy City," she wrote, "and the rich reward to be given those who wait the return of the Lord from the wedding."*

For the early pioneers the doctrine of a special people grew out of a fervent belief, but one senses that, while the doctrine remains, Adventists no longer hold it with fervor. Has the time come to reassess our special standing with God? The sense of being God's

special people pervades the Old Testament: "So we, Your people and sheep of Your pasture" (Ps. 79:13, NKJV). By New Testament times that conviction had congealed itself into a national consciousness that defied all logic, ignored the spiritual dimensions forming its original basis, and led to such terrible blindness that the special people crucified Christ.

Is the doctrine of a special people then wrong? No. The doctrine is biblical. The promises of God are directed to "[His] people," with whom He does have a special relationship. But no true claim to be God's special people will lead to pride and exclusiveness. On the contrary, when the claim is theologically and experientially true, it will lead to deep humility, overflowing gratitude, and a longing desire to share it joyfully with everyone we meet.

Our prayer will be: "Help us, O God of our salvation, for the glory of Your name; and deliver us, and provide atonement for our sins, for Your name's sake! . . . We will show forth Your praise to all generations" (verses 9-13, NKJV).

REACT

1. Do you sense a special relationship with God? How would you explain this relationship?

2. Does the remnant status of the church depend on the actions of the General Conference, your local church, the members in your Sabbath School class, or on you? Why?

*Early Writings, pp. 13, 14.

by Lyndon McDowell

Lyndon McDowell is the pastor of the Olney, Maryland, Seventh-day Adventist Church, and editor of the *Ministry* Tape-of-the-Month.

Lesson 2, July 8 - 14

God's Blueprint for Happiness



“For the Lord watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish” (Ps. 1:6, NIV).

Believing Together

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 1

“Prayer requests?”

The young woman speaking had just finished leading our Friday-night Bible-study group through a chapter in Revelation. Now it was time to close the study—time to share our concerns with one another and then with God.

“I have a request,” I said. “I have to write the introduction to the lesson study for the COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY and I haven’t come up with an idea yet.”

Actually, I had come up with some ideas, just not any good ones. It had been a long week; I had worked on a script, two newsletters, and a book someone had hired me to write. I felt “written out” and found I was experiencing writer’s block.

Oh, it wasn’t that I hadn’t even looked at Psalm 1. I had. I had read God’s plan for successful living—avoiding the counsel of unbelievers, delighting in the law, and meditating on the Scriptures. I had read God’s promise that in following that plan one would “be like a tree *firmly* planted by streams of water, . . . [whose] leaf does not wither; and in whatever he does, he prospers” (verse 3, NASB).

I had read the whole chapter but had had problems internalizing it enough to write about it. I had become stuck on God’s promise in verse 3 that we wouldn’t wither, but prosper.

How could such a promise be true in the midst of financial pressures, troubled relationships, and medical concerns?

Why, as I looked around the room I thought of all the burdens we as a group had shared in the past year. No one had been immune to life’s difficulties.

Yet, as I looked into the faces of my fellow church members, I realized something else. We had all survived our individual difficulties of the past year, and part of that survival had come from the strength of meeting together on Friday night.

In meeting regularly on Friday night, we had chosen to spend time with others who wanted to know more about God. That fellowship and study time had become precious to each of us. As we had delved into the Word of God and asked His blessing on our study, we had discovered a great deal about God, His desires for our lives, and the best ways to support one another.

And through this process of assembling as a community of believers, delighting in God’s law, and meditating on His Word, we had survived the storms of life like trees firmly planted by streams of water.

We had prospered, not withered, in our relationships with God and with one another. God’s promise was true.

As the group gathered in a circle for closing prayer, a friend gave me a hug and said, “I’ll be praying for you in your writing.”

by Stephanie Irwin

Stephanie Irwin is a free-lance writer and communications consultant in Dayton, Ohio.

Monday, July 9

The Happy Hero

LOGOS

Ps. 1

Theme: Righteousness and Ungodliness Contrasted. *The Lord's blessings now and for eternity are given to those who live by His instruction. Those who do not are called wicked ones. Their temporary existence will end in eternal extinction.*

We're all familiar with this fairy-tale plot: sweet damsel faces dilemma but is rescued by handsome prince. "My hero," she coos as they ride off into the sunset. "And they live happily ever after." How sweet! How unreal!

The composer of Psalm 1 wants to clear up just who the real heroes are in this world. Our senses and popular opinion influence us to believe that the rich, powerful, and famous get all the breaks. Who doesn't drool while watching "Lifestyles of the Rich and Famous"? But this psalm refocuses our eyes upon the truly blessed man, our "hero," who wisely follows God and His Word. Heaven's congratulations are for this happy person, who finds his reward in this life and the one to come. Let's take a closer look at just who he is.

1. What the Good Man Is Not

Associations are important in revealing the man. Our hero is known first by whom he shuns, not out of righteous smugness, but because of who he is and

what he loves.

He doesn't fit in with the ungodly. These are not avowed enemies of God; they are just careless about their spirituality. By neglecting the Spirit of holiness in their lives, they have progressively wandered on the way to destruction.

Nor does he stay around sinners. These delight themselves in the acquisition of their unholy pleasure, selfish desires, and evil habits. They've gone beyond spiritual neglect; they enjoy sin. To "stand" here implies the increasing immobility that sin inflicts to keep us from approaching God.

Finally, he does not associate with mockers. Now we see the vocal enemies of God. They cast scorn upon everything spiritual; through voice and print they declare that there is no god, that religiosity is a psychological handicap, that the future will be made better by the progressive development of humanity. Today we have many mockers, from the atheist to the humanist, from the anarchist to the New Ager. The act of sitting implies a strong familiarity with antipathy toward God, a position from which it is difficult for the Lord to move us.

*Whom do I associate with?
What do my friendships say about me?*

The three kinds of sinner portrayed in Psalm 1 typify the subtle progression of sin. When people lead a sinful life they move gradu-

by Dan Stevens

Dan Stevens is an associate pastor at the Kettering, Ohio, church and leader of the young adults group.

ally from bad to worse. At first they merely *walk* in the counsel of the *ungodly*, the careless who forget God. Soon they become habituated to evil and *stand* in the way of open *sinner*s, who enjoy willful violation of God's commandments. If left alone, they will evolve into tempters and mockers themselves, influencing others to take the same path into sin as their own, and thus they come to *sit* in the seat of the *scornful*.

2. What the Good Man Is

We would think that our hero, having shunned evil companions, would be described as associating with the godly, pure, and reverent. With some surprise we discover that he has chosen an even more consistent companion than these, for he delights "in the law of the Lord" and His Word.

Is it possible in today's busy world to make the Bible your constant companion? How can we make such a worthy goal part of our daily Christian walk? How much time do you spend meditating on Bible passages? What does this say about your relationship with God?

In the Bible our hero finds rich nutriment that help to build a godly character. Thus he is described as a tree that will flourish and bear fruit.

Finally, he is the intimate friend of Jehovah. In verse 6 we

see that God "knows" ("is knowing" in Hebrew) the way of the righteous. At times our hero's life may traverse clouds and darkness or fires of temptation, yet the Lord knows where he is. God numbers the hairs on his head. Indeed, the same word *know* is used to describe the relationship between a husband and wife—an intimacy so close that nothing is hid from either partner. In this way our hero "knows" the Lord, also.

3. The Wicked Foil

In sharp contrast to the godly, or righteous, stand the wicked, whose evil life the psalmist emphatically characterizes in this passage with the double negative of the Hebrew ("no way the ungodly, no way . . ."). The wicked do not love God's law and are thus without it. Lacking it, they are so devoid of strength that they are pictured as dry stubble useful for no purpose but decomposed fodder or fuel for the fire. Note that those depicted here are the ungodly, the *beginners* in the downward path of sin. How much worse the case for *hardened sinners*!

Not loving the Word, they will ultimately be condemned by it. In the judgment they will not be able to receive the rewards of fellowship with the righteous. Not only will they perish, but their way will, too. Sin and sinners will be no more. But our hero will live happily ever after.

Tuesday, July 10

Law Means Order and Harmony

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 1:1, 2, 6

“Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the path of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in His law he meditates day and night. . . . For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the ungodly shall perish” (Ps. 1:1-6, NKJV).

The date as I write this is August 29, 1989. Drug lords in Colombia have declared war on their own country and the United States. It is on one level a cocaine war with heavy casualties; on another level it is a gruesome symbol of the great controversy between good and evil. Both are wars with everlasting consequences. The Bible and Ellen White have good news for those in doubt about the outcome of the war: the lawless and their way of life will lose. God’s way of life (the law of love) will win.

Ellen White speaks of the redemptive mission of Christ in terms of reestablishing the war-torn creation into the natural harmony of the universe:

“Everything in nature, from the mote in the sunbeam to the

worlds on high, is under law. And upon obedience to these laws the order and harmony of the natural world depend. So there are great principles of righteousness to control the life of all intelligent beings, and upon conformity to these principles the well-being of the universe depends. Before this earth was called into being, God’s law existed. Angels are governed by its principles, and in order for earth to be in harmony with heaven, man also must obey the divine statutes. To man in Eden Christ made known the precepts of the law ‘when the morning stars sang together, and all the sons of God shouted for joy.’ Job 38:7.”¹

“By venturing to disregard the will of God upon one point, our first parents opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. And every individual who follows their example will reap a similar result. The love of God underlies every precept of His law, and he who departs from the commandment is working his own unhappiness and ruin.”²

REACT

How does the cocaine war in Colombia and the United States symbolize my involvement in the great controversy?

1. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 48.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 52.

by Dave Evans

Dave Evans is a chaplain at Kettering Medical Center, Kettering, Ohio.

Come to the Garden

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Luke 8:4-8, 11-15

With a vivid word picture the parable of the sower of seed unfolds a powerful lesson on human nature in response to God's approach. It is neither the sower nor the seed but the condition of the ground that decides the outcome. Whether the soil will allow the seed to sink a deep root determines whether the seed is wasted or fruitful. The psalmist shares similar truth, for he compares the blessed to "a tree *firmly* planted . . . , which yields its fruit in its season" (Ps. 1:3, NASB).

Within each of us lies an inner, spiritual self. No rational person would deny this. But for avowed Christians this inner self takes on special significance. God desires to meet us here, to speak with us and develop a friendship on the most private and intimate of terms. "Come now, let us *reason* together" (Isa. 1:18, NIV). "*Hear* me, that your soul may live" (55:3, NIV). "*Taste* and see that the Lord is good" (Ps. 34:8, NIV). "*Live in* me, and let me live in you" (John 15:4, TLB).

God does not offer hollow invitations. As surely as we possess the ability to comprehend the physical world through our five senses, deep within us abide facul-

ties for experiencing Him and the spiritual world. We need to respond to the Holy Spirit's urge and begin to exercise them.¹

One modern theologian uses the metaphor of a secret garden to describe our spiritual self.² This garden is a delicate place easily overrun by the weeds of everyday concerns. Reserving a time and setting away from our daily routine will help us cultivate that garden.

Though the seed of revelation has been sown upon fertile ground, it must infiltrate the deepest recesses of the garden. Meditation is the process by which truth is internalized.³ Through meditation God is able to perform His good work upon that aspect of self that we dare not share with anyone. Once allowed access, He delights to console, to teach, to heal, and to affirm our status as sons and daughters of the King. A close encounter of this kind will impact a life. It is the touch of divine acceptance and unconditional love.

"When the inner garden is under cultivation and God's Spirit is present, harvests are regular events. The fruits? Things like courage, hope, love, endurance, joy and lots of peace. Unusual capacities for self-control, the ability to discern evil and to ferret out truth are also reaped."⁴

1. A. W. Tozer, *The Pursuit of God* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Christian Publications, 1948), p. 51.

2. Gordon MacDonald, *Ordering Your Private World*, expanded ed. (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1985), pp. 117, 118.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 138.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 120.

by David Pappenfus

David Pappenfus is a clinical anesthesiologist and director of post-anesthesia care at Kettering Medical Center, Kettering, Ohio.

Thursday, July 12

Help for the Topple-prone

HOW-TO

Key Text: Josh. 1:8

Across the street from my downtown Dayton office a new building expands upward under the patient hands of construction workers. It amazes me how they confidently erect one floor on top of the next. I catch myself wondering whether and when the building will show signs of stress and topple over. On and on they work, however, day after day, month after month, seemingly oblivious to any thought of collapse.

How can they have such confidence? Before they build up they build down, pouring and pressing layers and layers of gravel and concrete deep into the earth to ensure an adequate foundation. Without a sufficient foundation the building would soon collapse.

Meditation is like a building's foundation: without it we are vulnerable to the stresses and pressures that come our way, but with a sure foundation in God and His Word we can confidently face each day's challenges as we erect the structure of our lives.

What makes up the "foundation" of a meditative life?

1. A Willing Heart. By nature we are not equipped with an adequate foundation on which to construct our life. Our building will fall without God (Ps. 1:6). To our own destruction we would, by na-

ture, rather walk with the wicked than stroll with the Saviour. God, knowing our heart, simply asks for our willingness to let Him walk with us—to let Him build His values into our heart.

2. A Contemplative Heart.

Building foundations are not thoughtlessly thrown together. Engineers carefully calculate the depth and composition of each layer. In building our foundation, we too must thoughtfully contemplate what God is trying to tell us.

Meditation is like a cow chewing its cud. Have you ever noticed field cows that look as if they're chewing gum? Actually, they are chewing their cud. They thoroughly masticate their food; they chew till there's no more to chew! That's how the "blessed" man of Psalm 1 "chews" God's Word. He chews it thoroughly, which takes purposeful time: "On his law he meditates [chews] day and night" (verse 2, NIV).

3. An Obedient Heart. For us to benefit from our meditation we must be obedient to God's leading. Jesus said the wise builder "hears these words of mine and puts them into practice" (Matt. 7:24, NIV). James concluded that "the man who looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues to do this, not forgetting what he has heard, but doing it—he will be blessed in what he does" (James 1:25, NIV).

by Randy Daniel

Randy Daniel is executive director of New Life Connection, a prison ministry, in Dayton, Ohio.

Does God Deliberate?

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 1:5, 6

It is probably safe to venture that *praise* is one of the first words that we associate with the psalms. We often think of praising God in terms of the wonderful things He has done or created. However, I suspect that our thankfulness is somewhat deficient. Sure, we may be genuinely pleased to be the recipients of His various gifts. But might we view God as we view a multimillionaire uncle who gives us a \$100 bill? Yes, we like the present, but we know it required negligible effort to produce the gift.

Believers in a fiat creation (God spoke and it was) probably do not tend to visualize much effort on God's part. Is it not possible, however, that an omnipotent Creator, even if He can instantly speak objects into existence, may spend a great deal of time planning and designing? Our theology includes God's extensive preliminary consideration of the plan of salvation. Are we not more appreciative if we believe He invested enormous thought and care into this creation rather than impulsively "popping" it into existence?

Psalm 1:5, 6 identifies an area at the other end of our time spectrum—the judgment, for which we may also have an inadequate sense of thankfulness. In the computer age we can easily conceive of a God who can process data at

incredible speed. Yet morality, motives, and faith are not discrete, objective packets of information.

Many Adventists believe that, at the end of time, people will be polarized—either clearly for or against God. Yet the real people that we know (including ourselves) are antithetical conglomerations of good and evil. Our motives are altruistic one moment and self-serving the next. Our faith is strong one minute and vaporized the next.

Theoretically, God's omniscience simplifies and clarifies the contradictions. But have you ever noticed that the more you know about a subject, the more complex it becomes? The ignorant often see issues in black and white. The informed tend to perceive gray areas.

Imagine an all-knowing and all-caring God struggling through the final determination of the destiny of children for whom He sent His Son to die! A God who desires that none should perish. I trust—and I believe—that He will decide fairly. But I also believe that it is a painful, difficult process for Him. So I am thankful for His intimate concern for each individual's salvation as He resolves the sin issue through the judgment.

REACT

Might an omniscient God plan, design, debate, question, and weigh options? Or are decisions made in nanoseconds because everything is instantly obvious?

by Brian Christenson

Brian Christenson is a systems consultant at Wright State University, Dayton, Ohio.

Lesson 3, July 15 - 21

When God Speaks



“Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the Lord with fear and rejoice with trembling” (Ps. 2:10, 11, NIV).

Dad's Advice

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 2

It was Saturday night. I was 17 years old, and all day I had been eagerly anticipating the evening's social activities. At last the big clock in the hallway struck eight. Taking a deep breath, I walked into the kitchen, where Dad had just finished his evening meal. The best time to ask a big favor of my dad was always just after he had enjoyed his supper. He had just pushed himself back from the table and was reaching for the daily paper when he noticed me.

"Dad," I stammered, "uh, I kinda have a date tonight. And well, ya know, I kinda need a car to pick this girl up. Can I use your car?" Now, Dad was a nice guy, but when it came to lending the car to his teenage sons, he had been known to show another side of his personality. But this night was different. Maybe it was the good meal. Maybe it had been a good week at work. For whatever reason, Dad smiled and said, "Got a date, huh? Good. Well, the keys are on top of the refrigerator."

In a state of disbelief over this rare show of good faith in his son's driving skills, I mumbled a thank-you and turned to pick up the car keys. I had just

grasped these keys to fun and freedom and headed out the door when Dad's deep voice stopped me. "Oh, son," he said, "before you leave I've got some good advice for you." I cringed as I heard those words. The lecture on safety and responsibility was forthcoming. I gritted my teeth, put on a smile, and endured it. Nevertheless, that evening I left determined to drive just the way I pleased.

I have to be honest. To this day I dislike the words "I've got some good advice for you." It seems like an attack on my independence, my abilities. To adults, the words are even more objectionable, for they take us back to that old parent-child relationship that most of us cherish but are glad to have behind us.

Psalm 2 represents a heavenly Father's advice to His erring children. They are words to the foolish and the proud, who intend to do things their own way. They are words of warning to the stubborn and independent. They caution those who have trouble relinquishing control—whether of a '71 Pontiac or of a nation. The key passage of the chapter, verses 10 and 11, represents God's invitation to the rulers of the earth to submit their ways to God. It is a timeless call to recognize God's sovereignty. Good advice from a heavenly Dad.

by Steve Haley

Steve Haley is a 1983 graduate of Southern College, Collegedale, Tennessee. He and his wife and daughter live in southern Georgia, where Steve pastors and "receives lots of advice."

Monday, July 16

A Royal Destiny

LOGOS

Ps. 2

Theme: The Lord's Counsel to the Rebellious. *The Lord has two answers to people and nations that turn against Him and the Messiah, whom He has sent: 1. The world and its inhabitants are the heritage of the anointed King. 2. The only hope for rebellious peoples is to serve the Lord and take refuge in Him.*

1. A Historical Perspective (read 1 Sam. 16:1-13)

Psalm 2, a "royal psalm" of Davidic origin, begins with the enemies of Israel in revolt. For a brief time the covenant promise had been fulfilled. The monarchy of Israel had conquered the realm "from the river of Egypt as far as the great river, the river Euphrates" (Gen. 15:18, NASB). But Israel's enemies were now rebelling. Such revolution is evidence of a coronation taking place in Jerusalem, a change of Davidic rulership. Therefore David questioned: "Why are the nations in an uproar, and the peoples devising a vain thing? The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers take counsel together against the Lord and against His Anointed" (Ps. 2:1, 2, NASB).

The Davidic kingship had been appointed by God. The king, upon receiving the oil of ordination, was declared to be the anointed, the messiah. Such a ceremony was equivalent to adoption. God

then decreed: "Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee" (verse 7, NASB).

This anointing and adoption ensured that the heir would be installed upon Mount Zion (see verse 6) as ruler. The Davidic succession was assured. The king in Jerusalem would "break them with a rod of iron" (verse 9, NASB). The wrath of God could be averted only by succumbing to Israelite authority. "Do homage to the Son, lest He become angry, and you perish in the way, for His wrath may soon be kindled. How blessed are all who take refuge in Him!" (verse 12, NASB). Wrath is avoided by declaring allegiance to the son-king and worshipping his God.

2. A Christological Perspective (read Matt. 3:1-17)

The apostolic church, on its knees in prayer, applied Psalm 2:1, 2 (cf. Acts 4:25, 26) to the political alliance that crucified Jesus. "Truly in this city there were gathered together against Thy holy servant Jesus, whom Thou didst anoint, both Herod and Pontius Pilate, along with the Gentiles and the peoples of Israel, to do whatever Thy hand and Thy purpose predestined to occur" (verses 27, 28, NASB; cf. verses 23-30).

The nations then included Latin diplomats, the Gentiles, and the nation of Israel. When the people of Judah took "their stand . . . against the Lord and against his Anointed" (verse 26,

by Patrick D. Williams

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NIV), they became part of the opposition to God.

Yet even this conglomerate of state (Rome) and church (Judah) could not prevail against the Anointed, the Messiah, the Christ.

At Jesus' baptism the Spirit descended "as a dove out of heaven; and He remained upon Him" (John 1:29-34, NASB; cf. Matt. 3:1-17; Mark 1:1-11; and Luke 3:21, 22). Jesus was the Christ, the Anointed (see Acts 4:27; 10:38; and Heb. 1:9). In fact, He Himself declared: "The Spirit of the Lord is upon Me, because He anointed Me to preach the gospel" (Luke 4:18, NASB).

Such an anointing inaugurated Jesus' mission as the Son of God. At His baptism, when the anointing dove descended, the voice of the Father said, "This is My beloved Son" (Matt. 3:17, NASB). Paul, preaching at Pisidian Antioch, declared: "God has fulfilled this promise to our children in that He raised up Jesus, as it is also written in the second Psalm, 'Thou art My Son; today I have begotten Thee'" (Acts 13:33, NASB). The resurrection of Jesus from the dead confirms the sonship declared at the Lord's baptism. Resurrection is sure evidence of Jesus' valid claim to the throne of heaven. The writer of Hebrews applied this passage to the seating of Jesus upon the heavenly throne: "He [Jesus] sat down at the right hand of the Majesty on high. . . . To which of the angels did He [God] ever say, 'Thou art My Son, today I have begotten Thee?'" (Heb. 1:3-5, NASB).

The baptism, resurrection, and ascension of Jesus unequivocally established His sonship. His rule upon Mount Zion was confirmed. The Son born to Mary was destined "to rule all the nations with a rod of iron; and her child was caught up to God and to His

throne" (Rev. 12:5, NASB). Psalm 2 is clearly a messianic psalm, pointing forward to the reign of the Lord Jesus.

3. An Eschatological Perspective (read Acts 2:1-4, 37-42)

At the end of time the nations will once again be in revolt, this time against God's people. Revelation 11:18 declares that "the nations were angry" with the disciples of the Son-King. Why? Because the age of the Spirit has come to the church. At Pentecost, tongues of flame rested on the disciples, "and they were all filled with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 2:4, NASB). All those in Christ are the anointed ones of God (2 Cor. 1:21, 22). "The anointing which you received from Him abides in you" (1 John 2:27, NASB).

"Because you are sons, God has sent forth the Spirit of His Son into our hearts, crying 'Abba! Father!' Therefore you are no longer a slave, but a son; and if a son, then an heir through God" (Gal. 4:6, 7, NASB).

As God's anointed ones, as His sons and daughters, we will be given the kingdom. For Jesus has "made us to be a kingdom, priests to His God and Father" (Rev. 1:6, NASB). We will soon experience the trappings of rulership. Jesus "will grant to [us] to sit down with [Him] on [His] throne, as [He] also overcame and sat down with [His] Father on His throne" (3:21, NASB). We will be given those "golden crowns" (4:4, NASB) to cast at Jesus' feet. He will even entrust us with that rod of iron to rule over the nations (2:26, 27). The earth will be our possession. "If we endure, we shall also reign with Him" (2 Tim. 2:12, NASB).

So we see that the experience of the king in Psalm 2 became the experience of the Son-King, Jesus, whose experience becomes our experience.

Tuesday, July 17

An Unlikely Prophet

TESTIMONY

Key Text: John 11:49-52

The pages of Scripture are filled with stories of men and women who rebelled and strove to defeat God's purposes, only to discover that ultimately their actions were overruled for good, and in many cases proved to be a fulfillment of prophecy. Naturally the Messianic Psalm 2 finds its most concentrated series of applications during the life and ministry of Jesus.

Christ on earth "was made the mark of every weapon of hell,"¹ yet God's plan was accomplished despite the combined efforts of His adversaries. When people tried to humiliate Christ by trapping Him with words, they found the situation reversed and Jesus magnified before the people. When they sought to use force, they found it worthless against Him.

The actions of Caiaphas provide a frightening illustration of the hopelessness of scheming against God. In a rage Caiaphas declared, "It is expedient for us, that one man should die for the people." Ellen White writes, "His words meant more than he . . . knew. . . . Unknowingly he was declaring that Christ was about to fulfill that for which the system of sacrifices and offerings had been instituted."²

She continues, "Each actor in

history stands in his lot and place; for God's great work after His own plan will be carried out by men who have prepared themselves to fill positions for good or evil. . . . In a crisis, just at the right moment, they will stand in the places they have prepared themselves to fill. Believers and unbelievers will fall into line as witnesses to confirm truth that they themselves do not comprehend. All will co-operate in accomplishing the purposes of God, just as did Annas, Caiaphas, Pilate, and Herod. In putting Christ to death, the priests thought they were carrying out their own purposes, but unconsciously and unintentionally they were fulfilling the purpose of God. . . . The wicked will trample one another down as they act out their attributes and fulfill their plans, but they will carry out the purposes of God."³

Fearful of the truth and unwilling to repent, Caiaphas tried to quench hopes of a resurrection by placing guards at the tomb. This was again futile, for "by [his] action God was glorified. The very efforts made to prevent Christ's resurrection are the most convincing arguments in its proof. The greater the number of soldiers placed around the tomb, the stronger would be the testimony that He had risen."⁴

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 116.

2. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 5, p. 1137.

3. *Review and Herald*, June 12, 1900.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 778.

by Rob Clayton

Rob Clayton, a 1985 graduate of Southern College, pastors the Tifton, Georgia, Seventh-day Adventist Church.

The Kingdom of God

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 2:6

Psalm 2 opens with a tumult among the nations, a frantic uproar and tumultuous assembly characterized by neither sanity nor reason. The nations imagine a vain thing, an impossibility; namely, an overthrow of God's rulership.

First, this psalm has a general application to all times as an illustration of the rebellious spirit of fallen humanity. "The carnal mind is enmity against God" (Rom. 8:7, NKJV). This has always been true, for in a very real sense the nations have always raged against God, and the people imagined a vain thing. In their quest for position and power the kings of the earth have continually set themselves at variance with the purposes of God.

Second, this tumultuous federation of evil manifested itself—that is, became potent (Acts 4:25, 26)—at the time of Christ's crucifixion. This was no partial outbreak of evil, for both Jew and Gentile, rich and poor, learned and ignorant, were federated against the Son of God. A confederacy of rulers opposed God's purpose to establish His kingdom in the world; for they said of Christ, "Away with Him!" and nailed Him to a tree.

This psalm looks forward,

however, to a final crisis of history for its full accomplishment. In Revelation 16:13, 14 and 20:7-9 we read of tumultuous armies (inspired by a confederation of evil spirits) marching to do battle against our Lord and His people. This is the final expression of the enmity of the human heart against God. But despite all the unbelief and opposition, God says, "I have set My King upon My holy hill of Zion" (Ps. 2:6, NKJV). As far as God is concerned, the enthronement of Jesus over the kingdoms of this world is just as certain as if it were an accomplished fact. The wicked will not always rape the earth, and blood will not always flow. For at the end of this present age God's purpose to establish His rule on the earth will be accomplished (see Dan. 2:66; Lev. 11:15; and Matt. 25:31).

REACT

1. New Testament writers speak often concerning the "kingdom of God," or the "kingdom of heaven." How do you understand this concept?

2. In what sense is the kingdom of God on earth today?

3. In what sense do you understand Jesus Christ to exercise kingship, or rulership, today?

4. How is the kingship of David related to that of Jesus Christ (see 2 Sam. 7:8-16; Luke 1:31-33; Acts 1:6; 2:29-36; Matt. 25:31; and Rev. 11:15)?

by Graham Bingham

Graham Bingham is editor of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY.

Thursday, July 19

Glad Homage

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 2:11

When David wrote Psalm 2 he had something important to say. His words have a practical application even for our computerized society. Verse 11 says, "Worship the Lord with reverence; tremble, and pay glad homage to the king" (REB).

When we look closely at this verse and notice the verbs and their direct objects, we come up with far more than a boring lesson on English syntax! In the verse David is giving a blueprint for living life to the fullest. The whole purpose of our life is to worship and "pay glad homage" to the King.

The question naturally arises, How do I pay glad homage to the King? Paying glad homage to the King involves far more than our behavior when we're in the presence of the King at Sabbath services or prayer meeting. We need to pay glad homage to the King every day, 365 days a year, 24 hours a day. How do we achieve this?

1. "Pay glad homage" spiritually. Begin the moment you wake up in the morning. Start the day in prayer and Bible study and your chances of giving God glory when you're with the crowd are greatly improved.

2. "Pay glad homage" mentally. The same God who made Solomon the wisest man in the world will give wisdom to all those who ask (James 1:5). But what do we do with the wisdom we receive? Do we use it to benefit others or to claw our way to the top?

Ask yourself, "Am I paying glad homage with my intelligence? Do I spend time strengthening my intellect through reading the Bible and following other mind-building methods? How much of my brainpower do I donate to TV?" An honest answer to these questions will go a long way toward helping you pay glad homage to the King.

3. "Pay glad homage" physically. People have various reasons for being in shape. But for the Christian, one incentive tops them all. Our physical condition is related to our spiritual condition.

So think about paying God glad homage when you make up your daily or weekly schedule; don't let work, school, family, or friends crowd out a place for exercise in your life. Also think about your health when you sit down for a meal. Why overeat, sugar-load, or fat-feast? Such habits will only slow you down and make it *awfully* hard to pay glad homage.

by Darcy Smith

Darcy Smith is a communications major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Kissing God

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 2:12

Expressions of love are important. Bumper stickers remind us with catchy phrases like "Have you hugged your kid today?" or "Hugs, not drugs." Psychologists tell us that lack of love can cause serious damage to a person's emotional development. Doctors now know that babies require love for physical growth and health. Love is high on the list of human needs.

God too is love. Love is the basis of Creation and redemption. He created us for companionship and redeemed us because He loves us. He shows His love to us every day. How can we overlook the importance of expressing our love to God?

Obviously, we cannot literally fulfill the command of the psalmist, "Kiss the Son" (Ps. 2:12). But we can "kiss" Him with words and actions. In fact, Jesus leaves no doubt as to how we can show our love when He says, "If ye love me, keep my commandments" (John 14:15). Remember, also, that all of our expressions of love

to other human beings are expressions of our love to Jesus. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40).

Worship of God in any of its forms is nothing more or less than an expression of our love to Him. By worship we acknowledge His worthiness of our love. "We love him, because he first loved us" (1 John 4:19). This worship of God begins here and now and will continue for eternity. As knowledge of God increases, so does love, happiness, and praise (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 678).

The question of Psalm 2 is Will we accept God and His Anointed One, together with the offer of His love and salvation, or will we reject His love and rebel against His salvation? The choice we make determines whether we are blessed or whether He laughs at us in derision.

REACT

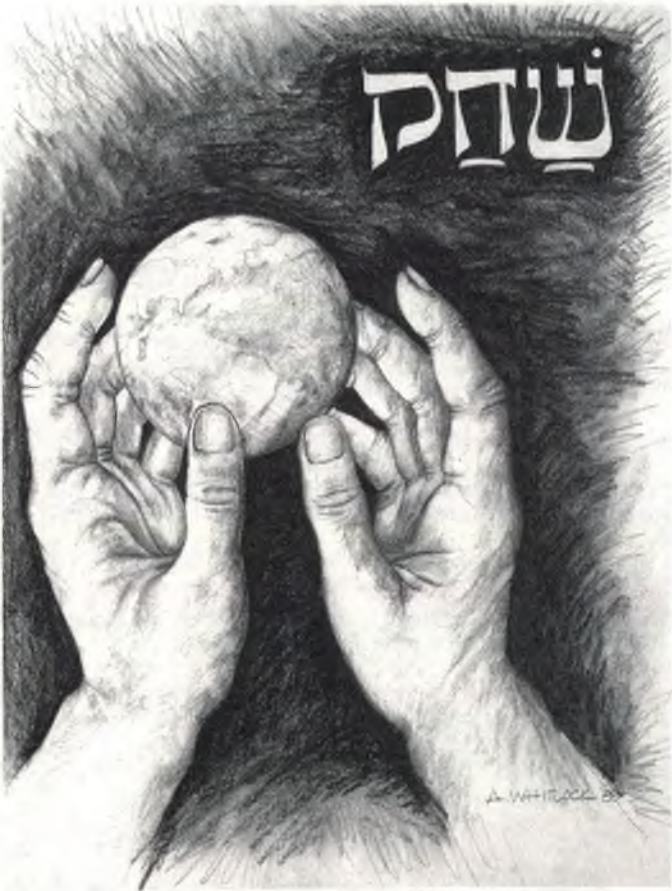
1. In what way does our worship of God express our love for Him?
2. How could our worship better express that love?

by Dale McConnell

Dale McConnell pastors churches in Americus and Oglethorpe, Georgia.

Lesson 4, July 22 - 28

In Pursuit of Excellence



“When I consider your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?” (Ps. 8:3, 4, NIV).

Sunday, July 22

The Everest Trail

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 8

It was a Sabbath afternoon walk I will always remember. We hiked up a mountain trail, along a narrow rock-strewn pathway with a steep, rocky incline that supported a few rough-looking bushes on one side, with a sheer drop-off on the other side. White-washed mud huts dotted the hillside before us. The poor sun-darkened peasants we passed on the trail carried heavy burdens of wood, water, and other necessities of daily life, a stark contrast to the awesome grandeur of the Himalaya Mountains of central Nepal.

We hiked a few miles up the Everest Trail, which runs right through the front yard of our Ad-

ventist clinic about 30 miles outside of Kathmandu. Another 50 miles up the trail would bring us to the base camp of Mount Everest, where the actual ascent of the peak begins.

I had come with family to visit the missionaries at the clinic and vacation a few days in Nepal. Hiking the Everest Trail was the highlight of the trip for me at age 11.

As I contemplate the theme of this week's lesson, I wonder whether the psalmist was inspired by beauty similar to what we encountered along the Everest Trail. What is man compared to the awful grandeur, power, and raw beauty of nature? Yet God, in His love and wisdom, has put us in charge of the natural world and asked us to care for it. It is a sacred and solemn responsibility.

by Kevin Sadler

Kevin Sadler is an accountant at Sunbelt Health Care Centers in Orlando, Florida.

Monday, July 23

Reflecting the Divine Likeness

LOGOS

Ps. 8

Theme: Human Weakness—Divine Strength. *By comparison with their all-powerful, majestic Creator, human beings are insignificant, weak, dependent creatures. Even so, the Lord originally invested humankind with dominion over the earth, and this dominion will be restored for those who trust Him.*

1. God's Glory

"Then Moses said, 'Now show me your glory.' And the Lord said, 'I will cause all my goodness to pass in front of you'" (Ex. 33:18, 19, NIV).

A central theme in the book of Psalms is praise. God's attributes command our praise. His actions, whether of Creation, or redemptive, demand praise as the only proper human response. "Oh that men would praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his wonderful works to the children of men!" (107:8). With this background we can understand how the cries of an infant praise the Lord (8:2).

What are some ways I can praise God through my humanity?

2. Humanity Compared to God

"Can you fathom the mysteries of God? Can you probe the limits of the Almighty?" (Job 11:7, NIV).

The obvious answer to this rhetorical question is NO! God can

certainly "probe our limits" but we can barely begin to grasp Him. "O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise; you perceive my thoughts from afar" (Ps. 139:1, 2, NIV). Even fresh from the Creator's hand in a perfect pre-Fall condition, God is far beyond human comprehension. David finds it difficult to understand why God is mindful of him.

How do you feel when you compare yourself with God?

How does knowing that God is mindful of you affect your life day by day?

3. The Human Position

"So God created man in his own image, in the image of God he created him; male and female he created them" (Gen. 1:27, NIV).

Unlike any other creatures we know, humans have a unique relationship with God. God is specially concerned about human beings because He created them in His likeness with a desire for fellowship with Him. Psalm 8:5 might better be translated, "Yet You have made him a little lower than God, and have crowned him with glory and majesty." Through the process of redemption humanity can again be at one with God and spend eternity reflecting the Creator's glory.

How does the exalted position of humanity make you feel? proud? humble? peaceful? troubled? Why?

by Andy McDonald

Andy McDonald is senior pastor of the SDA church at the Florida Hospital in Orlando, Florida.

AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN DIVISION



PROJECTS:

1. Printing press, Nigerian Union
2. Lamb shelters, Nigerian Union
3. Adventist Missionary College, West African Union
4. Seven church buildings, West African Union

Unions	Population	Churches	Church Members
Central African	24,201,000	524	40,341
Indian Ocean	13,024,116	165	25,280
Nigerian	97,805,350	429	77,835
Rwanda	6,724,273	666	182,266
Sahel	39,726,759	38	4,786
West African	23,290,000	417	134,083
Zaire	38,526,616	831	190,435
Burundi Mission	<u>5,120,000</u>	<u>81</u>	<u>21,547</u>
Totals June 30, 1988	248,418,114	3,151	676,573

Tuesday, July 24

What Is Man?

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 8:4

What is man? When you look into the heavens and realize that there are more than 10 billion galaxies out there, earth becomes a mere speck in the universe. How big—how important—does that make you feel? Worthless? “The worth of man is known only by going to Calvary. In the mystery of the cross of Christ we [you] can place an estimate upon man.”¹

But one might say, “Why do I need the cross? God made me upright. He gave me noble traits of character. He endowed me with high intellectual powers and presented to me the strongest possible inducement to be true to any cause. In fact, I possess obedience and perfection that will provide me eternal happiness. Best of all, I have the power of choice.”

These character traits were all true, but you have left out one important element. The effect of sin. Your noble ideals are now influenced by your selfish desires, causing an eternal separation from the character traits you desire.

This separation can be bridged only by “the mystery of the cross of Christ,” and the grace that comes with it restoring those traits with which God created man.

What is man? As viewed from the universe, nothing without the gift of salvation. From this gift, Christ knows you individually and is touched with the feeling of your infirmities. He knows you by name. The joy of this gift comes when you give yourself to Christ, who considers you more precious in His sight than the whole universe. The Saviour would have gone through the agony of Calvary just for you to be saved in His kingdom. He has promised never to abandon you for whom He has died. Unless you choose to leave Him.

Through all your trials, you have a never-failing Helper. Christ will not leave you alone to struggle with temptation, to battle with Satan, and be finally crushed into nothingness. Though you might not be able to see Him in person at this time, your faith can hear His voice saying, “Fear not; I am with you.”

What is man? In Christ, you are a gift of God, and the reward of His work. Jesus loves you. Heaven itself can bestow nothing greater, nothing better.²

Compare this to being nothing on a mere forgotten speck in one little corner of one little solar system, in one little galaxy, and there are 10 billion galaxies in a vast universe!

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 634, 635.

2. Paraphrased from *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 44, 51; *The Desire of Ages*, pp. 19-26; 476-484.

by Rick Stevens

Rick Stevens is an administrative resident at Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida.

Strength From the Psalms

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 8

Psalm 8 is the first of the nature psalms and has been called the "Song of the Starry Night." Although the circumstances of composition are not known, it is easy to imagine David standing beneath a star-filled sky, awe-struck in his contemplation of God's handiwork.

Although 73 of the psalms carry the subheading "of David," many scholars believe that only 13 of the Bible's 150 psalms were actually written during David's lifetime.

This leaves the reader with two puzzling questions.

1. If David did not write all of the psalms, or even the 73 attributed to him, who did?

2. Why do biblical writers credit David with psalms many scholars believe he could not have possibly written?

It is widely believed that eight authors are responsible for the Psalms: David, Asaph, Korah, Moses, Heman, Ethan, Solomon, and Jeduthun.

The traditional viewpoint holds that David's experiences, musical ability, and relationship with God are sufficient evidence of David's role as one of the principal contributors to the collection. Also, the connection of David's name with the psalms, and with parts

of psalms quoted in 2 Samuel 22 and 1 Chronicles 16:1-36, as well as in numerous New Testament texts, constitutes strong support of authorship.

This leads us to the second question—why David is credited with 73 psalms, some of which were not written during his lifetime.

The phrase "of David" (Hebrew—*ledawid*) had several meanings in David's day. Whereas the casual reader understands "of David" to mean "by David," Bible scholars have found that this Hebrew phrase describes a number of relationships, of which authorship is only one.

The Hebrew preposition *le* expresses the idea of "belonging to," hence *ledawid* could mean "belonging to the collection of." Nevertheless, other evidence combines to show that David wrote or supervised the compilation of many of the psalms.

Whether or not David is the author of Psalm 8 is not as important as the inspired message of the text—man's worth to God. In Psalm 8, man realizes he is insignificant while at the same time he is awed that God has placed him in charge of all other creatures on the earth. Man is allowed to be responsible even though he has proved himself irresponsible. He is counted worthy even though he is unworthy.

by Patti Smedley and Janice Richert

Patti Smedley is a public relations editor at Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida. Janice Richert is a homemaker in Orlando, Florida.

Thursday, July 26

Earth Day

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 8:6-8

In January 1989, *Time* magazine, instead of naming a person of the year, named a planet of the year—Earth. This is only the second instance where *Time* has deviated from the annual Person of the Year selection. In 1982 it named the computer Machine of the Year. *Time* explains its choice:

“Starting at the dawn of the Industrial Revolution, smokestacks have disgorged noxious gases into the atmosphere, factories have dumped toxic wastes into rivers and streams, automobiles have guzzled irreplaceable fossil fuels and fouled the air with their detritus. In the name of progress, forests have been denuded, lakes poisoned with pesticides, underground aquifers pumped dry. For decades, scientists have warned of the possible consequences of all this profligacy. No one paid much attention. This year the earth spoke.”¹

The notion that Planet Earth will adjust to our lifestyles is now called into serious question. People are sitting up and listening to discussions about the “greenhouse effect.” Descriptions of tropical forests being eliminated at a rate equal to one football field a second are demanding attention and action. Man’s predatory relationship with nature,

which has developed over the ages, must stop.

As we study Psalm 8, especially verses 6-8, the questionable state of our planet takes on new meaning. If we take these verses seriously and if we believe that as Christians we have special obligations and responsibilities toward our planet, then we must take action. At least four steps seem worth discussing:

1. We must take individual responsibility for our planet.

This doesn’t mean heaping your plate with ecology-minded activities. It may mean researching and choosing one project and being consistent with it. For example, you may choose to be involved in a recycling project.

The Environmental Defense Fund newsletter lists some interesting facts about the need for recycling. “Nationwide, only about 10 per cent of this country’s waste is currently being recycled. Americans throw away enough office and writing paper each year to build a 12-foot-high wall between Los Angeles and New York. The glass bottles and jars we discard could fill the New York World Trade Center’s 1,350-foot twin towers every two weeks. Other industrial nations generate half as much trash per person as Americans do, and recycle a major portion of it.”²

2. Recognize the consequences

by Melody Lowe

Melody Lowe is a community-services representative for Manor Health-Care Corporation in Orlando, Florida.

or the chain reactions that occur when you use the planet's resources. When you turn on the air conditioner, the electric company uses fuel to cool your home and in doing so puts pollutants into the atmosphere. Wind currents blow Chernobyl's fallout around the globe. Leveling of rain forests disturbs or destroys countless living things. Garbage flushed into the Mississippi River spreads throughout the Caribbean.

3. Be informed. Go to your local ecology or conservation center and read materials about what is happening in your area of the planet. Subscribe to a newsletter or magazine that focuses on the crisis or join a group like the Sierra Club or National Wildlife Federation.

4. Make every day an Earth Day. On April 22, 1970, millions

of Americans rallied to support the environment by celebrating the first Earth Day. They planted trees, cleaned up vacant lots, started gardens, and began learning about the delicacy of the natural world. Since then, April 22, Americans celebrate Earth Day. Let's not wait until April 22; let's make every day Earth Day!

Senator Al Gore summed up the situation well when he said, "We saw the two whales trapped in the Arctic ice, struggling for air, and the world responded. The U.S. and the Soviet Union cooperated. Yet we see 40,000 babies starving every day, and we don't react. What is wrong with us?"

"There used to be a debate in the 1970s about appropriate technology. Now the question is: Did God choose an appropriate technology when He gave human beings dominion over the earth? The jury is still out."³

1. *Time*, Jan. 2, 1989, p. 26.

2. *EDF Letter*, Dec. 1988, p. 1.

3. *Time*, Jan. 2, 1989, p. 66.

Friday, July 27

The Value of Human Life

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 8:5, 6

He lay in intensive care, his skin dry and cracking like an old worn shoe. Close to 70 years old, he weighed 90 pounds. It was painfully obvious that he was unaware of recent trends—Sun-block, Retin-A, and the latest in pH-balanced skin emollients. After two weeks of exhaustively searching for a friend or relative, it was also obvious that no one on this planet cared whether this patient's blood was getting oxygen from his tuberculosis-filled lungs.

I was the intern taking care of him. I had managed to keep him breathing with the help of a ventilator, but now he was hemorrhaging, most likely from a stress ulcer. He had gotten six units of blood and large amounts of fluid. How much more should I do? Should I continue to give him blood that other patients desperately needed? Should I request the assistance of a specialist who might wish to do expensive procedures and just prolong the patient's suffering? How long could the hospital continue to pay his bill? If this man were my father, would I treat him differently? Should my Christian values play a role in my decision? What was this human life worth?

I'd like to think of myself as a thoughtful person, one who sees both sides of an issue and then makes a decision. I'm not one to take sides on an issue and then

dogmatically defend it. Sometimes I would rather retreat into a shell of intellectualization than take a firm stand and be wrong. All too often, however, you and I are forced to take a stand.

We are not the first generation in this country to deal with difficult questions about the value of human life. Our ancestors had to ask themselves whether freedom was worth dying for. Did their belief in the evils of slavery mean that they should fight for the slaves' emancipation? Whose lives were worth more, the slaves or their own brothers? Were those with Christian beliefs exempt from fighting or were they letting others do their dirty work for them?

I have found that medicine does not allow me the luxury of taking a passive role. Practical decisions must be made every day about ethics. Poignant examples abound: There is the 24-week-old premature infant whose life could possibly be spared, but at the cost of hundreds of thousands of dollars, of a lifelong handicap, and the stress the child's parents will face. There is also the explosive issue of abortion. Can we end the life of a 12-week-old fetus who, with the help of an ultrasound, can be seen moving its arms and legs? Or should we respect a woman's right over her body and allow her to decide whether she is emotionally capable of giving her child a worthwhile existence? The list goes on.

Outside of medicine there is

by Kenneth Palm

Kenneth Palm is a family practice resident at Florida Hospital, Orlando, Florida.

also the issue of capital punishment. Can we kill someone whom Christ said we should forgive 70 times 7? Do we owe it to society?

So far, I have discussed areas that deal with the value of human life in a direct manner. These are issues on which most of us will not have to take a stand. There are, however, more subtle ways in which you and I show how we value human life. Do we consider our lives more valuable than those of the handicapped, the poor, the "nerds," those with a race different from ours, people who drink and smoke and don't believe the way we do?

As Christians, we need to be leaders in ethics. Unfortunately, difficult questions still exist, and we, by no means, have a monopoly on the answers. Here are some guidelines I believe should

be kept in mind when we wrestle with complex issues about the value of human life.

1. Be aware of the Holy Spirit's willingness to guide you.

2. Be filled with compassion, rather than absorbed with the burning desire to be right.

3. Consider all the angles and realize that there may be several answers that are acceptable.

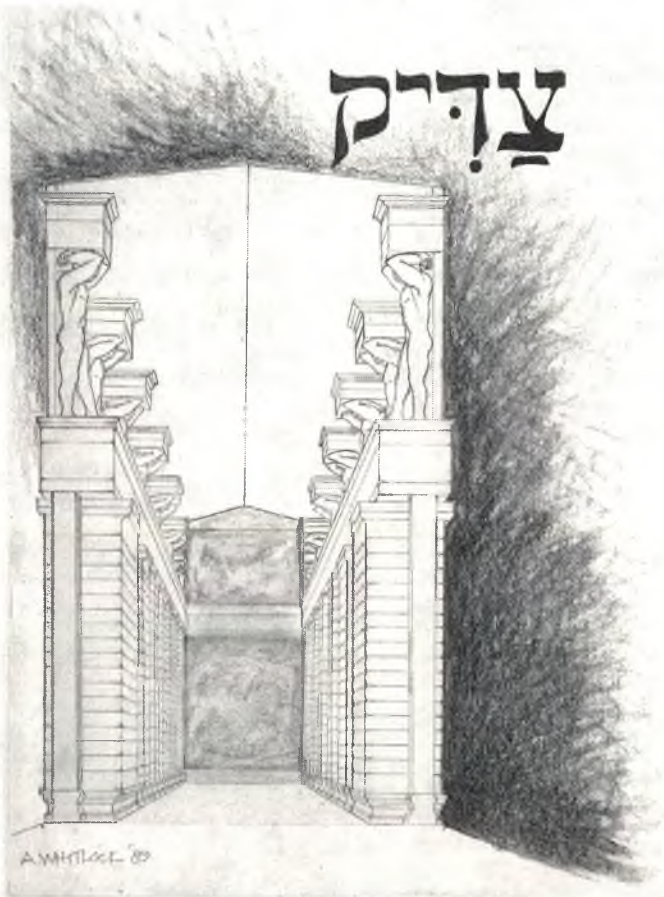
4. Choose one answer only after you've been totally honest with yourself and God. If some believe differently from you, listen to their viewpoint and learn from it; don't ever put them down.

5. Last, always keep learning. God gave you and me the ability to make choices and He's trusting us to make the right one.

I did not give the patient any more blood. He died peacefully a week later. I'm still not sure I did the right thing.

Lesson 5, July 29—August 4

The Question of Questions



“Lord, who may dwell in your sanctuary? Who may live in your holy hill? He whose walk is blameless and who does what is righteous” (Ps. 15:1, 2, NIV).

More Than Survival

INTRODUCTION

Key Text: Ps. 15:1

I grew up being taught not to run in the church. Not only that, but never was I to go stand in the pulpit or walk across the chancel area. We never used words like *chancel* or *narthex*—they seemed too pompous or ostentatious for our “humble” forms of worship. Rather, we referred to the area at the front of the church sanctuary as the platform, a somewhat mundane term when you stop to think of it.

And in the setting of these strictures and prohibitions, I toyed with the idea that I might be stricken down by lightning or swallowed by the earth if I were to desecrate the sanctuary by standing in the wrong place, or by moving too fast in it, or, for that matter, by having too good a time in church.

It was scary stuff. After all, one must remember Korah, Dathan, and Abiram, who were swallowed up for disrespect. Or Uzzah, who was struck dead when he was trying to be helpful but was in the wrong place.

So, how am I to understand, much less enjoy, a text that talks about dwelling in the sanctuary when I am almost afraid to go into it? Isaiah’s description doesn’t help much either. He saw the Lord on a throne high and lifted up, surrounded by seraphs

whose voices of praise were so powerful that the walls and foundations shook and smoke filled the room.

How would anyone be able to survive in a place like that, let alone want to? The risk is that as much as we need to maintain the proper respect for God, we may make Him out to be so austere and frightful that He seems unapproachable. Yet again, we do not want to make either the presence of God or the dignity of the church structures so common that they have no unique meaning.

The psalmist knows and maintains this tension between the grand dignity of God and His loving presence. He says, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress” (Ps. 18:2), but he also says, “The Lord is my Shepherd” (23:1).

The question is not really Who can survive in the sanctuary? (as if only a few spiritual athletes will be good enough). But it is more in the mode of Who is it that thrives on the kind of living that is characterized by God’s way of doing things? And the answer is not threatening, but is rather the expression of obvious truth. This is what it takes to produce livable society both in our relationship with God and with one another.

The issue is not a frightening question as to how one can survive in the presence of God, but rather a question as to how one could survive in a society without Him.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Monday, July 30

Godly Citizenship

LOGOS

Matt. 5:46-48

Theme: Who Shall Abide? *The individual acceptable to God is the one whose righteousness of heart is the source of righteous behavior. The only kind of behavior that God accepts is that which is morally and ethically pure.*

Hebrew poetry and a literalistic, proof-text methodology do not sit comfortably together. Taking the words of Psalm 15 at technical face value robs the poem of its meaning. One could make a technical distinction between the use of Hebrew terms in verse 1 that would separate its meaning into a choice between a temporary sojourn and a permanent dwelling. But to do so would violate the flow of restatement, which is so much a part of Hebrew poetry. We must give the author some room. Some "poetic license."

For us, poetry is usually understood as words placed in rhythm and rhyme. But for the Hebrews, it was a matter of statement and restatement, two or three times in different words, often increasing in intensity. Such is the case with the opening of Psalm 15. The movement in verse 1 is from the visitor to the permanent resident. In verse 2, the flow builds in couplets, repeating the message six times, growing in its intensity, as it expresses just what it means to be godly.

The first couplet is passive. It

refers to one who is "blameless." But godliness is much more. There is activity to it. Activity that is part of one's entire life and dealing. Merely to be blameless is not enough, wonderful as it may be. True godliness shows itself in action. There is the active doing of righteousness. But even good deeds may be only an outward show of conformity. True godliness goes deeper and is motivated from within. It is a matter of the heart.

Then righteousness moves out into the street. It does no wrong. It does not violate others or their property. Nor does it indirectly violate their characters by slanderous words. It makes proper judgment between good and evil and finally even assists others to one's own personal detriment.

Then there is the issue of usury. There seems to be more here than merely our usual concept of interest on money. The second section of this couplet refers to bribery. Surely interest is not in that kind of company. Maybe extortion is closer to the intent. And perhaps the word *usury*, a word not presently in common parlance, is a good word after all. Using another person for one's own selfish advantage and to their detriment is definitely not a godly concept.

The poem has thus ascended to the heights of godliness, and rejected the seeking of selfish advantage even as its introduction has invited God's people to ascend to the "holy hill" and take up resi-

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

dence with Him, leaving behind the low life of sin.

Yet beautiful as all this is, the implications for perfectionism are very real. First, one is distressed when honestly addressing this rehearsal of circumspect behavior, by the fact that it appears impossible to achieve. Who can truly say that they are living up to all this ideal?

And if we do not fall into this insecurity trap, an opposite and even more dangerous process takes over. We tend to analyze, codify, and legalize it all so that we can check off the requirements one by one. Maybe we would start with a precise definition of slander. Once its exact definition is established, then we can say with assurance, "I don't do that" and assume that we are blameless. And so on—and so on—until we finally are able to convince ourselves that we actually are perfect. If this all sounds just like the legalism Jesus faced in His day, you have it right.

As indicated at the outset, technical manipulation of the text destroys its beauty and meaning. Indeed perfection is the goal of the godly. Jesus said that we are to be perfect even as our Father in heaven is perfect. But what does that mean? God is perfect in every way—omniscient, omnipotent, immortal, eternal. Wouldn't it be blasphemous for us to assume that we qualify for

such approbation? In fact, isn't that where Lucifer went wrong?

The problem is with our understanding of perfection. We have too many definitions for it. We say of a newborn child that it is a perfect baby. What do we mean by that? The child can't care for itself. It can't read or do mathematical calculations or qualify for competition in the Olympics. How, then, can it be perfect? It all rests with our definitions.

The behaviors delineated in Psalm 15 are not intended to be a measuring stick by which worthiness to dwell in God's holy hill is listed. Rather they are poetic expressions of how a godly relationship looks. And at the end of the description comes the assurance that such a relationship establishes our dwelling with God in such a way that we will never be moved. Surely God would not move us out. He has been seeking such companionship through the ages since Creation. Surely we would not want to move. Dwelling with God has been the desire of the redeemed all along. And the neighbors would not object. Living in a setting like that would be heavenly, you might say.

So in the end it works out perfectly for everyone. God is happy, you are happy, I am happy. Sounds too simple, doesn't it? But then, we always seem to make Scripture and salvation too difficult anyway.

Tuesday, July 31

Practical Godliness

TESTIMONY

Key text: Matt. 22:37-40

“Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy strength, and with all thy mind.’ If this commandment is obeyed, it prepares the heart to obey the second, which is like unto it: ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’ All the Ten Commandments are embodied in the two specified. The first includes the first four commandments, which show the duty of man to his Creator. The second embraces the last six, which show the duty of man to his fellow man. On these two commandments hang all the law and the prophets. They are two great arms sustaining all ten of the commandments, the first four and the last six. These must be strictly obeyed.

“If thou wilt enter into life, keep the commandments.’ Very many who profess to be Christ’s disciples will apparently pass along smoothly in this world, and will be regarded as upright, godly men, when they have a plague spot at the core, which taints their whole character and corrupts their religious experience. ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself.’ This forbids us to take advantage of our fellow men in order to advantage

ourselves. We are forbidden to wrong our neighbor in anything. We should not view the matter from the worldling’s standpoint. To deal with our fellow men in every instance just as we should wish them to deal with us is a rule that we should apply to ourselves practically. God’s laws are to be obeyed to the letter. In all our intercourse and dealings with our fellow men, whether believers or unbelievers, this rule is to be applied: ‘Love thy neighbor as thyself.’

“Here many who profess to be Christians will not bear the measurement of God; when weighed in the balances of the sanctuary, they will be found wanting. Dear brother, ‘Come out from among them and be ye separate, saith the Lord, and touch not the unclean thing; and I will receive you, and will be a Father unto you, and ye shall be My sons and daughters, saith the Lord Almighty.’ What a promise is this! But we are not to lose sight of the fact that it is based upon obedience to the command. God calls you to separate from the world. You are not to follow their practices, nor conform to them in your course of action in any respect. ‘But be ye transformed by the renewing of your mind, that ye may prove what is that good, and acceptable, and perfect will of God.’ ”*

* *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 42-44.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Images of God's Dwelling

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ex. 25:8

Images and perceptions of the Temple tend to sneak up on us without our realizing it. Even though we know that there were several manifestations and many locations of the tabernacle/sanctuary/Temple, yet we probably tend to visualize it most often in its Solomonic format.

Then somewhere in its inner sanctuary—behind the walls, past the gates, beyond the courtyard, through the doors, and next to the Holy Place—was the residence of God in the Most Holy Place. And it seems as if God was ever more trying to break out of this isolation box and be with His people.

In actuality, God established His tabernacle in order that He might have a place to be with His people. The words we use to name this dwelling place for God have taken on entire new meanings. Words such as *tabernacle*, *temple*, and *sanctuary* portray images foreign to God's intent. In fact, the word *tabernacle* originally referred to a tent—a small tent at that.

The outer courtyard was about 25 yards wide and 50 yards long, while the actual Most Holy Place was only about 16 feet square—

about the size of a bedroom.

Mobility was the motif of its construction. God was not shut off and contained in some distant shrine accessible only by arduous pilgrimage. Not at all. He was in the midst of the people, at the crossroads of the community. And when it came time to move on, it was the tabernacle—God's tent—that led the way.

It is only with the passage of time that temples, sanctuaries, and churches take on sacerdotal self-importance, as if God were contained in their confines, to be addressed only by priestly intermediaries and dispensed or withheld at their impulse. But in so doing, the intent of the dwelling of God with us is violated.

Surely, the most graphic break-out of all time was the ripping open of the Most Holy Place at the moment of Christ's death on the cross. God would not be shut off from the people by curtains or walls or traditions or ceremonies. The symbolisms of the sanctuary are rich with the imagery of salvation. But none is more resplendent than the torn curtain, signifying that God will not be contained within the walls of a building or the walls of a creed. In Christ, all the walls of separation are torn down, and we revel in the presence of God dwelling with us.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Thursday, August 2

The Reality of Existence

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 133:1

Even as tension must exist between reverence and familiarity in our relationship with God, so also a balance must be maintained in our understanding of righteousness. Surely, the legalism so rampant in the behavior of Jewish society in Jesus' day, and before, is one extreme. But the antinomianism that masquerades as its cure is really no more than another spiritual disease.

T. S. Eliot is credited with a well-known comment about doing the right things for the wrong reasons. And this seems to be the turf of the legalist. Having observed the behavior that a righteous relation with God produces, the legalist assumes that if only these behaviors can be replicated, then one will be righteous. The problem is, however, that it becomes a doing of the right things for the wrong reasons.

There are at least temporary benefits to doing the right things for the wrong reasons. Even though the laws of the land and their enforcement may be poor reasons to prevent theft and murder, yet I am thankful for them. But, in the long haul, a society that is based on forced compliance to a code of laws is doomed to failure. Unless society moves beyond its externally imposed, codified existence to a relational model of moral conduct, it

will never be free.

The answer, however, is not antinomianism. Freedom does not flow as a result of doing away with law. Who in their right mind would equate lawlessness with freedom? True freedom exists only when one addresses the realities of existence.

If you jump off a cliff, you are going to be hurt—killed, maybe. But it is not the law of gravity that is being arbitrarily imposed by some malevolent force. It is merely the reality of relational truth. And the sooner we learn these realities, the better—and probably the longer—we will live.

Psalms 15 does not describe how to become righteous. One does not produce righteousness by following the behaviors outlined in this psalm.

Nor does one become worthy to dwell in God's sanctuary by producing these behaviors. Doing the right things for the wrong reasons does not produce righteousness. Rather, by being in a loving relationship with God and His children, one becomes righteous.

The behaviors expressed and exhibited in those who dwell in God's presence are the result of living in the realities of a relationship with God. In order to avoid legalism one may easily fall into the trap of thinking that doing good things is somehow bad. Or one may fall into the trap of doing good things for the wrong reasons. But those who would dwell together both know and cherish the realities of the relationship.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Traditions and Icons

OPINION

Key Text: Jer. 31:33

So, how do I walk in church these many years later? Those early prohibitions restricting my running in church are no longer relevant, since adults do not run and jump around in public as kids do, anyway. And what about standing behind the pulpit? Well, now I do it regularly—nearly every Sabbath—sometimes more than once on a given Sabbath.

Time changes things. Now my parents try to arrange such appointments and come to hear me preach. That which would have shamed them before their friends when I was a child, now brings them joy. I have learned to respect the church and its traditions and have come to love it.

Yet one must never come to the place that the traditions and icons of religiosity substitute for a relationship with God. It is not easy to distinguish between our own cultural setting and traditions and the core issues of worship. Worship in a college church may be vastly different from that in the mountains of Tennessee or in a church in the ghetto of Philadelphia. Indeed, I can testify that it is, having preached in all of these.

But who is to say what is acceptable worship and what is not? We tend to become so righteous

about our own worship and so condemnatory about the others. Sequestering God away from the people in our own architecture, creeds, or liturgies is risky business. We may just force Him to rip His way out of our imposed strictures.

Certainly, I am not opposed to dignity and liturgical beauty. In fact, my wife calls me a “high-church junkie.” And I confess that I am. But the beauty of our God is that He seeks to dwell with us. Across cultures. Across traditions. Across national boundaries. Across language barriers.

God has always sought communion with us. It was His purpose in Creation. And after sin barred face-to-face communion, God has sought continuously to re-establish His dwelling with us. The sanctuary, the church, the tabernacle, the temple, have all served as points of contact through the years. But these are not enough. God cannot—will not—be contained in them.

No, indeed. For as Paul states, our bodies are the temple of God. God would dwell in us. Law is not externally imposed. It is written on our hearts. So the question takes on a whole new meaning. How do I walk in the temple of God? How do I dwell in His sanctuary? The question is not how we can survive in the presence of God, but how we could survive without Him.

by Gary B. Patterson

Gary B. Patterson is administrative assistant to the North American Division president.

Lesson 6, August 5 - 11

The Heavens Are Telling



“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord are radiant, giving light to the eyes” (Ps. 19:7, 8, NIV).

Bumping Into the Law

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 19:7, 8

Now don't get me wrong. I *like* Thomas Jefferson. But that well-meaning man made a mistake. He shouldn't have tossed in that line about the pursuit of happiness because it set a lot of folks to searching hard.

Just look at folks these days. They're not happy. They're reaching goals, jumping hurdles, and accumulating belongings. But it's not enough. So they start killing each other, and robbing each other, and coveting each other's goods, accomplishments, and relationships, and they search desperately, high and low, far and wide, faster and faster, until they're frustrated and confused, and hot means hot, and hot means cool, cool means bad, and bad means good. And they're not happy.

Except for Christians, because Christians have an edge. They know that the reason folks aren't happy is that they're not doing what they're supposed to be doing. It's not merely that they aren't keeping Sabbath, honoring their parents, and having no other gods. It's that they're separated, in these and many other ways, from their Creator.

Back in the Garden of Eden when all was well, Adam and Eve did a lot of running around with their Creator. That's what they were cut out for. That's what they were supposed to do. That's what

brings perfect contentedness. Perfect fulfillment. Perfect completeness. But that relationship was severed, to a degree, and folks aren't running around every day with their Creator anymore. So folks are unhappy.

Except for Christians, because they cling to the promise that the relationship was restored, and that what they've got now is just a temporary arrangement. They look forward to a reunion someday when the picture will be perfect again.

But you know, it's been a lot of years since they've run around with the Creator. And they've forgotten what it's like. They've forgotten what *He's* like. So He gave it to them in writing. A description of His character and the way He operates in 10 simple principles. But if it's by beholding Him that they become like Him, and they haven't seen Him in so long, it's no wonder they've strayed so far from His image.

The Ten Commandments needn't be considered a bother, or binding. I think if folks find themselves bumping into the law, it's probably an indication that something's askew with their relationship with God.

And I think that's why the psalmist could use words like *perfect, reviving, sure, wise, rejoicing, enlightening, and restoring* in reference to the law of the Lord. Because it puts folks back in touch with the Creator, the only remedy for unhappiness.

by Carol Loree

Carol Loree is a recruiter for Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Monday, August 6

Listen to the Sky

LOGOS

Ps. 19

Theme: Lives Changed by Knowledge of God. *The revelation of Himself that God gives through nature and through His inspired Word creates in the human heart a longing for deliverance from everything that is unlike Him.*

The question of how God is revealed to humankind is of ancient origin. The answer is not new either. It has been stated often, yet misunderstood nearly forever.

For those of us on this wayward planet—simply speaking—God is revealed through what He has created and through inspired writings.

Psalm 19 brings all this together in as succinct a setting as one could wish.

1. The Heavens Are Telling

"The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard. Their line has gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world" (Ps. 19:1-4, NKJV).

In these verses God's creativity in the heavens is set forth as testimony to His nature. The sky's majesty is not confined to any one locale, though the manifestation may vary with geography. God's

nature is revealed in the aurora borealis in the Northern Hemisphere, and aurora australis in the Southern Hemisphere. The stars, moon, and planets are a witness to every sighted person of God's creative power. The precision of the astronomical bodies is mute testimony to God's omniscient nature.

In fact, to what we would consider mute testimony, the psalmist gives life and breath, writing of the heavens' "declaring and uttering." He speaks of the witness in the heavens as a universal language. "There is no speech or language where their voice is not heard" (verse 3, NIV). Logic tells us that, physically speaking, the heavens are silent. Spiritually speaking, they shout at us, "God is good—God is love—God is generous—God is everywhere," and the list could go on forever.

2. The Personification of the Sun

"In them He has set a tabernacle for the sun, which is like a bridegroom coming out of his chamber, and rejoices like a strong man to run its race. Its rising is from one end of heaven, and its circuit to the other end; and there is nothing hidden from its heat" (verses 4-6, NKJV).

The psalmist narrows his focus to one orb in the sky—the sun. He is poetically animated in his description of the sun and its travel through the heavens. The sun is personified and described as a bridegroom in his radiance,

by P. B. Morrison

P. B. Morrison is a chaplain at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

or a strong man eager to compete. The sun makes its path across the heavens in the course of each day. "And there is nothing hidden from its heat" (verse 6, NKJV).

We can't avoid God's impact on our life—He is everywhere. The warmth of His presence is not only available to all, but it surrounds and impacts all. Romans 1:18-21 reemphasizes this important understanding about God. Verse 20 says, "For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even His eternal power and Godhead, so that they are without excuse" (NKJV).

3. The Law of the Lord

"The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the judgments of the Lord

are true and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, yea, than much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb. Moreover by them Your servant is warned, and in keeping them there is great reward" (Ps. 19:7-11, NKJV).

God hasn't left us to nature alone. He also gives special revelation. He enunciates His law, testimony, statutes, commandments, and judgments. If the heavens declare—His word underlines, magnifies, and clarifies. The Law is not a bane to our existence—it is a description of God and the principles of His kingdom. Christian freedom is not lawlessness, but conformity to God and His ways.

The psalmist concludes by acknowledging our distance from God and His ways. He prays, "Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength and my redeemer" (verse 14, NKJV). God has opened the lines of communication between Himself and humanity.

Tuesday, August 7

It Is Your Decision

TESTIMONY

Key Text: 2 Chron. 20:20

What would you think of someone who took a long journey with one tire flat? What we would not do in the physical realm we often attempt in the spiritual. We travel on our heavenly journey with a flat tire, feeling that the Spirit of Prophecy is not relevant to the modern person. Is it any wonder the road is bumpy and unpleasant? If we would apply the wise counsel of Psalm 19 our journey would be more enjoyable.

"Nature's ten thousand voices speak His praise. In earth, and air, and sky, with their marvelous tint and color, . . . we behold His glory. The everlasting hills tell us of His power. The trees wave their green banners in the sunlight, and point us upward to their Creator. . . . The living green that carpets the brown earth tells us of God's care for the humblest of His creatures. The caves of the sea and the depths of the earth reveal His treasures. . . . The sun rising in the heavens is the representative of Him who is the light and life of all that He has made. All the brightness and beauty that adorn the earth and light up the heavens speak of God."¹

The value of the law: "The ten holy precepts spoken by Christ

upon Sinai's mount were the revelation of the character of God, and made known to the world the fact that He had jurisdiction over the whole human heritage. That law of ten precepts of the greatest love that can be presented to man is the voice of God from heaven speaking to the soul in promise, 'This do, and you will not come under the dominion and control of Satan.' There is not a negative in that law, although it may appear thus. It is DO, and Live."²

The consequences of slighting God's law: "We see the results which have followed a disregard of God's law—dishonesty, theft, licentiousness, drunkenness, and murder. . . . When the divine law is set aside, the greatest misery will result, both to families and to society."³

Benefits from contemplating God's law: "We should meditate upon the Scriptures, thinking soberly and candidly upon the things that pertain to our eternal salvation. . . . By beholding we are to become changed."⁴ "To discipline the mind to dwell upon heavenly things will put life and earnestness into all our endeavors. . . . As exercise increases the appetite, and gives strength and healthy vigor to the body, so will devotional exercises bring an increase of grace and spiritual vigor."⁵

1. *My Life Today*, p. 175.

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

3. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 54.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 3, p. 1145.

5. *Ibid.*, p. 1157.

by D. G. Rand

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I Love Your Law

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Col. 3:23

What do you do when nobody is watching? Are you a Cain or a David? Or perhaps a Jonah or a Judas? All of these people felt at one time or another that they were all by themselves and nobody could see or know what they were doing, where they were going, or what they had done. And they were wrong. Somebody always knows, and we often hate Him for that fact.

“The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul” (Ps. 19:7, NIV).

What do you do when nobody is watching? It is easy to sit behind the steering wheel of a car and watch the speedometer creep up over the posted speed limit. After all, nobody is watching. It is so easy to find yourself in a quiet spot and think that no one will ever know what you are going to do. But then that nagging, uncomfortable thought comes—God knows. Then we each face the dilemma: Do I do it anyway, or do I remember that God’s law is absolutely perfect and that it is meant to make my life better and to revive my soul? This is a choice

that we all face. Do we struggle to do our best and go for the empty salvation of independent works, or do we trust in the law to revive our soul?

One Christian scholar provides a meaningful interpretation for the word *law*. “The word *Torah*—translated ‘law’—comprises not merely the moral commandments of the Decalogue, but all the divine instruction concerning the covenant of grace and its atoning services in Israel’s sanctuary.”¹ A paragraph later he writes, “*Torah* is the divine instruction of how to find salvation and divine deliverance! *Torah* is the holy ground where the Lord reveals His mercy and holy will.”²

Instead of looking at God as the scoreboard, we need to change our perspective and think of His law as the divine cue card, or holy teleprompter. The purpose of God’s law is not to peer over our shoulder and count our misdeeds. Rather, His law is “perfect, reviving the soul . . . making wise the simple” (verse 7, NIV).

The question now is not What do you do when nobody is watching? The question now is What can God do through me when I love His law?

1. Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1983), p. 91.

2. *Ibid.*

by David L. Rasmussen

David L. Rasmussen was assistant dean of men at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan, when he wrote this article.

Thursday, August 9

The Law—A Delight

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 19:7, 8

Buckets of steaming frustration enveloped me. I had sinned. Sure enough, two of my chubby little fingers were raised, counting up two horrible sins for that day. *Sin* was a new word in my vocabulary. To break God's commandments was sin. As a well-intentioned 7-year-old, I had figured that constantly counting my sins would increase my likelihood of being a fine Christian girl. Somehow that didn't work. Instead, the more I understood of the law, the more I found myself sinning. In no time, I found myself needing many more than two fingers to count my wrongs.

Perhaps some of you can identify with this experience. Like many in their toddling stage of Christianity, I discovered that my awkward steps in my walk with Christ led to a fuzzy concept of God and His laws. It is likely that others around you may not be as excited as you are about your new birth in Christ. In fact, following His laws may seem to be as annoying as a diaper change to a grumpy baby, or as stinging as an injection. Not until years later does the same baby realize the benefits of a diaper change or a vaccination.

As we meditate on God's laws, do we grumble or rejoice? The psalmist said, "The statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the

heart." If we find God's law to be burdensome, here are two suggestions to help us change our attitude.

1. Daily chat with the Lord.

Discuss with Him your perplexities. Explain to Him your weakness. Ask for strength to follow His laws. Remember, God's power is available for us. In 2 Peter 3:9 the apostle proclaims, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise . . . [and] not willing that any should perish." Don't forget, God wants us to learn how to delight in His laws rather than to fret over our weakness.

2. Daily choice to follow God's law.

As much as possible, acknowledge your weakness, and avoid situations that entice you to fall. For example, if keeping the Sabbath Christ-centered is difficult for you, plan Sabbath activities that will help you keep your attention on Christ and His mission in the world. In addition, invite people who respect the Sabbath to join you in these activities. Unless we make a determined effort to follow Christ, it will be impossible to stand firm when temptation flirts and blinks its neon-bright conveniences and transient pleasures. But we can overcome each temptation with God's ever-present help just as Christ did. As Psalm 37:5 succinctly states, "Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass."

By Haiyoung Kim

Haiyoung Kim is an English major and the religious activities chairperson of the Student Association at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Telling Words From Heaven and Heart

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 19:7, 8

For almost as long as I can remember, Psalm 19 has been part of my experience. Like many other Adventist young people, I memorized this Bible passage for one of my elementary-school Missionary Volunteer investitures—sixth grade, I think it was.

Whenever I read this passage or recite the more familiar parts of it to myself, I recall a particularly warm childhood memory. In this mental picture my brother and I lie late at night in the middle of the street on the black-top still warm from the sun, gazing into the night sky. You have to understand, we didn't live in a particularly busy neighborhood. But I still remember the incredible smallness I felt looking up at the stars that night. The heavens do, as the verses explain, clearly tell the glory of God.

Psalm 19, however, confused me as a child; somehow I always felt that this passage should be two separate psalms rather than one since verses 1-6 seemed, at first glance, disconnected from verses 7-14. One part reminded me that God's handiwork is nowhere more visible than in the heavens; the other part shifted abruptly to a warning that if I was wise, I would obey God's laws.

But the two parts of the psalm

do support each other. The first half of the psalm describes the kind of God we serve, while the second half of the psalm details for us the relative merits of applying God's orderly laws to our own lives.

Perhaps the most significant characteristic of the psalm is the envelope effect of its introduction and conclusion: "The heavens are telling. . . . Let the words of my mouth . . ." (verses 1-14, RSV). Had we only these two parts of the psalm we could catch the complete message of the passage: The heavens, without benefit of audible voice, tell the glory of God to all the universe, merely by being what they are. How important, then, that we who have voice offer to all our friends and neighbors both words and actions that are acceptable in God's sight.

Right now I recall another childhood memory that I have never forgotten, my mother's parting words to me whenever I left the house: "You are a Closser. Never do or say anything to embarrass the family name." The analogy should be obvious. While we live in this world we represent our heavenly family. Nothing we do should embarrass our Father's name.

REACT

Do you think God worries about being embarrassed by members of His family? Why or why not?

by Bruce Closser

Bruce Closser teaches writing in the English Department at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.

Lesson 7, August 12 - 18

A Cry in the Dark



“From you comes my praise in the great assembly; before those who fear you will I fulfill my vows. The poor will eat and be satisfied; they who seek the Lord will praise him—may your hearts live forever!” (Ps. 22:25, 26, NIV).

How Can I Give You Up?

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 22

One troubled night. Two disturbed men. Two acts of perfidy; one loving friend betrayed. Two confessions wrung from two anguished hearts. One man rises to his feet accepted; he goes out and begins walking the path of repentance and forgiveness. One man rises to his feet abandoned; he goes out and hangs himself.

Why the difference?

Peter and Judas, case studies in confession. The difference? The types of confession made by each.

Jesus "knew that Judas did not repent; his confession was forced from his guilty soul by an awful sense of condemnation and a looking for of judgment, but he felt no deep, heartbreaking grief that he had betrayed the spotless Son of God, and denied the Holy One of Israel."¹

Profound indeed. But are my requests for forgiveness similar to Judas', motivated only by feelings of condemnation and guilt? Can I force myself to feel true sorrow for hurting a loving Saviour?

No, I cannot.

I cannot change my motives. Repentance is as much a gift from God as is forgiveness. Received by faith, it is brought by the Holy Spirit.

But if true repentance is a gift

from God, *why did God give it to Peter and not to Judas?*

Because "through becoming the slave of one vice he gave himself to Satan, to be driven to any lengths in sin."² One sin clung to despite the promptings of the Holy Spirit so desensitized Judas to the voice of God that in the end God could not reach him. This is both a warning and good news, a warning that we cannot afford to cherish any sin in our lives, but good news in that we are not lost by feeling lost, but by consciously choosing to continue sinning.

Does God ever abandon anyone?

"Ephraim is joined to idols; leave him alone!" (Hosea 4:17, NIV).

Apparently so. But what does it mean to be "joined to idols"? An idol is anything we choose instead of God. It can be a thing, an action, or an attitude. We don't leave God by explicitly rejecting Him, but by continuing in that which is contrary to His principles.

Does God give us up easily?

"How can I give you up, Ephraim? How can I hand you over, Israel?" (11:8, NIV).

God does not let go easily. Judas cherished his sin for a lifetime, three years of it in the presence of God Himself, but Jesus still gave him an opportunity to repent during the Last Supper. Surely God is not willing that any should perish.

1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 722.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 716.

by Nicholas P. Miller

Nicholas P. Miller, who graduated with a degree in theology from Pacific Union College, Angwin, California, is now studying law at Columbia University in New York City.

Monday, August 13

Feelings of Loneliness Are Valid

LOGOS

Ps. 22

Theme: Does God Abandon?

Perhaps some of us have felt abandoned at one time or another. The question we ask this week is Does God really abandon anyone? If so, under what circumstances, and for what reasons?

“Eli, Eli, lama sabachthani.” Never has there been a more terrifying cry. The pain that pushes us to the point of feeling abandoned is the pain that dresses in a thousand different ways and is almost always expressed in the terms of total fear: “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?” (Matt. 27:46, NKJV).

Look in the mirror of your own memory and recall the last time you felt abandoned. Separated from any responsive voice, you cry, but none seem to notice or care to wipe away the tears. The daily claims of responsibility almost bury the pain, especially as you are surrounded by crowds of seemingly happy, content people. How is it that you are the only one suffering? Why is it that no one around you seems to hurt the way you do? These are some of the feelings of abandonment, very real, very painful, not at all unique.

1. David's Feelings Face the Reality of God (read Ps. 22:1-11)

“Yet you are enthroned as the

Holy One; you are the praise of Israel” (verse 3, NIV).

David gives us a door to move through, passing from the reality of our despair into the presence of the Holy One. David hangs this door on a well-oiled hinge called “yet.”

As we look at the theme of this psalm we are refreshed by an honest statement of human experience calling out for the healing presence of God. On the human side of this door hang the very real pains of life. The pains are so real to David that he begins his prayer with an aggressive statement of abandonment. Questioning God may not seem appropriate to some, but David does it without apology. “You have forsaken me” and “You are so far from me” (see verse 1). Especially painful is this abandonment in the light of David’s prayer life—crying out by day and night without divine response (see verse 2).

What we find here is an expression that many might feel is a denial of faith. But notice how David openly expresses himself and then lays his feelings firmly where they belong. His complaint is not to others about God; his complaint is brought to God.

We can all relate to the feeling that is shared here; our world knows well the feeling of abandonment. We wait for His coming; some even wonder whether He really will come again. We hold the

by Keith Jacobson

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quiet fear that no one really hears when we talk, or worse, that our prayers, some of them repeated over the years, are still waiting for a heavenly response.

If death has touched close by, we know pain that leaves us helpless and anxious for the promise of resurrection to be fulfilled.

Our present pains hang on a hope that at some time in the future God will respond powerfully and alter all the wrongs that have created the pains of this life.

How real is David's abandonment? How do you know that God hasn't abandoned you?

2. Cure for the God-Don't-Love-Me Blues (read Ps. 22:3-11)

"In you our fathers put their trust; they trusted and you delivered them. They cried to you and were saved; in you they trusted and were not disappointed" (verses 4, 5, NIV).

Our attention is powerfully directed to evidence of God's former dealings. Today's pains are real. There is nothing exaggerated in feeling abandoned. But don't forget what has happened before, if not in your own life, then in the lives of others. Once again we are reminded of the tremendous worth of hearing the old stories. Joshua knew the value of remembering. To guard the faith of future generations he ordered the construction of a historical/faith landmark. "The monument will be a permanent reminder to the people of Israel of this amazing miracle" (Joshua 4:7, TLB).

A few years ago I encouraged my church family to go for a Sabbath hike and somewhere on their journey to stop and construct a monument of memories. My wife, Kari, and I chose to hike along the Spokane River. In a secluded area we built our monument. We put each rock into place with a

story. With the retelling we were refreshed to see how God had led in the past and given us hope for the present.

In our altar were rocks of great pain and loss, and stones of great victory and blessing. It became an altar of praise to God. We cried, we laughed, and we shared, all in the safety of God's presence. Many times we have the idea that the altar was used only to sacrifice perfect gifts of praise. In David's prayer we see that often the only thing that a child of God may have to offer is reflection.

What are the events in your life that you would build into a monument of memories? When is God most visible in your life—during pain or joy? Why?

3. As if Things Weren't Bad Enough Already, Look Where I Am! (read Ps. 22:12-18)

"Dogs have surrounded me; a band of evil men has encircled me, they have pierced my hands and my feet" (verse 16, NIV).

David states not only his personal feelings of abandonment but also the pain of his cruel environment. Not only has trouble come to the private sector of his mind, but also he is surrounded by those who add to his pain—in very aggressive terms.

For every child of God who lives in the shadow of the cross a bitter-sweet joy is found in this psalm. Our pains are real, but they are not unique. They are pains that our Saviour can fully comprehend. In startling detail the psalmist speaks of the treatment this world gives. The claim in this passage is not a prophetic one as much as it is a personal reality.

But the surprising consummation in the cross of Christ adds a wonderful dimension to our suffering. We do not suffer alone! The feelings of abandonment are real,

and the pains are real, even as the cross was very real. But we are not alone! Jesus too has been touched by the terrible chill of abandonment and knows its lonely cry.

In Christ's life where do you see Him experiencing rejection, mockery, and abandonment? What is the greatest human pain? Why?

4. The Door Swings Wide to the Other Side (read Ps. 22:19-21)

"But you, O Lord, be not far off; O my Strength, come quickly to help me" (verse 19, NIV).

The stories of last-moment victories are the ones that keep us sitting on the edge of our seats. The last few moments of a basketball game are lived by one set of fans hoping for a sudden push of power that will lead to an upset. Quite honestly, a rally is something that I think of only in the world of sports.

But here a rally is most visible in a spiritual battle. David is close to giving up. Even the stories of past victories have not fully resolved his pain. The great reality of the present is declared. "O Lord," David cries, "make yourself known; come quickly to help me." Powerful enemies are around David; once again he brings them before God (see verses 20, 21). Each foe is matched to a plea for God's sudden display of power—"come quickly," "deliver my life," and "rescue me."

Then the focus shifts from pain to victory. David is not crying for help. He is declaring the power of God and claiming God's faithfulness as his security.

When was the last time God "delivered" in your life? In what ways has He come to rescue you? How do you know that David is doing more than simply projecting a positive attitude?

Tuesday, August 14

Jesus Is Mine

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 22:1

Even though our journey through life occasionally leads through the desert of trials, Jesus is always with us. This assurance can be appreciated much more when we realize that Jesus was abandoned by His Father once, so that we could be in touch with God for eternity.

“As man’s substitute and surety, the iniquity of men was laid upon Christ; He was counted a transgressor that He might redeem them from the curse of the law. The guilt of every descendant of Adam of every age was pressing upon His heart; and the wrath of God and the terrible manifestation of His displeasure because of iniquity, filled the soul of His Son with consternation. The withdrawal of the divine countenance from the Saviour in this hour of supreme anguish pierced His heart with a sorrow that can never be fully understood by man. Every pang endured by the Son of God upon the cross, the blood drops that flowed from His head, His hands and feet, the convulsions of agony which racked His frame, and the unutterable anguish that filled His soul at the hiding of His Father’s face from Him, speak to man, saying, It is for the love of thee that the Son of God consents to have these heinous crimes laid upon Him; for

thee He spoils the domain of death, and opens the gates of Paradise and immortal life. He who stilled the angry waves by His word and walked the foam-capped billows, who made devils tremble and disease flee from His touch, who raised the dead to life and opened the eyes of the blind, offers Himself upon the cross as the last sacrifice for man. He, the sin-bearer, endures judicial punishment for iniquity and becomes sin itself for man.

“Satan, with his fierce temptations, wrung the heart of Jesus. Sin, so hateful to His sight, was heaped upon Him till He groaned beneath its weight. No wonder that His humanity trembled in that fearful hour. Angels witnessed with amazement the despairing agony of the Son of God, so much greater than His physical pain that the latter was hardly felt by Him. The hosts of heaven veiled their faces from the fearful sight.

“Inanimate nature expressed a sympathy with its insulted and dying Author. The sun refused to look upon the awful scene. . . . At the ninth hour the darkness lifted from the people, but still wrapt the Saviour as in a mantle. The angry lightnings seemed to be hurled at Him as He hung upon the cross. Then ‘Jesus cried with a loud voice, saying, Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani? which is, being interpreted, My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?’ Mark 15:34.”

* *The Story of Redemption*, pp. 225, 226.

by Darcy Smith

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The Messianic Psalms

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 22

Because Jesus moaned an agonizing cry from Psalm 22 shortly before His death on Calvary (verse 1; cf. Matt. 27:46), and since the book of Hebrews applies another verse from this psalm to the experience of Jesus (Ps. 22:22; cf. Heb. 2:12), Christians have frequently stated that Psalm 22 is one of the Messianic psalms. That is, they have felt that this is a psalm that anticipated the life and ministry of Jesus Christ.

However, some modern scholars have questioned the validity of this category of psalms. Even though the language of Jesus in Luke 24:44 "makes it absolutely certain that he believed that the Psalms anticipated his future ministry of suffering and glory,"¹ some interpreters doubt whether any psalms can properly be said to have pointed forward to a coming Messiah. These scholars have tended to see each psalm as merely reflecting the situation, status, and emotions of its writer, devoid of prophetic intent. This raises the question: Is it correct to call Psalm 22 a Messianic psalm? Indeed, are there any Messianic psalms at all, or was David simply describing his own experiences?

In considering this issue of how to understand the psalms properly, we must keep two points in mind. First, it is true that we should seek to learn the

primary meaning of a psalm in its immediate historical context. We should try to ascertain its original intent. In an interpretation of the psalms it is incorrect exegesis to leap through 1,000 years of history from David's era to the time of Christ without considering the significance of a passage for its original audience.

But having said that, we can also affirm that this primary meaning does not exhaust the meaning of the psalms. In other words, "no one can read the psalms without becoming aware that certain psalms and individual verses have a deeper, future significance beyond the simple meaning of the words."² As C. Hassell Bullock states, "Although we do not want to slight history and its significance, we must contend that on some occasions the historical context was merely the skeleton for a composition that was primarily future."³

Bullock proceeds to list several criteria that provide help in recognizing Messianic psalms. "First, when the language outruns the abilities of the subject, presenting achievements that are not humanly attainable, we may detect messianic overtones. . . . Second, when messianic terms occur, such as 'anointed' and 'son of man,' we may suspect a messianic inclination."⁴ That is, certain titles and terminology provide clues to the prophetic intent of some of the psalms. "Third, when the New Testament circumstances fit those described in the psalm, permitting

by Greg A. King

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prophetic inferences from it, messianic associations may be suspected.³ On this point we notice that Jesus Himself applied Psalm 41:9 to Judas (cf. John 13:18). In fact, on many occasions the story told in the New Testament seems to be a reliving of the psalms. It seems clear that Jesus saw His life as a fulfillment of what had been spoken in passages such as Psalm 22.

As Hans LaRondelle states, "Christ recognized that His mission, both in His sufferings and coming triumphs, was foreshadowed in the experiences of the psalmists. Of course, Christ experienced a deeper reality of anguish of soul than David ever went through himself. David, as the king of Zion, served as a type of the Messiah, his Lord. . . . In the light of the New Testament it becomes gradually more clear that Jesus Christ is not merely the One about whom the psalms speak, but also the One who inspired the psalms."⁶

While it is true that the psalms had great significance for their original audience, it is equally true that in the psalms "the Messiah is presented in His divine character and human de-

scend, in His humility and exaltation, in His suffering and glory, in His priestly service and royal dignity, and in the ultimate triumph and blessedness of His eternal reign. The NT picture of Christ as Prophet, Priest, Redeemer, and King is forecast in the Psalter."⁷

So while we must ever seek to understand the original meaning of the psalms, it is also proper and necessary to realize that the suffering, humiliation, and ultimate enthronement of David, as portrayed in the psalms, typify and anticipate the degradation, rejection, and ultimate coronation of Jesus Christ, the Son of God. And in doing so, we will again be reminded that all Scripture, from Genesis to Revelation, bears witness to Jesus, our Saviour and Lord.

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1. Tremper Longman III, *How to Read the Psalms* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 65.
 2. David and Pat Alexander, eds., *Eerdmans Handbook to the Bible* (Grand Rapids: William R. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1987), p. 329.
 3. C. Hassell Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1988), p. 137.
 4. *Ibid.*
 5. *Ibid.*
 6. Hans K. LaRondelle, *Deliverance in the Psalms: Messages of Hope for Today* (Berrien Springs, Mich.: First Impressions, 1983), pp. 8, 9.
 7. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 3, p. 623.

Thursday, August 16

You're Never Alone

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 22:24

We have all experienced times in our lives when everything seems to be crashing in. We can identify with David's many agonized laments. In the midst of turmoil we reach out for God and find Him strangely absent. What can we do when our one last hope seems so far away, when it seems that God Himself has forsaken us?

1. Realize that feelings of frustration and loneliness are valid. You are not living as you were created to live. You were born on the wrong planet. God created you for heaven, and you are living on earth; problems and pain are guaranteed here. Because you have a longing for the "good life" to come, you will naturally rebel against the sorrows of this life. Because you were created for a face-to-face relationship with God, you will feel the current separation keenly at times.

2. Remember that the view from earth is extremely limited. During times of loneliness and despair, when your perspectives tend to shrink until they focus on only yourself and your pain, it is crucial to remember the "big picture." A lot that you do not know about or understand is going on in the universe. God alone is omniscient. You

must trust that He knows what He's doing and that He is working hard to bring about all possible good in your life.

3. Imagine how God reacts to your pain. God cannot be reduced to human terms. But it helps to ask yourself, "What is the expression on God's face right now?" and see the same tears, the same sorrow lines, the same sadness that you are experiencing. The God who created you to live a perfect life hurts when you, one of His oh-so-beloved children, experience anything less than His ideal for you.

4. Reach out to fellow sufferers. No matter how you feel, you can be sure your situation is not the first of its kind on Planet Earth. Many people around you—at work, at school, in your community, in your own family—are suffering from pent-up pain. God works powerfully through broken people who are willing to reach out, share with, and care for, other broken people. Often other people are the windows and doors through which God's love comes. Open yourself to both give and receive care, love, and support.

REACT

How do you think God feels about separation? At the cross Christ died from the agony of separation from the Father; God has been separated from us, His children, for thousands of years now.

by Cheri Lynn Gregory

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Hephzibah and Beulah

OPINION

Key Text: Isa. 62:4, 5

This afternoon I took my car to an auto body shop for an estimate on the cost of some minor cosmetic surgery. Minor quickly became major, and I began reading all the little notes on the shop wall in a useless attempt to make all the trauma go away.

Under a photo of a wonderfully restored wreck was a yellowed newspaper article "The High Cost of Abandoning Your Car." Judging from the number of rusting derelicts I've noticed recently, I'd say a whole nation of owners isn't feeling that "high cost of abandoning," or has found some creative way to avoid the expense and the pain.

I wonder, how does a car abandoner feel? Is there a sense of loss, a twinge of guilt, and a "pat on the fender before I go"? Does he look back for one last vision of what the old Buick used to be? Or does he just drive away in a plush new possession? I wonder.

And what about the abandoned? I've felt abandoned a few times and wished that my "owner" would take another look and maybe even drive by once more to see whether there might

be some life left in the old frame. It's a desolate, deserted, useless feeling. Just sitting there, going on about life's drudgery without any real cause or direction any more. Empty. With a crushed shell of hope.

And then He comes by, kicks a tire or two, and buffs some long-clinging mud from the windshield. And in His eyes I see reflected, not the seemingly abandoned derelict I know myself to be, but a fully restored marvel. Everything He knows I *can* be.

How does a restorer feel? Is there a sense of thrill in the process, a twinge of excitement, and an arm of encouragement around the shoulders? I wonder.

No. I know! For Isaiah joins David in painting a picture of the Great Restorer. "No longer will they call you Deserted. No longer will they refer to you as Desolate. For I have given you a new name. You will now be called *Hephzibah—the one in whom I delight*. And you will be known as *Beulah—for you are mine, married to the Creator and Restorer*" (Isa. 62:4).

And how do the restored feel? As joyful as a virginal bride on her wedding day. As happy as Hephzibah and as contented as Beulah.

by Dick Duerksen

Dick Duerksen is vice-president for marketing and communication at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.

Lesson 8, August 19 - 24

The Good Shepherd



“The Lord is my shepherd, I shall lack nothing. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake” (Ps. 23:1-3, NIV).

An Essential Element

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 23:1-3

Leah Kim softly closes the door behind her and sneaks to her dorm room. "Why am I so afraid?" she moans. "Why, Lord, does he have to know so much about me?"

Leah and Tony have been dating for a few months. Tony is very serious about the developing relationship, and until recently he has been patient with Leah's inability or unwillingness to open up and trust him. It is perplexing. "Lord," he prays, "I know that Leah's afraid and that she's been hurt before, but it hurts me that she does not trust me. I don't want to hurt her. I can do so much more for her if she will just let me see who she really is."

Like all of us, Leah has to make the decision to trust (or not to trust) sooner or later. Why? Because she will spend the rest of her life running away from intimate friendships. She will never experience the joy of really knowing another person and she will never afford herself the privilege of sharing herself with another person. This will result in a deeper loneliness than she now feels.

There are many possible reasons for Leah's fear to trust—

maybe this fear stems from childhood, or perhaps she broke away from a painful friendship in which her trust was badly abused. Whatever the reason, trust is still essential to all friendships. No friendship can grow or survive without it.

Even our relationship with God. God calls us to trust Him implicitly. There is only so much that He can do for us if we lack faith in Him. There are so many blessings in store for us when we surrender our wills to the Lord and allow Him to shape the events of our lives.

The psalmist David knew what it meant to trust God. In the shepherd's psalm he compares his trust in God to the trust of a sheep in the shepherd. Sheep willingly allow the shepherd to lead, and they do not doubt his guidance. Sheep depend on the shepherd for protection and provision of needs.

So with God. If we will but trust Him and allow Him to lead throughout the course of life, then all of our physical, spiritual, and emotional needs will be provided. We will ever feel His presence and we can be assured that He will never betray our trust in Him. Knowing this, we will live our lives in peace and joy.

by Chandra L. Tyler

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Monday, August 20

The Good Shepherd

LOGOS

Ps. 23

Theme: The Good Shepherd.

The Lord constantly leads and sustains His faithful followers through the varied experiences of life, gives them courage as they face death, and reserves for them an eternity of peace and joy.

1. The Shepherd and His Care

"The Lord is my shepherd; I shall lack nothing" (Ps. 23:1, NIV).

Perhaps in 1990 other metaphors than "shepherd" would be more arresting. Our contemporary choices sound more like "pilot" or "coach" or "leader" or "captain" or "manager" or "engineer," or someone might even prefer "quarterback." But remember that David, the author of Psalm 23, was himself a shepherd, as well as the son of a shepherd, and, therefore, makes use of a most meaningful title to him and his contemporaries.

As the shepherd cares for and takes full responsibility for his or her sheep, even so God in David's eyes oversees and influences his life and the lives of all God's people. The divine Shepherd knows every one of His sheep, calls them by name, and keeps a watchful eye over them in storm or sunshine, in hazard or safety, under attack or under His strong arm.

A most endearing word in the whole passage is the little word *my*. For what would it matter to

say, "The Lord is a shepherd," or "The Lord is *somebody's* shepherd"? Am I not drawn into a warm personal bond of reassurance and hope when I know that God is "my" shepherd, "my" companion, "my" guide? Therefore, "I shall not want"—for food and shelter, for grace and beauty, for quietness and peace, for a loving welcome back to the fold when I have wandered far away.

In what ways am I able to say God has been "shepherd" in my life? What evidence did Jesus Christ give that He was the messianic God-Shepherd?

2. A Life of Comparative Peace and Contentment

"He makes me lie down in green pastures. . . . He guides me in paths of righteousness for his name's sake" (Ps. 23:2, 3, NIV).

Some time ago there appeared in a newspaper a cartoon showing two fields divided by a fence. Both fields were about the same size and had the same lush green grass.

In each field was a mule with its head through the fence, eating grass from the other mule's pasture. Each mule in his own field had plenty of grass, yet the grass in the other field looked greener and fresher.

In the process of trying to graze grass in the other's field the mules were caught in the wire fence and were unable to extricate themselves. The cartoonist put one word at the bottom of the

by Mervyn A. Warren

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picture—"Discontent!"

Only contented sheep will lie down restfully. In his book *A Shepherd Looks at Psalm 23*, Philip Keller points out that it is almost impossible for sheep to be made to lie down unless four requirements are met: they must be free from all fear, free from friction among themselves, free from tormenting flies or parasites and such pests, and free from hunger.

Trust in the shepherd brings peace and satisfaction. "If we take Christ for our guide, He will lead us safely along the narrow way. The road may be rough and thorny; the ascent may be steep and dangerous; there may be pitfalls upon the right hand and upon the left; . . . but with Christ as our Guide we shall not lose the path to immortal life."¹

How willing am I to be content with pastures and paths of God's choosing? How may I know when God has chosen?

3. The Comfort of Rod and Staff

"Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4).

In various parts of the world, including Palestine, summer means moving the flock of sheep to high country. Working their way slowly up mountain ranges and through dark, dangerous valleys, sheep remain under the close and constant watchcare of their shepherd. His presence is their only hope of a safe passage; his rod and staff, their protection and guide. Such an experience is certain to bring shepherd and sheep into a personal, intimate relationship.

"Jesus knows us individually, and is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. He knows us all by name. He knows the very

house in which we live, the name of each occupant. He has at times given directions to His servants to go to a certain street in a certain city, to such a house, to find one of His sheep."²

What two promises are there in Psalm 23:4 that we may meditate on to give us confidence as we walk through the dark valleys of life?

4. The Life of Superabundance

"Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: Thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over" (Ps. 23:5).

It is believed that what David refers to as "table" was actually the high summer mountain range where, early in the season even before all snow has melted, the shepherd goes ahead and makes preliminary preparation for his flock's arrival in the coming season.

Enemies of the sheep include lurking predators and insect pests. The problems created by insect pests were remedied by the sheep's head being treated by a mixture containing oil. Indeed, the overall complete and sustaining care of the shepherd for his sheep can be symbolized by the expression of one's "cup running over."

List three recent experiences in your life that you could cite as examples where God, the divine Shepherd, prepared a "table" for you.

5. The Response of Faith

"Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever" (Ps. 23:6).

Having had a personal experience par excellence with a never-failing Shepherd, whose care, provisions, and protection

were constant companions during his wandering and precarious life, David could look to the future with nothing less than full faith that these blessings would continue. "We have nothing to fear for the future, except as we shall forget the way the Lord has led us."³

Indeed, reflections from one's past with the divine Shepherd light up the future and prompt faith to exclaim, "I know these kinds of things will always be there for me when God sees I need them; and in response to such 'goodness and love' (verse 6, NIV), I will always seek for and abide in God's presence."

An aged minister and a distinguished actor attended a social gathering. When the actor was asked to give a reading, aware of the minister's presence, he repeated the twenty-third psalm. Such were the beauty of his voice and the charm of his manner that a murmur of praise swept around the room. Then he invited the minister to repeat the same psalm. When the aged minister finished, all eyes were filled with tears, for he had spoken with deep tenderness, understanding, and experience. Said the actor: "I know that psalm, but you know the Shepherd."

1. *That I May Know Him*, p. 253.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 479.

3. *Testimonies to Ministers*, p. 31.

God's 1,000 Ways

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Mark 9:23

Psalm 23 deals with a number of themes, one of which concerns the God in whom we place our trust. Ellen G. White has much to say about what God will do if we simply trust Him.

"All things are possible to him that believeth; and whatsoever things we desire when we pray, if we believe that we receive them we shall have them. This faith will penetrate the darkest cloud and bring rays of light and hope to the drooping, desponding soul. It is the absence of this faith and trust which brings perplexity, distressing fears, and surmisings of evil. God will do great things for His people when they put their entire trust in Him. . . . Christ will prove a never-failing source of strength, a present help in every time of trouble."¹

One of the rewards of this unrestrained trust is peace.

"In the heart of Christ, where reigned perfect harmony with God, there was perfect peace. He was never elated by applause, nor dejected by censure or disappointment. Amid the greatest opposition and the most cruel treatment, He was still of good courage. But many who profess to be His followers have an anxious, troubled

heart, because they are afraid to trust themselves with God. They do not make a complete surrender to Him; for they shrink from the consequences that such surrender may involve. Unless they do make this surrender, they cannot find peace."²

But peace of mind is not the only blessing God has in store for us.

"If we surrender our lives to His service, we can never be placed in a position for which God has not made provision. Whatever may be our situation, we have a Guide to direct our way; whatever our perplexities, we have a sure Counselor; whatever our sorrow, bereavement, or loneliness, we have a sympathizing Friend. If in our ignorance we make missteps, Christ does not leave us. His voice, clear and distinct, is heard saying, 'I am the Way, the Truth, and Life.' John 14:6. 'He shall deliver the needy when he crieth; the poor also, and him that hath no helper.' Ps. 72:12."³

There will never be a shortage of such blessings, for God has a storehouse of blessings.

"Our heavenly Father has a thousand ways to provide for us, of which we know nothing. Those who accept the one principle of making the service and honor of God supreme will find perplexities vanish, and a plain path before their feet."⁴

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 140.

2. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

3. *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 173.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.

by Chandra L. Tyler

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Wednesday, August 22

The Good Shepherd

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 23

The tenderest and most well-known of all the biblical psalms is Psalm 23, universally referred to as "the shepherd psalm."

Couched between the "psalm of the cross" (Ps. 22) and the "psalm of the ascension" (Ps. 24), this pearl of all psalms may be called the gospel of grace in miniature, portraying the God of the covenant as the Good Shepherd.

Whether we are in the charm of childhood or the consolation of old age, Psalm 23 meets our gamut of needs. Augustine noted that it also served as the hymn of the martyrs.

As a poem, this psalm can be divided into two balanced stanzas, each having four couplets (a couplet being one line of Hebrew poetry). For example, stanza one consists of verses 1-2a, 2b-3a, 3b-c, and 4a-c. Stanza two: verses 5a-b, 5c-d, 6a-b, and 6c-d.

Our point here is to observe that even the inspired prophets were sensitive to and appreciated

the beauty of language to express the message of God. In each of the stanzas of Psalm 23 David uses the most sacred name for God: "Lord" (Hebrew "Yahweh") in verses 1 and 6.

David's acknowledgment of the "Lord" as his Shepherd-King takes on a Messianic dimension in the light of John 10:11, 14, where Jesus declares, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep." "I know my sheep and my sheep know me" (NIV).

It certainly would not be too ambitious to see righteousness by faith in the "paths of righteousness" (verse 3) inasmuch as God always leads us in right ways, which inevitably lead to Himself, who says, "I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me" (John 14:6, NIV).

When God's way becomes our way, then "goodness and mercy" and love will not just *follow* us but "pursue" and "chase" (Hebrew *radaph*) us all the days of our lives. And we shall find joy dwelling in God's presence forever!

by Mervyn A. Warren

Mervyn A. Warren is chairman of the Department of Religion at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

The Power of God's Presence

HOW-TO

Key Text: Heb. 13:5

Sadly, in one form or another, loneliness affects us all. It may be masked or denied, but still it is there. It is felt in the sardine-packed atmosphere of boisterous subways. It exists amidst the bustling chatter and laughter of a school's cafeteria. Even the romantic moments of a couple may not quite drown it. Worse still, it has a few bothersome relatives: fear, discouragement, and poor self-esteem.

But what can be *done* about them?

The lives of Moses and David give helpful suggestions.

1. God's presence is continual.

Upon fleeing Egypt after killing an Egyptian, Moses lived as a shepherd in Midian's wilderness. He was cut off from his relatives and fondest dreams. When called to liberate his enslaved countrymen, Moses was initially afraid of being a failure and was reluctant to accept God's charge.

But he practiced God's presence, casting his fears aside (Heb. 11:27). Returning to Egypt, he pictured God beside him. Through difficulty after difficulty, he knew that God's presence and power were with him. God filled Moses with courage and perseverance, making him superior to the challenges of life.

2. God's love is unconditional.

God's love for David was as great for him when he had committed adultery with Bathsheba, another man's wife, as when he had slain Goliath or written the shepherd's psalm. Unlike roller-coaster sentimentality, God's love consistently reaches us where we are, empowering, healing, correcting, and disciplining. It is always there to assure us that we are each uniquely important. That He is willing to do everything to maximize our joy. That He will respectfully listen to our problems and confessions. And that He will make us conquerors in *this* life.

3. God's presence brings joy.

As David affirms, "In thy presence is fullness of joy" (Ps. 16:11). The one consistently practicing God's presence will find happiness, peace, contentment, and assurance. It furnishes strength for the good and bad times.

4. God's presence creates similarity.

Forty days and nights of intense communion with his Best Friend illuminated Moses' face with God's glory (Ex. 34:29-35). No wonder that of Moses it is written, "Moses was very meek, above all the men which were upon the face of the earth" (Num. 12:3). The one living in God's presence demonstrates a life of progression. He or she increasingly thinks, speaks, and acts like God. Ultimately, that one will look like God (1 John 3:2).

by Derek C. Bowe

Derek C. Bowe is an instructor of English at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

God's presence is bursting with potential and positiveness. May we, like David, realize this, crying out, "Cast me not away from thy presence and take not thy holy spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11).

REACT

1. Is the Good Shepherd a cosmic game-show host, rewarding only those who play the game best? Why or why not?
2. Is God still a good shepherd when evil and tragedy attack His sheep? Why or why not?

The God-Human Relationship

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 23:1

"The Lord is my shepherd." A profound statement indeed! The majesty of the universe is a servant of sinners! Why was there such an "infinite humiliation"? "What is man that you are mindful of him, the son of man that you care for him?" (Ps. 8:4, NIV). Is there any answer to David's question? God is displeased when we place a low estimate on ourselves.

"The Lord is my shepherd."

What meaning has this text for the twentieth-century city dweller who has no concept of shepherding? People of David's time knew that the survival of a flock of sheep was dependent upon the shepherd. He provided food, water, shelter, and protection from wild beasts and robbers. He was doctor and nurse to the sick and injured. He was the guide to the lost who went astray. However, our concern is not really sheep, but our relationship to God. Scripture declares again and again that we are God's "peculiar treasure" (Ex. 19:5; Titus 2:14; 1 Peter 2:9; Rev. 21:1-3; and Deut. 14:2).

Human beings "have even a more sacred relationship to God than have the angels who have never fallen."¹ We are reminded also that, "the church, enfeebled and defective though it be, is the

only object on earth on which Christ bestows His supreme regard. . . . The church is the repository of the riches of the grace of Christ; and through the church will eventually be made manifest, even to the 'principalities and powers in heavenly places,' the final and full display of the love of God."²

Friend of mine, you and I are honored above all creatures in God's creation. We have been chosen to demonstrate God's character, justice, goodness, and love. In cooperation with Christ we are to accomplish a work that no other creature in the universe can. By uniting humanity and divinity, God has devised a plan that will secure the entire universe and the angels who have never fallen.

"This is the mystery of godliness. That Christ should take human nature, and by a life of humiliation elevate man in the scale of moral worth with God: that He should carry His adopted nature to the throne of God, and there present His children to the Father, to have conferred upon them an honor exceeding that conferred upon angels—this is the marvel of the heavenly universe, the mystery into which angels desire to look."³ "In Christ we become more closely united to God than if we had never fallen."⁴

1. *Testimonies*, vol. 5, p. 740.

2. *Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 13.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 22.

4. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 25.

by Clarence Barnes

Clarence Barnes is professor of history at Oakwood College, Huntsville, Alabama.

Lesson 9, August 26—September 1

A Shelter in the Time of Storm



“For in the day of trouble he will keep me safe in his dwelling; he will hide me in the shelter of his tabernacle and set me high upon a rock” (Ps. 27:5, NIV).

Be of Good Courage

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 27

The tiny spider dangled dangerously close to the leaping flame. It seemed as if he had been swinging there for hours, years, eons. His little joints ached. It was getting awfully hot, too. He tried to think about what to do. He tried to figure out how he would manage to escape, hanging there. But his thoughts were unorganized. Nothing.

One thing he was sure of—well, not positive, but pretty sure. He remembered faintly how he had been building a beautiful web. A web to reach upward until it touched the heavens. What had happened? How had he managed to get in this jam? He kept swinging, swinging. Confused, he could not quite figure it out. It was so hot.

He wiggled around a little trying to stretch his tired legs. Something was there. What was it? He was hanging from something. Had it been there all along? Yes. It must have been. Of course. He was hanging from a tiny, fine thread. Really rather pretty. Intricate and glistening. He could not decide what to do. It was becoming hotter. But wait a minute.

The tiny thread reached as far as he could see. Way up beyond where the hot flames were leaping. He could crawl up and away to safety. Why hadn't he seen it before? He gained courage. He

stretched one weary leg up to grasp the sparkling thread . . .

Morning! It was awfully hot this morning. The radio was announcing the high for today—98 degrees. Another scorcher. But, no time to waste. Time to get ready for a new day.

The old spider-dangling-on-a-thread dream is nothing new. But there is something to be learned from it even now. How often do we find ourselves in that position? Trusting and brave, we work toward a worthy goal. Then suddenly, confused and afraid, overcome with temptation, everything falls apart. Because of our dedication to God, we are sometimes opposed by spiritual enemies. But take heart! At these times, we can be sure that, as we depend upon God, He will shelter, provide for, and vindicate us.

David dangled. So did Abraham and Moses. Even the spiritual dynamos floundered and feared sometimes. In spiritual hard times we are often confused and unsure of what to do. Fear and confusion may cloud our thoughts so much that we forget that our dear Saviour is forever near to rescue us. As protector and defender, He sends His life-line. When temptation and doubts arise, when earthly foes attack, and family and friends fail, we can be sure that God remains at the end of that fine, strong thread, waiting for us to reach out and grasp it.

by Lisa K. Saveikis

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Monday, August 27

A Shelter in the Time of Storm

LOGOS

Ps. 27

Theme: A Divine Defender.

Because of our dedication to God, we are sometimes opposed by spiritual enemies. At such times we may be sure that, as we depend upon the Lord, He will shelter, provide for, and vindicate us.

In Psalm 27 we catch a glimpse of our own vacillation between confidence and fear.

Today is a time of rapid change, characterized by a lack of interpersonal relationships, and compounded by scholastic and administrative one-upmanship. Insecurity is a predominant emotional factor in the nineties. Small wonder this psalm speaks to us today when we so desperately need a shelter in a time of storm.

1. The Source of Courage (read verses 1-3)

Our present life is the accumulation of thousands of experiences, each recorded in our mind. Courage for the present situation must come from our awareness of what God has done in the past. This is the primary source. Experiences borrowed from others are secondary.

How has God been a "light" and a "stronghold" for you in the past year? Name specific instances.

What are your fears today? Can you name them? Are you even

afraid to name some? Why?

What is the worst thing that could possibly happen to you? Why? What would enable you to survive this terrible eventuality? Is God able to deliver you?

What are the implications of a fortress? How do we take refuge in that fortress?

2. A Worthy Goal (read verse 4)

This passage is echoed in Jesus' admonition to seek first God's kingdom and His justice, allowing all other things to be provided subsequently (Matt. 6:33). It calls for a disciplined spirituality and concentrated focus.

If you could ask one thing of the Lord, and have it granted, what would it be?

How does your culture or society value single-mindedness? When was the last time your whole life was focused on a single desire? What happened? Why?

Where do you find "God's house"? Is it a location? a state of mind? an experience? With whom can you share it? How do you think others get there? How do you get there?

How can you maintain the sense of being in "God's house"? How is it made compatible with school, work, romance, leisure, family, and other social demands?

3. A Place of Refuge and Vindication (read verses 5, 6)

This passage is not eschatological. It is not limited to last-day events. The day of trouble is any

by Bruce Moyer

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day we are threatened and our security is challenged. For some of us those days arrive with alarming frequency.

When you were a child where was the warmest, most secure place in your home? What made you consider it a secure place? What is the nicest and warmest thing you can remember feeling about God the Father or Jesus?

What gives you the greatest feeling of security?

Describe an occasion when you were misunderstood and then vindicated. How was God active in this situation?

I tend to see God as:

- a. the first one to turn to in trouble.*
- b. generally coming in at the end like John Wayne without my even asking.*
- c. the court of last resort.*
- d. frequently playing games with me, testing me.*
- e. other.*

4. The Cry of a Saint (read verses 7-10)

A key word in this psalm is the word *seek*. It is an active word, suggesting movement and investigation. Where is God most likely to be found? Where is God chiefly at work around you? Where do you see the indications of His presence? God is best sought where He is present. Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 are recom-

mended passages for determining God's presence in this world.

When was the last time you felt you and God were playing "hide and seek"? Who was hiding? Who was seeking? Who won?

When do you tend to become discouraged? Why?

What is your best way of handling discouragement:

- a. ignore it and let it go away?*
- b. resort to an artificial crutch (i.e. food, chemicals, TV)?*
- c. exercise?*
- d. push the panic button?*
- e. talk to friends?*

5. The Secret of Success (read verses 11-14)

The key word in this passage is *wait*. Being taught and being led involve waiting upon God, allowing Him to speak, listening to His voice. This is not done in a hurried situation, but in quietness and over a period of time.

The best lesson I have learned from God was . . . I learned it through . . .

The most important area of life in which I need to practice integrity is . . .

I see the goodness of Yahweh most clearly revealed in . . .

One person who has most successfully modeled confidence in God for me is . . . Especially when this person . . .

Tuesday, August 28

Waiting on the Lord

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 27:14

There's nothing in the world harder than waiting. You wait in line at the grocery store, at the bank, in traffic. You fret and fume, but why? Because you're late for a date? Because you're missing a good movie? We usually view waiting as something negative, but God seems to have a different connotation in mind. As earth's history draws nearer to its close our ability to wait patiently may become one of our greatest assets.

Ellen White says, "Let us each wait on the Lord, and He will teach us how to labor. He will reveal to us the work that we are best adapted to perform. . . . Even in the midst of the great deceptions of the last days, when delusive miracles will be performed in the sight of men in behalf of satanic theories, it is our privilege to hide ourselves in Christ Jesus. It is possible for us to seek and to obtain salvation. And in this time of unusual peril, we must learn to stand alone, our faith fixed, not on the word of man, but on the sure promises of God."¹

"Remember that prayer is the source of your strength. A worker cannot gain success while he hurries through his prayers and rushes away to look after something that he fears may be neg-

lected or forgotten. He gives only a few hurried thoughts to God; he does not take time to think, to pray, to wait upon the Lord for a renewal of physical and spiritual strength."²

"The lessons that God sends will always, if well learned, bring help in due time. Put your trust in God. Pray much, and believe. Trusting, hoping, believing, holding fast the hand of Infinite Power, you will be more than conquerors.

"True workers walk and work by faith. Sometimes they grow weary with watching the slow advance of the work when the battle wages strong between the powers of good and evil. But if they refuse to fail or be discouraged they will see the clouds breaking away and the promise of deliverance fulfilling. Through the mist with which Satan has surrounded them, they will see the shining of the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

"Work in faith, and leave results with God. Pray in faith, and the mystery of His providence will bring its answer. At times it may seem that you cannot succeed. But work and believe, putting into your efforts faith, hope, and courage. After doing what you can, wait for the Lord, declaring His faithfulness, and He will bring His word to pass. Wait, not in fretful anxiety, but in undaunted faith and unshaken trust."³

1. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, p. 490.

2. *Testimonies*, vol. 7, p. 243.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 245.

by Kathy Hecht

Kathy Hecht is circulation supervisor at Weis Library, Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

A Psalm for Goodness' Sake: A Defense of Psalmody

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 27

Picture a fugitive in a cave composing lyrics. Why is he writing? He produces poetry for one reason, because it's a popular mode of expression. In a different age he might instead write a story like *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* or a musical like *The Sound of Music*. Today's idea of a musical would probably intrigue him, because he's fond of singing.

But his purposes are not to provide entertainment. He's probably composing for heuristic reasons; that is, he writes to discover his thoughts and feelings. He isn't asking, "Am I creating a piece that can entertain as well as inspire?" though those qualities are inherent in all great literature.

He composes, too, because the Creator endowed him with a lyrical gift. Perhaps downgrading of the arts started with Plato, who gave higher marks to math and philosophy than to the arts and literature. It may be that the fugitive's dad once lectured him: "It's OK to compose, son, if you don't neglect your work. Just don't forget that sheep, not lyrics, are our cash crop. Sure, you can dream about becoming a court musician, but we don't have any traffic with the king or the king's men. So play your harp, but keep an eye on those sheep."

If the fugitive were writing a story instead of a song, he'd probably use his father's words as a touch of irony. Right now, in the cave, he's insisting, "The Lord is my light. . . . Of whom shall I be afraid?" And his men are saying, "Ironic he should talk about light when we're stuck in this dark, smelly cave. Who's he psyching up—him or us?" Answer that question either way to find another reason for the psalm. Expression deepens impression.

But then the composer ceases talking *about* God, and addresses God directly. Why doesn't he maintain a steady point of view? Lyric writer he may be, but this man sees the dramatic elements in his situation. In a drama, the lines of Psalm 27:7-12 would place the speaker on stage by himself, addressing God directly: "Be merciful. Don't be angry. Don't abandon me. I have many enemies!" The fugitive writes, sings, prays because of his human condition. Bravado gone, he's pleading for safety.

His prayer ended, the troops surge into sight. David raises his hand and says, "Wait on the Lord." Now he speaks as a prophet. Has the Lord given him this explicit message? Or is this his conclusion, based on his trust bank? Either way, a 1990 psalm singer knows more than the psalm writer about the outcome of his wait upon the Lord. The before-and-after story of the fugi-

by Edna Maye Loveless

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tive enhances the psalm's prophetic message.

There's a final reason for composing Psalm 27. It reveals not only the fugitive but his God. We can infer that his God likes poetry—or He couldn't have inspired so much of it to be placed in the sacred canon; that He expects creatures made in His image to create in like fashion; that He is approachable on occasions of crisis; and that His actions are worth waiting for. Just

think of the epilogue that David's editor could write to supplement his psalm.

REACT

1. What epilogue can you/David supply to demonstrate the truth of Psalm 27?
2. What is your best defense of a Christian's pursuit of artistic expression?
3. What is a rational/irrational situation for employing the line "Wait on the Lord"?

From Trust to Triumph

HOW-TO

Key Texts: 2 Chron. 20:12 and Ps. 27:14

There he stood, bewildered, afraid, and at a loss to know what to do. Jehoshaphat had just learned that the Ammonites, Moabites, and Edomites had joined forces and were on their way to lay siege on Jerusalem. He gathered all of Judah together, and there they stood wondering what was going to happen and what they should do about it.

Have you ever found yourself in a hairy situation? Do the powers of evil constantly seek to lay siege on your heart? Do you fight discouragement, fear, or failure in your life? Are you, right now, bewildered about something in your life and wondering, "What should I do?" In his time of need, Jehoshaphat decided to turn to the Lord for deliverance.

1. Call upon God—"O Lord God of our fathers" (2 Chron. 20:6).

The first step in seeking deliverance at the hand of God is to call upon Him for help. This is evidenced in the lives of Bible characters throughout the ages. David called on the name of the Lord, and Peter, while sinking quickly under the waves, cried, "Lord, save me!" So, call upon God and know that all who call upon

the name of the Lord will be saved.

2. Trust in the Lord. Jehoshaphat presented the problem to the Lord, admitted to not being able to handle it on his own, and ended with, "But our eyes are on Thee" (2 Chron. 20:12, NASB). He knew the Lord would be his help and refuge in his time of need, and so must you. Don't give up on God, but let your problem rest with Him, and trust till the end.

3. Wait for His deliverance.

"And all Judah was standing before the Lord" (verse 13, NASB). And there they waited for the word of the Lord, and that word was "stand and see the salvation of the Lord in your behalf" (verse 17, NASB). "Wait on the Lord; be of good courage, and He shall strengthen your heart" (Ps. 27:14, NKJV). The Lord will deliver you in the way He knows best. Be patient, trust His promises of deliverance, and wait to see His salvation.

4. Rejoice in His salvation. It was as Judah sang praises to God that the enemy was destroyed. It was as Paul and Silas sang hymns that their chains were loosed and the doors were opened.

When we put our faith in Jesus, whose name means "Yahweh is salvation," there is nothing that can stand against us.

by Vester Gravley, Jr.

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Friday, August 31

A Shelter From Discouragement

OPINION

Key Texts: Ps. 27:5; Isa. 27:5

Have you ever had a broken heart? Has your boyfriend, girlfriend, or spouse ever left you for someone else, or left you because you had become boring in his or her eyes? Have you ever worked all summer to pay off last year's tuition, only to have the student finance office deny financial registration for the fall? Have you ever blown a diet? Have you ever been determined to break a bad habit or even turn your whole life around, only to find yourself right back in the same rut a few days later? Ever lose your temper and then get down on yourself for what you said or did in anger? Ever do something that you thought was so awful that it would be hypocritical to pray afterward?

How do any of the above or similar experiences make you feel about yourself? About God? Do you ever feel frustrated? Discouraged? Suffer from low self-esteem? What do you *do* about it?

Do you ever feel like "Why me?" "Why do these things always happen to me?" "The fact that we are called upon to endure trial shows that the Lord Jesus sees in us something precious, which He desires to develop."

Consider where such feelings come from. "For our struggle is

not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places" (Eph. 6:12, NASB). No wonder discouragement hits so hard; who am I to resist supernatural forces that overwhelm me and drown me in a deluge of self-pity and despair?

But before humans were ever created, the powers of darkness and discouragement were defeated. And you know what? These same loyal angels who were victorious millenniums ago through Christ's strength are ready to fight by your side today if you're ready to quit trying to do it by yourself and accept *Christ's* strength in *your* battles. He says, "Let him take hold of my strength, that he may make peace with me; and he shall make peace with me" (Isa. 27:5). Just when you feel the most discouraged and the least like praying, that's when you should kneel down and take hold of God's strength.

Christ has said that He will shelter you and protect you in your time of trouble. Take Him at His word. The next time you catch yourself feeling angry at someone else, feeling down on yourself, or just feeling frustrated with the whole situation, don't try to handle it yourself; you're no match for Satan and his henchmen. The negative emo-

by Richard O. Greenwood

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tions will just grow. Ask the Lord for the desire to serve Him. Take hold of His strength. "Resist the devil and he will flee from you. Draw near to God and He will draw near to you" (James 4:7, 8, NASB).

REACT

1. When are you the most discouraged or disappointed in yourself? Why?

2. Do you feel like praying then? Why or why not?

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

Lesson 10, September 2 - 8

Yellow Ribbons on the Old Oak Tree



“Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sins are covered. Blessed is the man whose sin the Lord does not count against him and in whose spirit is no deceit” (Ps. 32:1, 2, NIV).

Sunday, September 2

True Confessions

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 32

SKETCH I

CAST: CHURCH DIGNITARIES, YOUNG MAN.

SCENE: Very early morning. Enter CHURCH DIGNITARIES, agitated, gesturing heatedly. Cluster and talk in hushed, intense tones. Suddenly a door behind them bursts open. Enter a YOUNG MAN, eyes wild, hair in disarray. He hurls a huge fistful of coins to the floor.

YOUNG MAN: (Screaming) I have sinned in betraying an innocent man!

SKETCH II

CAST: BOY, FARMER.

SCENE: A blistering August afternoon. Enter (left) a gaunt, dirty boy of indefinite age, in ragged T-shirt and blue jeans. He stumbles across stage, rehearsing something aloud. Enter (right) a 60-year-old gentleman, puffing slightly, hand shading eyes. Suddenly spying something, he gives a yelp of surprise and lumbers, arms outstretched, toward the BOY.

BOY: (Pulling back from FARMER'S embrace) Father, I have sinned against God and against you!

SKETCH III

CAST: PRESIDENT of

Mideastern state, two MEN, BODYGUARDS, ATTENDANTS. SCENE: A muggy, late afternoon inside the PRESIDENT'S personal chamber, which is black and humming with flies. The PRESIDENT, BODYGUARDS, and ATTENDANTS beat frenziedly at the insects. No one speaks. Enter two MEN in slacks and sports shirts, responding to an urgent summons. PRESIDENT: (Glaring) Pray for me! This time I have sinned!

SKETCH IV

CAST: CHURCH ELDER, IRS AGENT, CONGREGATION.

SCENE: The platform of a modest SDA church just before services begin. A CHURCH ELDER, plump and well dressed, stands, chest puffed, smiling and nodding at the CONGREGATION; then he raises his eyes heavenward and prays aloud. (Simultaneously in the vestibule of the same church.) An IRS AGENT, also overweight and well dressed, huddles in a corner, hands clenched. He too prays aloud. IRS AGENT: (Weeping) God, have pity on me, a sinner!

NARRATOR: Which of these, then, do *you* think went home justified before the Father?

(Note: These sketches are adapted from Matthew 27:1-10; Luke 15:11-24; 18:9-14; and Exodus 8, 9.)

by Joy Cassano Coleman

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Monday, September 3

The Felicity of a Restored Relationship With God

LOGOS

Ps. 32

Theme: Why Should We Confess Our Sins? *Because God's forgiveness involves the blessings of deliverance and cleansing, the most reasonable approach to our spiritual dilemma is to confess our sins. Then we can claim the promise of divine love and guidance.*

One profound appreciation I hold for the Bible concerns its objectivity. Though it is history with a theological outlook, the depiction of its heroes is laudable. It does not gloss over their weaknesses and mistakes and highlight their virtues and accomplishments. It presents both their failures and achievements.

This point is germane to this study. Second Samuel 11, 12 outline David's vice and his rebuke by the prophet Nathan. His sin is not glossed over. The gory details are cited. Psalm 51 is part of his prayer of repentance and contains his vow to "teach transgressors the ways that lead to thee [God]" (verse 13, NEB). Psalm 32 captures his jubilation and happiness following his forgiveness; his guilt, pain, and sorrow prior to acknowledging his sin; his confession; God's forgiveness; his response; God's response; and finally his evaluation of the experience.

1. A Real Cause for Celebration and Felicity (read verses 1-4)

Psalm 32 is a psalm of thanksgiving. It celebrates the happiness that floods the soul of a repentant and forgiven sinner. David outlines his true feelings following God's forgiveness of his guilt. The state alluded to is often viewed as one of blessedness. Some prefer to see it as a state of happiness. Perhaps both renderings are limited, since even peace and freedom are encompassed. What David depicts is a state of "being what God meant us to be."¹

The psalmist and those like him who attain this state can exult because four things have happened for them: (a) their *disobedience* is forgiven, (b) their *sin* is put away, (c) the Lord lays no guilt to their account, and (d) there is no deceit in their spirit.

David claims that when he refused to confess his sins his strength withered away down to the very core of his being (verse 3). Also his wretchedness weighed him down so much that he grieved to it by frequent groans.² This suggests that his conscience was still alive and the Spirit was convicting him of sin. He acknowledges this when he says he couldn't hide from God's presence. The tortures of an accusing conscience were so real that he felt as though God's punishing hand was incessantly upon him. He could identify with the man

by Bertram Melbourne

Bertram Melbourne is a professor of religion at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

depicted in Romans 7:24: "What a wretched man I am! Who will rescue me from this body of death?" (NIV).

Describe the mental anguish and physical agony you think David endured before his confession. How do you feel when you've done wrong? Does your conscience treat you as David's did? What does your response indicate about your spiritual condition?

Do you think David's repentance was based on genuine sorrow for sin or on sorrow at being found out? Is there a difference?

Are we sometimes more concerned about the shame involved with the discovery of our sins than about the pain and grief it causes a loving God who sacrificed Himself to save us from sin? Why or why not?

2. David's Response (read Ps. 32:6, 7)

Apart from the relief he felt and the happiness he expressed, how else did David respond to this experience? What should be our response to God's forgiving love? David models a twofold response: (a) praise and (b) teaching/counseling.

First, he praises God. The psalm is one of thanksgiving and praise. He states in verse 6 that every faithful heart should pray to God—that's praise. He praises God for being a refuge from distress, for guarding him, and enfolded him in salvation.

Second, the psalm seems designed to portray David's commitment to "teach transgressors the way that leads to thee [God]"

(51:13, NEB). Verses 1-5 are instructive, but verses 5-7 seem particularly designed for instruction. David is teaching all that God is the source of help in the hour of anxiety. Since He was his refuge from distress, the One who prevented him from being touched, the One who kept him beyond the reach of all harm, he is counseling others prayerfully to consult the Lord. He is suggesting that God will be for them as He was for him.

Do I share God's goodness with others so they can come to experience His awesome love and grace? Do I find in God a source of help and a refuge from distress? If not, why not?

3. God's Response (read Ps. 32:8, 9)

In these verses we have God's response to David. The psalm pictures a God who hears, forgives, renews, forgets, covers, and acquits. He is a God who makes promises and fulfills them.

God's response (verse 9) summons us to act according to our status. Homo sapiens has a superior brain and is able to reason. God invites us to utilize our brain and not be outdone by unreasoning creatures whose course must be checked by bit and bridle. God is saying: If the ass knows its owner and the ox its master's stall, then His people should surely have knowledge and discernment (Isa. 1:3).

What do we have to do to experience God's forgiving love in our lives?

1. Nolan B. Harmon, ed., *The Interpreter's Bible* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1953), vol. 4, p. 169.
2. H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of the Psalms* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1969), p. 267.

Tuesday, September 4

“Blessed Is He Whose Sin Is Covered”

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 32:1, 2

Even the smallest sin can be an impenetrable barrier between the individual and God. Sin separates us from God because, by definition, it is something we feel compelled to hide from Him. The only alternative is to confess the sin and repent. Perhaps the most trivial sin of all was the first sin in the Garden of Eden. As Ellen White states, “Had some great test been appointed Adam, then those whose hearts incline to evil would have excused themselves by saying, ‘This is a trivial matter, and God is not particular about little things.’ And there would be continual transgression in things looked upon as small, and which pass unrebuked among men. But the Lord has made it evident that sin in any degree is offensive to Him.”¹

To cherish and make excuses for sin conversely makes the absolute holiness of God offensive to us. Once Adam and Eve had committed their seemingly insignificant sin, they “fled in terror, and sought to hide in the deepest recesses of the garden.”² Previously, Ellen White tells us, “In

their innocence and holiness they had joyfully welcomed the approach of their Creator.”³

Fellowship with God can be restored only if we overcome the tendency to minimize our sins that seem to come so naturally to us, and if we sincerely confess.

Such repentance can be seen most clearly in the life of David. Ellen White writes, “David’s repentance was sincere and deep. There was no effort to palliate his crime. No desire to escape the judgments threatened inspired his prayer. But he saw the enormity of his transgression against God; he saw the defilement of his soul; he loathed his sin. It was not for pardon only that he prayed, but for purity of heart.”⁴

Of course, repentance would be a pointless, if not an impossible, act without the sacrifice of Christ for us. To turn away from sin necessarily means to turn toward Christ. Ellen White writes, “The same merciful Saviour who appointed those temporal cities of refuge has by the shedding of His own blood provided for the transgressors of God’s law a sure retreat, into which they may flee for safety from the second death. No power can take out of His hands the souls that go to Him for pardon.”⁵

1. *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 61.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 57.

3. *Ibid.*

4. *Ibid.*, p. 725.

5. *Ibid.*, pp. 516, 517.

by Alan Hecht

Alan Hecht is an English major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

A Prisoner Named Carl

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 32:2

If your nose is crooked, you are merely disappointed. If your behavior is crooked, you are filled with remorse or even self-contempt.

It's human to feel bad when your deeds dishonor your ideals. No one can brush off moral failure lightly. Certainly this was true for the author of Psalm 32. Sin is disloyalty to God revealed in moral failure, and the psalmist's sin made him groan "all the day long"; it dried up his strength as does "the drought of summer" (verses 3, 4).

I once knew a prisoner named Carl; he paced for hours across the chapel floor of the penitentiary, gazing at the dark tiles. In a moment of anger he'd killed a man. Now he was always looking downward. When I spoke with him, he said no happy words about himself or about his future. His guilt was oppressive and horrible.

In one degree or other it's the same for everyone: guilt is oppressive; it's no fun. That's why the first two verses of Psalm 32 ring so true: you are blessed indeed when your "transgression is forgiven" and the Lord holds "no iniquity" against you. You feel like shouting for joy, just as the psalmist did (verse 11).

The key is to own up to what

you've done, to acknowledge your failure before the God who pours steadfast love upon every trusting person (verse 10). Because God is such a God, you'll be forgiven. And the reward is not only that you feel better; it's also that you get a clearer picture of how you're doing.

I try to spend a quiet time in the morning, collecting myself for focused thought. I look at a verse or phrase of Scripture and ask what it means for me on the day that is just beginning. Then I write a sentence prayer to God, expressing the joy or hope or need I feel.

A few months ago I spent my quiet time with the second verse of Psalm 32: "Blessed is the man to whom the Lord imputes no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit" (RSV). And it suddenly struck me: forgiveness not only purges remorse and self-contempt; it builds courage—courage to look truthfully at who you are. When you know you're accepted, you can be honest about yourself—just what you need if you want to grow.

My prayer that day was "With Your forgiveness, O God, wash away my self-deception." For I know that the blessedness is double-edged: you feel better and you see better—all at once.

REACT

If you had a circle of accepting friends, would the effect of their forgiveness be similar to the effect of God's? Why?

by Charles Scriven

Charles Scriven is the senior pastor of the Sligo church, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Thursday, September 6

Claim the Promise

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 9:9

“Theory, theory, and philosophy. When will the church deal with tangibles and real issues?” queried one of my students as we were leaving class. The students had been stating after class that the issues confronting the church seem increasingly numerous but remain unanswered. The “real issues” sometimes become cloudy in this technical and clinical world. However, forgiveness is one issue on which the Bible is clear. It is alive with examples of those who asked for forgiveness and received the joy and blessings of restoration. David and Samuel were real, not just theory. Daniel and John the Baptist were protected and worked to save nations from the guilt of their sins. This is not just speculation and hearsay.

Where to start?

The only way we can be forgiven is to focus in on the cross. Forgiveness of sin is the first step in the new life. There are no human answers—only God’s promise and the hope that accompanies it. So how do we go about obtaining this promise and developing this new life?

1. We must recognize how help-

less we are on our own (see Ps. 32:5). By recognizing our condition, we show our dependence on God, and this is necessary for a real relationship with Him. Isn’t that what friendship and caring are all about? We have to communicate and be there. We know this is true; God is always there and guiding us, even when we aren’t responding to His leading.

2. We must repent. By doing so, we learn to trust God’s love and see our true condition (see verse 7). David needed to realize how far from God he had strayed; when this occurred, the forgiveness and repentance that came with it opened David’s heart to God’s love, and his joy and hope for living were restored.

3. We must accept forgiveness and the new life that accompanies it. We have hope and possibilities because of God’s grace. God’s kindness leads to repentance and forgiveness. Most people find it easy to give gifts yet difficult to accept them.

God’s forgiveness is a gift. He has given His Son to show the way and pay the price for our sins so that we may live by His grace. All we have to do is claim that forgiveness and grace as our own.

by Joan Angelo Adams

Joan Angelo Adams is an adjunct instructor in the Business Department for the adult evening program at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Experience of Forgiveness

OPINION

Key Text: John 15:4

A saying goes something like this: You should not criticize a man until you have walked in his shoes. In other words, you should not be critical of someone until you know what that person has experienced in his life. We may be critical of the ways David sinned against God in his life, or even of a member of our own church/school community.

However, it is the Lord's work to heal and restore an individual, and we have no right to criticize. David sensed the forgiving power of God, and this experience had a profound effect upon his expectation of triumph over sin. The psalms express how deep David's relationship became with the Lord once he experienced the depth and breadth of God's forgiveness.

For David the gospel message was not just theoretical, but intensely practical. It changed his life and his whole point of view. Psalm 32 teaches three practical spiritual results of being forgiven:

First, we will be transformed and made righteous by God. Once we have confessed our sins, He is able to forgive and declare us righteous. The Lord will transform us into His image (verses 5, 11).

Second, we will be made free from the indwelling power of sin.

Our God is the one who will preserve and protect us from the dominion of sin if He has our consent and cooperation (verses 7, 10).

Third, we will joyfully abide in His presence and hold communion with Him daily. We are promised, "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7; Ps. 32:8). "Who-soever abideth in him sinneth not" (1 John 3:6).

"I am crucified with Jesus,
And He lives and dwells in me.
I have ceased from all my
struggling;

'Tis no longer I, but He.
All my will is yielded to Him,
And His Spirit reigns within;
And His precious blood each
moment

Keeps me cleansed and free
from sin."

The Lord asks us to put Him to the test and challenge Him on His promise that the experience of forgiveness is real. The difference the Lord makes will be seen in our relationships with friends, spouses, teachers, and parents. The new life in Jesus will lead to bearing the fruits of the Spirit. "If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit" (Gal. 5:25).

Our response will then be what David was able to proclaim: "Be glad in the Lord, and rejoice, ye righteous: and shout for joy, all ye that are upright in heart" (Ps. 32:11).

*Meade MacGuire, *The Life of Victory* (Payson, Ariz.: Leaves of Autumn Books, Inc., 1985), p. 152.

by Grant Leitma

Grant Leitma is an associate professor of psychology at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.

Lesson 11, September 9 - 15

Stop Worrying and Start Living



“Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when men succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes” (Ps. 37:7, NIV).

Cheaters Never Prosper

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 37:1, 2

“Cheaters never prosper.” I can remember hearing this phrase on the playground. We would use it to taunt those kids whom we had caught cheating. Another popular phrase was “Don’t worry, you’ll get yours.” This was usually said to the person who thought he had gotten by undetected. Playgrounds and children have their own versions of Psalm 37. But is it true on playgrounds or in life that cheaters never prosper? And does evil always get what it deserves?

We have on many occasions tried to explain to our boys that telling the truth is always the best policy. We have read stories to them that teach that honesty is best and that people who lie and cheat lose. We have also “re-warded” them with lighter discipline when they were honest about wrongdoing. Even so, it is obvious that this is a difficult moral lesson for them to understand. The next time they are confronted with “How did this get broken?” or “Who tracked in the mud?” the most “prosperous” answer for them is “I don’t know!” Even children can see that sometimes cheaters and liars do prosper.

Is it any different with adults? The recent scandals involving the stock market-insider trading and ethics violations in the U.S. Congress might lead one to believe that cheating adults don’t prosper. Although, many say that these highly publicized cases appear to be just the tip of the iceberg. Even for the few who are caught and disgraced, they can turn around, write a best-selling book on their exploits, and make millions!

In Psalm 37, God, through the psalmist, assures us that, contrary to appearances, evil will not prosper and the wicked will get what they deserve. If this is true, why is the observation of both children and adults so different? Could it be that we can understand this passage and others like it only in its ultimate sense? That is to say, that while evil might prosper for a season, in the final end it will not. If this is true, then is the same true for the promises to the righteous? If this interpretation is accepted, is there a danger of falling into a “pie in the sky, by and by” religion? Can this interpretation be modified to prevent this pitfall? Challenge yourself to find the answer this week in Psalm 37.

by Victor F. Brown

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Monday, September 10

Stop Worrying and Start Living

LOGOS

Ps. 37

Theme: Why Should We Choose God's Way? *Despite their apparent power and prosperity, the wicked will come to nothing. Despite their apparent weakness and poverty, the righteous will be established by the Lord forever.*

1. Relating to the Evil We See (read Ps. 37:1, 12, 13, 21, 32)

"Do not fret because of evil men or be envious of those who do wrong" (verse 1, NIV).

In the world in which we live, the wicked seem to have the upper hand. Evil men have control over large segments of society and seem to live quite comfortably. They prosper.

How can we, as Christians, relate to the wicked without losing our faith or becoming just like them? Evil could conquer us in the most subtle ways.

The command "Do not fret" means "Do not become angry." Anger against the wicked is being condemned. Our thirst for justice can deceive us. We may come to hate a wicked person, wishing his death. We may even want him to be totally deprived of God's grace and comfort. Instead of asking God to touch his heart with His transforming power, we want to see him destroyed.

Such an attitude is rejected by the psalmist. To nest those thoughts and feelings in our heart

is to be as evil as the wicked. The psalmist looks into the depth of our being and says that when we harbor anger against evildoers we are not being motivated by justice, but by envy.

When confronted by evil people, do not become angry against them, unless you want to be defeated by evil. Let God deal with them (verses 12, 13).

Have you ever been angry with someone? Why did you feel that way? How did it affect your Christian experience?

2. Putting Our Trust in God (read Ps. 37:3-7, 11)

"Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture" (verse 3, NIV).

The psalmist gives one basic answer to the problem of hatred against evil men: Trust in the Lord. To trust means to rely on God, to feel secure in Him. The person who trusts in the Lord builds a life of faith on solid ground.

There are many people who have not discovered certainty and security in life. They are like rolling stones, dead and rootless. Life is, for them, a journey into oblivion.

The psalmist says, "Trust in the Lord; stop looking for greener pastures; settle down, and then you will find green pastures." Notice the sequence: Trust the Lord, dwell in the land, and then you will find pasture. What provides firmness

by Angel Manuel Rodriguez

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and security is not the land or the pasture, but the Lord.

Such a person finds his joy and delight in the Lord (verse 4). The prosperity of the wicked is not a problem for him. He is building on the Rock.

How can you develop a trusting relationship with the Lord? What is the relation between waiting on the Lord and doing something to change our situation or circumstances?

3. The End Result of Doing Evil (read Ps. 37:2, 9, 10, 14, 15, 35, 36)

"For like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away" (verse 2, NIV).

Evil leads to extinction. Therefore we should not envy the wicked. The prosperity of the wicked is deceptive. His wickedness will result in:

a. *Shortness of life (verses 2, 35, 36).* Evil men may look like a green tree, but they are just grass. They, like the grass, will wither and perish.

b. *Unsettled life (verse 9).* An unsettled life has no future. The wicked may be rich, but they lack hope. They will not be a part of God's inheritance.

c. *Self-destruction (verse 15).* In

a sense, evil is self-destructive. We destroy ourselves when we attempt to destroy or abuse others. We reap what we sow.

Do you believe that evil is self-destructive? Why or why not? Why does God have to put an end to evil?

4. The Joy of Doing Good (read Ps. 37:4, 11, 16, 23, 24)

"Better the little that the righteous have than the wealth of many wicked" (verse 16, NIV).

To have little is better than to have much. We tend to believe that wealth provides security. The more we have, the more secure the future. The psalmist questions that assumption.

The righteous have little, but what they have is more significant than the wealth of the wicked. The righteous have the Lord. God will provide for them (1) the deepest desires of their hearts (verse 4); (2) a future inheritance (verse 11); (3) peace, wholeness of life, well-being (verse 11); and (4) providential guidance in this life (verses 23, 24).

Is there a relationship between piety and wealth? Define this relationship. What are the dangers and/or blessings of being righteous and rich?

Tuesday, September 11

Daily Struggles Bring Eternal Reward

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 37

How can a Christian be cheerful when faced with daily perplexities and problems? "Do not allow the perplexities and worries of everyday life to fret your mind and cloud your brow. . . . But if we look on the bright side of things, we shall find enough to make us cheerful and happy. . . . Heaven is all joy; and if we gather to our souls the joys of heaven and, as far as possible, express them in our words and deportment, we shall be more pleasing to our heavenly Father than if we were gloomy and sad.

"It is the duty of everyone to cultivate cheerfulness instead of brooding over sorrow and troubles. . . . Cheerfulness and hope, while they brighten the pathway of others, 'are like unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.'"¹

"Faith lightens every burden, relieves every weariness. Providences that are now mysterious you may solve by continued trust in God. Walk by faith in the path He marks out. Trials will come; but go forward. This will strengthen your faith, and fit you for service."²

Why are the righteous afflicted, and why do the evil prosper? "He [God] does not forget or neglect His children; but He per-

mits the wicked to reveal their true character, that none who desire to do His will may be deceived concerning them. Again, the righteous are placed in the furnace of affliction, that they themselves may be purified; that their example may convince others of the reality of faith and godliness; and also that their consistent course may condemn the ungodly and unbelieving.

"God permits the wicked to prosper and to reveal their enmity against Him, that when they shall have filled up the measure of their iniquity all may see His justice and mercy in their utter destruction. The day of His vengeance hastens, when all who have transgressed His law and oppressed His people will meet the just recompense of their deeds; when every act of cruelty or injustice toward God's faithful ones will be punished as though done to Christ Himself."³

"They may be apparently prosperous in this world. They may deceive poor, shortsighted mortals and be regarded as patterns of piety while in their sins. But God cannot be deceived. . . . Although the life of a sinner may be prolonged upon the earth, yet not in the earth made new. He shall be of that number whom David mentions in his psalm: 'For yet a little while, and the wicked shall not be; yea, thou shalt diligently consider his place, and it shall not

by Clinton J. Anderson

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be. But the meek shall inherit the earth.'

"Mercy and truth are promised to the humble and penitent, but judgments are prepared for the sinful and rebellious. . . . A wicked and adulterous people will not escape the wrath of God and the punishment they have justly earned."⁴

What will be the outcome of the righteous if they are faithful? "Temptations and wearisome toil will afflict the soul, but we must patiently wait in faith to reap with joy. . . . Those who stand like faithful soldiers to battle against wrong, and to vindicate the right, warring against principalities and powers, against the

rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places, will each receive the commendation from the Master: 'Well done, *good* and *faithful* servant: . . . enter thou into the joy of thy Lord.'⁵

REACT

1. How do you feel when you are being afflicted and the wicked around you are apparently blessed?

2. What does it mean to you to "put your trust in God"?

3. What joys can we now experience by doing good?

4. What future joys will the righteous experience that the wicked will never realize?

1. *Adventist Home*, pp. 430, 431.

2. *Prophets and Kings*, p. 175.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 48.

4. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, pp. 448, 449.

5. *Testimonies*, vol. 3, p. 327.

Wednesday, September 12

Start Living by Faith

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 37:7

God is revealed in nature and has designed nature to be the lesson manual for humankind. Therefore, people should be able to look at nature's concepts and from them draw parallels that will magnify the understanding of spiritual applications.

One such concept is that of the biological catalyst, a species ("third party" reagent) that makes it possible for an impossible or near-to-impossible reaction to occur. In this process the catalyst is not consumed. The species upon which the catalyst reacts is known as the substrate (that which will be transformed or changed).

The result of the transformation, or change, is the product or finished work. Now, the impossible task of changing the substrate into products is accomplished because the energy barrier over which the substrate must travel is lowered. This lowering effect occurs only in the presence of the catalyst and as a result the pathway for the transformation, from substrate to product, is feasible.

From such a generalized biochemical scheme, one can see parallels to a spiritual process. For humanity is a substrate; on a path (life) to a finished or transformed product (Christlike character); in need of a catalyst (a

Saviour) to make the impossible transformations feasible.

In his own strength, man is helpless to bring about the transformation (Jer. 13:23); helpless to conquer the feelings of despair and discouragement when he observes the progress of the wicked while everything seems to be crumbling about him; helpless to throw off the attacks of the enemy, who desires to keep the energy barrier across the pathway as high as possible (Luke 22:31, 32); but the catalyst opens the pathway, which ensures success. This success is the result of a substrate-catalyst complex.

In the sacred volumes we find an inference to such a spiritual complex (Col. 1:27). In nature the complex is made possible by bond formation between the substrate and the catalyst. This bonding occurs whenever the catalyst can recognize acceptable receptor sites on the substrate. In fact, the catalyst may be described as tweezers seeking out bonding sites. Such action allows for the specificity of catalyst; e.g., it will not act on just any substrate, but on specific substrates—those that have met the requirements for doing, those that have invited its presence. With the invitation comes change (in nature—conformational changes or transformations) that makes the receptor sites available for bonding.

So our spiritual Catalyst can be viewed as a seeker for an invitation (John 15:16; Rev. 3:20).

by Barbara Crutch Jones

Barbara Crutch Jones is professor of chemistry at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

The product of the union of the substrate and the Catalyst in the spiritual process can be viewed as faith. If we are to overcome circumstances as we see them and to obtain the desired effect, we must trust our Catalyst.

We are no different from Elijah or Moses, both of whom, in moments of weakness, had their confidence in the Provider (Jehovah-jireh) shaken. Despondency may shake the most heroic faith, may weaken the most steadfast will; but He who was Elijah's and Moses' strength is strong enough to uphold every struggling child, no matter how weak. God will assist in every emergency as He has done in the past when the invitation to do so is extended in faith.

Faith brings the power to lighten every burden, relieve

every weakness, press through every barrier, and to obtain victory in the pathway that God has designed. Yours is a matter of choice. Therefore, choose! Decide to become receptive to your Ultimate Catalyst, desire the conformational changes that will establish your receptor sites, reduce your energy barrier by studying the Word. This is how one begins really to live; this is how one ceases to worry.

A steadfast look at Christ will allow one to accomplish the impossible. It happened for Peter, who defied the law of gravity, and it can happen for you! Stop worrying about the wicked; their triumph is short. Be transformed (Rom. 12:2). Start living by faith (Heb. 10:38). *Choose God's way because that is the only path to success.*

Thursday, September 13

Who's Holding Whom?

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 37:23, 24

Nothing is worse than falling down. Whether you are 2 or 92, falling down is humiliating and painful. As we grow older, we fall literally less and less, and figuratively more and more. So many things can trip us up. It can be depressing to spend most of our time picking ourselves off the ground in our spiritual, social, or personal lives.

Psalm 37 contains a great prescription/promise for this problem of falling down.

1. Watch Your Step. One of the most important rules involved in not falling, whether you are speaking literally or figuratively, is watch your step. In verse 23, David says that "the steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord." The Lord knows how many obstacles are in our way. He has walked before us. On our campus we had a Blind-Awareness Weekend. One of the activities involved part of the students' blind-ing themselves with eye patches and allowing themselves to be guided by another. On one hand, it is hard to trust; but on the other, it is easy to trip and fall if you don't!

2. He Likes It. When is the last time you asked the Lord whether

He liked the way you were going—socially or spiritually? The psalmist says that when the Lord orders our steps He delights in the way we go. This does not mean *we* always like it. But sooner or later we see the plan; and we agree and are delighted, too.

3. Falling Is Inevitable. Because of our human weakness, we will fall. It is as much a part of living as walking.

4. Who's Holding Whom? When either I or my wife is walking with our son and we come to a street crossing, we take his hand. Well, not exactly. Actually, we take his wrist, and he takes ours. This way if he gets distracted and lets go, we still have him! It is that way with the Lord. This is the great promise! We cannot fall so hard that we cannot get up. One Christian said it this way: "There is no pit so deep that God is not deeper still." Can you believe it!

REACT

1. What rules do you follow to know you are walking in the direction the Lord wants you to?

2. What means does the Lord use to hold our hand so that when we fall we can get back up?

3. Is it right to say that falling is inevitable? If it is, are we making excuses for sin? Why or why not?

by Victor F. Brown

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

I've Seen Them

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 37:23-25

While listening to a Christian radio broadcast I was shocked to hear a missionary say, "I've seen His seed begging bread." The missionary was referring to his experience in the mission field that contradicted the promise found in Psalm 37:25. "I have never seen the righteous forsaken or their children begging bread" (NIV). Is the missionary wrong, or is the Scripture?

There are a number of possible solutions to this problem. First, you can take the approach that says that anyone forsaken or begging bread must not be righteous. Although this view might be true at times, it is not very satisfying as a rule.

Another view could be that David is speaking of his personal experience and did not intend this statement to be universally applicable. After all, he does refer to his personal observation at the beginning of the verse. This is a more satisfying answer but still presents problems. It would be just as hard to believe that this statement always proved true even in the life of David.

Further, if we did not accept this statement as universal, would this mean that the promises of protection and guidance in the previous verses are not universal?

I would like to suggest one possible solution to this trouble-

some verse. I think that while it is obvious that David was speaking of his personal experience, this verse, in a special sense, can also be seen as a universal statement.

Of course, you can say that the righteous might appear to be forsaken, but in the long run, never. But this does not fit as well with the phrase "nor seen his seed begging bread." I believe this was true in David's personal experience, not because he never saw those that were forsaken, but because David relieved the suffering and fed the hungry he came in contact with. If we read between the lines, I think David might be saying "I have never seen the righteous forsaken [because God used me to meet their needs]."

This can become a universal statement if we follow David's example. I believe that it is fair to think that God gives us a part in fulfilling some of His promises. If this is so, and yet if the righteous are forsaken, maybe it is because we have failed them, not God. It might be better to say that verse 25 is God's universal intention and our universal responsibility.

REACT

1. Is it wrong not to take the psalmist literally? If not, what are the rules for deciding what is literal and what is not?

2. If you think of the psalms as poetry, could it be that the poet is taking artistic license with some passages? Suggest some examples.

by Victor F. Brown

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Lesson 12, September 16 - 22

A Mighty Fortress



“God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea” (Ps. 46:1, 2, NIV).

Sunday, September 16

In God's Refuge

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 46

"Brrr . . . it's getting cold and dark. I thought we'd be down the mountain by now. We must be lost!"

It had started out as a pleasant August afternoon of hiking in the mountains of Vail, Colorado. My father and brother had decided to take the ski lift down, leaving Mom and me with a several-mile hike down an unfamiliar ski run. However, Mom and I had utmost confidence in following the red markers to the bottom. As we started out, the sun glowed brightly in the western sky around 4:00 on a Friday afternoon. The beauty of the scenery was lessened only by the patches of water left from the many August rainstorms.

About halfway down we came to a thick grove of trees that was interrupted by a small clearing. The trail seemed to come to an abrupt end. To make matters worse, the quarter-of-a-mile clearing was a lake of muddy water. At last we reached the other side, only to find *no* red marker rewarding our valiant efforts.

"Our only choice is to go back to the last marker we saw," Mom advised. Crossing the clearing a second time, we made our way to the original marker. Our feet grew weary. A worried look painted both our faces.

Crash! Mom and I whirled at the sound of two dogs and two men jogging toward us from the direction of the clearing.

"Where did they come from?" I gasped in amazement. White-haired, slightly wrinkled, probably in their early 50s, both men looked too old to be jogging up a mountain, especially this late in the afternoon.

Mom quickly went into action. "Could you tell us where the next red marker is?" One of the men smiled and slowed to a stop.

"You just missed it. It's back across the clearing behind that big boulder. It's not easy to find. In fact, this trail has been closed for some time. Surprised you've made it this far. But you will have no problem finding your way down if you follow the markers past the boulder over there."

We looked in the direction where he was pointing, then turned to thank him, but the two men and two dogs had disappeared around the bend up the mountain. In no time at all, we saw the city lights just below us. Dad and Denny were quite relieved when we appeared at our meeting place even though we were several hours late.

Since that fearful afternoon, I have often thought about God's loving protection when I read Psalm 46:1, "God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble."

by Melissa Hanson

Melissa Hanson, a graduate of Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska, with degrees in elementary education and English, works at Guam Adventist Academy.

Monday, September 17

A City Unshaken

LOGOS

Ps. 46

Theme: Peace in Time of Storm. *Whether the storm is inward or outward, God brings peace to the one who trusts in Him. He overcomes our inward and outward enemies and gives spiritual victory and ultimate redemption to His faithful people.*

The brief 11-verse poem we know as Psalm 46 paints one of the most evocative and powerful pictures in Scripture of the power of God to deliver us from the terrifying forces of evil. This poem speaks its truth through a satisfying three-part structure, by using universal archetypes that speak to people everywhere.

The poem's three-part structure marks off three distinct pictures of God's deliverance: His power over nature, over the attackers of His city, and over the created world.

1. God's Power Over Nature

"Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging" (Ps. 46:2, 3, NIV).

The first strophe, verses one to three, pictures God in control over some of the most frightening forces we can encounter—catastrophic upheavals in the earth itself. What could evoke

fear more strongly than the giving way of that which humans regard as most unchanging, the very earth we dwell on? Anyone who has experienced a major earthquake understands the terror we feel when "terra firma" sways and pitches under us.

The shade of meaning suggested by the RSV, "though the earth should change," speaks to a growing concern in the last decade of this century: our earth is in danger of "change" in the greenhouse effect that threatens catastrophic alteration in climate and productivity, and in the heightened danger of skin cancer as a result of the effect of pollutants in the atmosphere. It is hard to contemplate such pervasive alteration without fear.

Like the earth itself, the mountains seem an element impregnable by time or man's depredations. Members of my family witnessed the side of an Andean mountain break away, hurling boulders that flattened a loaded cattle truck and several other vehicles. That was a small landslide compared to a whole mountain falling into the sea, a mountain chain quaking and surging. Imagine the terror! The strongest, most ancient and unchanging forces known to man personified as quaking with fear—what an extension of ultimate terror!

In contrast to the unchanging stability man has experienced in the earth and the everlasting hills, the sea personifies all that is restless, menacing, destructive.

by Minon A. Hamm

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Television has brought into our living rooms terrifying views of its roaring under the power of hurricane forces. Throughout literature the storming sea symbolizes terrifying destruction. Here, the poem's first strophe pictures the worst physical calamities language can evoke. And God is shown as powerful, by His very presence, not only to shelter us from disaster, but to keep us from fear.

One additional aspect of destruction is suggested in the first line, where God is seen not only as refuge but as strength. The word *refuge* conjures up a stronghold fortified against attack, connoting deliverance from external danger. But *strength* suggests fortification from within. Perhaps the most terrifying threats come, not from nature's cataclysms, but from forces inside us, which are out of control and threaten to destroy us and others. God, ever present, is the antidote for these, as well.

Which type of destructive forces, the possibility of external cataclysms or the sense of being internally out of control, threaten you the most? Why? How can you practice the calming presence of Jesus as the antidote to fear?

2. God's Power Over Attackers of His City

"There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, the holy place where the Most High dwells. God is within her, she will not fall; God will help her at break of day" (Ps. 46:4, 5, NIV).

In striking contrast to the images of destruction the poet has portrayed, we now glimpse a scene that ranks with "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want" as an evocation of sheer peace. In place of the raging, angry sea, we view a peaceful, life-giving river and a majestic city. Calm, pure

water forms a powerful archetype of well-being and nurture; an abundant water source is a basic human need. What difference a life-giving river can make in an arid scene!

Recently I journeyed for hours through the hot brown dryness of Nebraska's sand hills, seemingly empty of human inhabitants and apparently inhospitable to the occasional herds of cattle clustered around a lone windmill and its water tank. Suddenly the road crested one more sand-hill ridge and, spread out in the valley before me, wound a sky-blue river widening into a chain of turquoise lakes, the terrain on each bank lush with emerald grassland and flourishing trees, fat cattle dozing under their shade. The river brought life to the sere, brown surroundings! It "made glad" my heart just to behold the scene.

And the city? It is the city of God, one of the great themes of the Bible. God had chosen Jerusalem, an unlikely heathen citadel, as His earthly dwelling place, the symbol of His favor, and the choice was just as much a miracle as was His choice of David the shepherd lad as the archetypal king who symbolized the Saviour to come.

That we are here dealing with a symbolic city and river is indicated by the fact that there is no river in literal Jerusalem, its water furnished in ancient times by a laboriously constructed aqueduct. Thus we must be focusing on the heavenly Zion, God's dwelling place, which earthly Jerusalem, and particularly the Temple, symbolized. We can compare Ezekiel's account (chapter 47) of the river flowing from the Temple giving life to the land and John's heavenly vision of the river of life.

Yet the peaceful city is assailed; it is under siege, surrounded by enemy forces. Not to

fear—the center of the city's power, her God, is in her very center, and that power makes her walls impregnable. The statement that He will help her at break of day evokes the marvelous deliverance that became for the Hebrews and for us the symbol of all future deliverances. At the Red Sea we are told that "Moses stretched out his hand over the sea, and at day-break the sea went back to its place" (Ex. 14:27, NIV), annihilating the threatening forces of Pharaoh's oppression.

We can look forward to the "dawn of the golden morning" when Jesus' second coming will blot out the enemies who stand ready to obliterate the faithful. The eschatological application of this passage is reinforced by comparison of Peter's prediction that on the day of the Lord "the heavens will disappear with a roar; the elements will be destroyed by fire" (2 Peter 3:10, NIV) with the poem's quiet statement "He lifts his voice, the earth melts" (Ps. 46:6, NIV).

Let us note that it is "his voice" that melts the earth. Just as God initially created heaven and earth by the spoken word, just so His voice brings it to its end, this poor old tottering, worn-out, sin-ruined planet, freeing His people from earthly existence with all the suffering and loss that it implies, and creating, again by His powerful word, "new heavens and a new earth" (Isa. 65:17) where they can live with Him forever in safety and righteousness. So it is His presence in its midst and the power of His voice which saves His city, and His chosen ones whom the city symbolizes.

Am I letting the utterances of His voice, His powerful promises, melt the destructive forces that rage around and within me today? How is this possible?

3. God's Power Over the Created World

"Come and see the works of the Lord, the desolations he has brought on the earth. He makes wars cease to the ends of the earth; he breaks the bow and shatters the spear, he burns the shields with fire" (Ps. 46:8, 9, NIV).

Now the psalmist gives us a vision of things to come, though the victories of the present are certainly a foretaste of them. The word translated "behold" in the KJV, "come and see" in the NIV, usually implies seeing with the inward eye, or like John the revelator being shown a heavenly vision, "Then I saw a new heaven."

What *we* are seeing as God "makes wars cease" is not gentle persuasion, but the process of judgment. The reassurance is set in a context of a world devastated and forcibly disarmed, as God breaks the implements of war, smashing and shattering the destructive power of the evil one.

And the injunction "Be still, and know that I am God" is not, at least to begin with, an invitation to quiet assurance. It is a command, "Stop your striving!" reminiscent of Jesus' rebuke to the angry wind and waves, "Peace! Be still!" It can be applied to all our efforts to save ourselves by our own merits. *He* is God; only *He* can speak peace, either to exterior forces of evil or to the sin-clamor within. He promises a sure outcome; He *will* "be exalted in the earth." And He is willing to be exalted in your life and mine.

What are the "bows" and "spears" that I need to let God break in order to set me free from my fears? How does this psalm give me assurance that He can and will do that?

God Is Our Refuge and Strength

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 46:1

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble” (Ps. 46:1). This verse has probably been uttered more times than any other by people in times of fear and need. Unfortunately, many people apply this verse *only* to situations requiring immediate help or attention from God.

However, this wonderful verse of Psalm 46 is applicable to our everyday lives. Ellen White illustrates throughout her writings that God should be the refuge and strength of our *daily* experience.

Take for example her comments about Enoch’s walk with the Lord:

“While engaged in our daily work, we should lift the soul to heaven in prayer. These silent petitions rise like incense before the throne of grace; and the enemy is baffled. The Christian whose heart is thus stayed upon

God cannot be overcome. No evil arts can destroy his peace. . . . It was thus that Enoch walked with God. And God was with him, a present help in every time of need.”¹

In extreme times of need and in our everyday walk with the Lord, we should never depend on ourselves for strength.

“God is our strength. We must look to Him for wisdom and guidance. . . . We should individually seek to obtain new victory [through His strength] every day.”²

Allowing God to be our refuge and strength every day involves trust, and God will do great things for His people when they put their trust in Him. “Christ will prove a never-failing source of strength, a present help in every time of trouble.”³

REACT

How do we develop the trust essential to allowing Christ’s complete control of our lives?

1. *Gospel Workers*, p. 254.

2. *Early Writings*, p. 105.

3. *Testimonies*, vol. 2, p. 140.

by David K. Tan

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Wednesday, September 19

Luther's Courage

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 46:1

Martin Luther was a German miner's son who became an Augustinian monk in 1505. Tormented by a keen conscience and profound fear of hell, he sought nothing but holiness of soul. He found it only when he learned that God was for him and not against him, and trusted in Christ's righteousness rather than his own for salvation.

Armed with gospel truth, Luther withstood all the fiery attacks of the evil one. In 1517 he posted his 95 theses on the door of the castle church in Wittenberg for debate, but no one accepted the challenge. Copies spread all over Europe; they were an idea whose time had come.

In 1519 Luther entered a debate at Leipzig with John Eck, a professor from the University of Ingolstadt. Taking a stand on the Bible as his authority, Luther found himself classed with John Huss of Bohemia, who had been burned at the stake for his faith a century earlier.

In 1520 Luther was officially excommunicated. Wherever the papal representatives publishing the bull could gather a favorable crowd, they burned Luther's books. But in some places the executioners refused to light the fires, and in some instances, stu-

dents added works of Roman theology. When the bull finally reached Luther, he had a bonfire of his own, burning papal constitutions, canon law, and more theology. For good measure he added the bull itself.

In 1521 Luther was summoned to answer before the Imperial Diet at Worms. Warned by friends that his life was in danger, Luther answered, "Even though there should be as many devils in Worms as shingles on the roof, I would still enter." He was determined to witness to the gospel. Commanded to repudiate his books and their errors, Luther replied, "Unless I am convicted by the testimony of the Scriptures or by clear reason . . . my conscience is captive to the Word of God. I cannot do otherwise. Here I stand. God help me." Not for 1,000 years had anyone so challenged the pope.

What gave Luther his courage? How could the simple miner's son stand up to pope and emperor? The answer is expressed in his hymn "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," written at the Diet of Speyers in 1529, when the Lutheran princes earned the name Protestant for their opposition to the papacy. The hymn is based on Psalm 46:1. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble" (NIV). Luther knew by experience that the one who finds his refuge in God need not fear.

by Ralph E. Neall

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Strength in the Face of Discouragement

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 43:5

King David was having a frustrating, discouragingly bad day. Possibly a bad week. Maybe even a bad year. His enemies were many; his victories, few. The people of Israel, although they had not openly turned completely against God, fell painfully short of God's ideal.

David begged God to give him strength. "Vindicate me, O God, and plead my cause against an ungodly nation; rescue me from deceitful and wicked men. . . . Why must I go about mourning, oppressed by the enemy?" (Ps. 43:1, 2, NIV).

We all feel oppressed at times. We feel the need to be rescued, or at least relieved from our troubles. When David felt discouraged, he asked God to guide him with "light and . . . truth" (verse 3, NIV). The way David dealt with his frustration hundreds of years ago provides some meaningful guidelines for us today.

1. You don't have to face your enemies alone. Whether that enemy is your parents' painful divorce, memories of a difficult childhood, financial difficulties, or a struggle with yourself—you can count on God to strengthen you

and help you through even the toughest times.

2. It's OK to admit weakness and insecurity. David did, and he was finally one of God's greatest successes. In admitting your inabilities, you give God greater room to work in your life. The more *you* can't change, the more there is for God to change in you—in a better way than you ever thought possible. Until you see your smallness, there won't be room for God's greatness in your life.

3. After putting your trust in God, open your heart and thank Him. David praised God through song. You too need to express thanks for the strength and love God has showered upon you. Then share that love and strength. Listen to someone else who is feeling the pain that you've experienced. Give that person a vision of the One who gave you success in the face of discouragement.

4. Realize that God is always available and reachable. When David asked God to send light and truth, he added, "Let them bring me to your holy mountain, to the place where you dwell" (verse 3, NIV). As a child of God, you always belong. You always have a place to call home.

by Jennifer Schmitt

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Friday, September 21

The Easy Answer

OPINION

Key Text: Ps. 46:1, 2

How simplistic! It sounds like the old "just pray about it" answer to all the problems of life. "God is our refuge and strength, an ever present help in trouble. *Therefore we will not fear*" (Ps. 46:1, 2, NIV). Oh, yeah? The earth has given way, the mountains have fallen, the waters are roaring; and the ecologists, geologists, marine biologists, and seismologists are carefully analyzing all the data and are even now preparing their predictions regarding the future of our planet. And this is supposed to make you feel more secure?

And what about wars and people problems? It's easy for David to say that God will make wars cease and destroy all the bows, spears, and shields. But what about the B-1 bomber, nuclear warheads, and Star Wars laser beams? We need Pentagons, State Departments, and political analysts. With all this international intelligentsia going for you, don't you just feel a whole lot safer?

In Psalm 46 David draws a picture of a world in upheaval and a peaceful little city in the middle of all this turmoil with peaceful little streams making the city happy. God is within the city, so everything is just fine. Come now, isn't that a little like the ostrich with his head in the sand? God hasn't given us brains for noth-

ing, and He expects us to use them. We can solve the problems of this world if we all hold hands and work together, or wield a bigger stick than anybody else and restrict people through legislation and power. Then we can all live "happily" ever after. Don't you feel better already?

With all the modern answers and right methods for fixing everything, surely following the simplistic approach of Psalm 46 doesn't make sense. Or does it? After a notable victory in the days of Jehoshaphat, the Israelites sang this hymn (see *Prophets and Kings*, pp. 201-203). Now the Israelites were at times considered pretty good warriors. Granted, the Lord had to deliver them miraculously from some of their enemies, but they also knew how to take care of themselves. Yet after victory was theirs, they sang Psalm 46, acknowledging God as their refuge and strength.

Martin Luther used to sing this hymn during times of trouble. He even paraphrased it into a song familiar to many of us ("A Mighty Fortress") at a time when he could have looked at the success he was having in exposing the corruption of the papacy. Yet he sought solace in knowing of the river that made glad the city of God. Since God was with him, he would not fall.

John Wesley used verse 7 for his comfort as he courageously met his demise. Throughout the night before he died he was heard quoting it: "The Lord Almighty is

by Rich Carlson

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with us; the God of Jacob is our fortress" (NIV). And even for us in the last days, when the final chapter of the great controversy is upon us, Psalm 46 will bring special comfort to the people of God (see *The Great Controversy*, p. 639).

The close of Psalm 46 provides meaningful insight for us as we face the close of this earth's history. "Be still, and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth" (verse 10, NIV). We talk too much, listen too little, and lack Christian poise and steadiness because of our ceaseless busyness. We with our fix-it

mentality to make everything work out usually get in God's way. We read Ephesians 6 and see all the armor of God and think that means God needs us to go out and battle the enemy in our own strength. On the contrary, God gives us all the armor so that we can safely "stand [our] ground, and after [we] have done everything, to stand" (verse 13, NIV). Stand and watch what God can do. It seems simplistic, but it is God's way.

To "be still and know" is to quit, to give up our own way, to observe the acts of God, and to have confidence that He will lead us to the glad city.

Lesson 13, September 23 - 29

Let's Sing the Doxology More Often



“Praise our God, O peoples, let the sound of his praise be heard; he has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping” (Ps. 66:8, 9, NIV).

Thankfulness, the Posthole Method

INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Ps. 66:3

“Let’s go around the circle and tell something that we are thankful for.” Does your mind go blank when the discussion leader makes such a request? When is the last time you took a thankfulness inventory? And how long has it been since you were overcome with the urge to sing the doxology? Studying Psalm 66 for this article has caused me to do both!

What kind of things are you thankful for? It’s easy to be thankful when you suddenly come into a lot of money or when you find out that you are not going to lose those hard-earned dollars! “Praise the Lord” comes easily when you narrowly escape an accident, or a friend makes a miraculous recovery from illness. Unfortunately such incidents don’t happen often. How do you sustain an attitude of thankfulness? When you are in a circle of people telling what they are thankful for, do you have anything to say if others have already mentioned the weather and their health?

One of my history teachers used to talk about “postholing” as

a method of teaching history. This approach involves stringing the course of history on the “posts” of significant events. I have borrowed this method and applied it to sustaining thankfulness. In this application the posts are special experiences for which you are thankful. They do not have to be grand or exciting—just special. Take time this week to think about your posthole experiences.

It is possible to stretch the fence metaphor a little farther. Sometimes it is hard to be thankful, and at other times, when tragedy strikes, you are simply not grateful. At such times a strong “thankfulness fence” provides boundaries for your pain and sorrow. A spirit of thankfulness is a mighty bulwark against times of trouble! A person prone to doubt can string the existence of God and faith in His Word between these posts of thankfulness.

Read Psalm 66 several times this week, and ask yourself what makes the psalmist so thankful. What do you think were his posthole experiences? After you take your thankfulness inventory, you might try to write your own psalm of gratitude.

by Victor F. Brown

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Monday, September 24

Praise the Lord!

LOGOS

Ps. 66

Theme: Is There Praise in Your Heart? *There is so much for which to praise our Creator. His hand has been over His people throughout history. He has tested and tried the faithful, has delivered them from apostasy and captivity, and has answered their prayers for restoration to loving fellowship with Himself*

Most Christians understand that worship is impossible without praise to God. The expression of praise in the sanctuary, however, can be a controversial subject. Is it appropriate to applaud a stirring sermon passage or moving special music? Some members feel that applause is an irreverent and dangerous outburst, which glorifies the gift with scant reference to the Eternal Giver. Others view it as a natural response, by which God is honored. Nevertheless, everyone would concur that God is worthy to be praised.

Praise to God can take many forms and may be a response to many motivations. The author of Psalm 66 examines some of these in an overview that begins by enjoining "all the earth" to praise the Lord and concludes with his personal testimony and thanksgiving. The spectrum of this praise progression runs from the global to the corporate to the individual. Our study of the

psalmist's thoughts on this subject may bring the purpose of praise and worship today into sharper focus.

1. Shouting to God for Joy (read Ps. 66:1-4)

"Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glory and praise!" (verses 1, 2, NIV).

The psalmist opens, not with a request that God be praised, but with a command. It seems strange that praise is required, not optional, for everyone on earth—friend and enemy, Christian and heathen, righteous and wicked. Is such an idea consistent with the concepts of a loving God, and human beings as free moral agents? Is it realistic to expect such global agreement ever to take place?

It might be helpful here to differentiate between acknowledgment and adoration. Even demons have acknowledged that Jesus is the Son of God, which is high praise. The wicked will grudgingly acknowledge God's justice in the judgment. They will simply not be able to reach any other conclusion when they face overwhelming power and evidence (see verse 3).

Change does not always follow the recognition of truth. Most smokers recognize that tobacco shortens their lives, but they continue to smoke. That is why such grudging "praise" to God from the wicked may be much more inevitable than it is desirable.

by W. G. Nelson

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Nevertheless, "all the earth shall worship thee."

How would you describe your reaction to grudging praise? Can God take any satisfaction in the "praise" of the wicked?

2. Grateful to the God of History (read Ps. 66:5-7)

"Come and see what God has done, how awesome his works in man's behalf!" (verse 5, NIV).

Many commentators view verses 1-7 as a continuum. Not until verse 5, however, does the psalmist make an evidentiary appeal to history. God has miraculously led His people in the past. Historical God is worthy of praise.

"But what has He done for me lately? And what about tomorrow?" The psalmist anticipates these questions and asserts that "he ruleth by his power for ever" (verse 7). God is the alpha and omega, the God of yesterday, today, and forever. We can praise Him as the master of the past, present, and future.

Does my own praise to God emphasize the past, present, or future? What does this tell me about my relationship with God? Where should my praise properly focus? Why?

3. The Blessing of God in Our Life (read Ps. 66:8-12)

"We went through fire and water, but you brought us to a place of abundance" (verse 12, NIV).

While God moves on behalf of all people in history, He has led in a singular way on behalf of Israel, the chosen people; the church; and the remnant. Special blessings have come to the body of believers, and special praise for such blessings may be in order.

But can imprisonment, oppression, and slavery be considered God's blessing or curse? The

author chooses to regard them, not as obstacles, but as means to the desired end. God "preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping" while He "refined us like silver," led us "through fire and water," and "brought us to a place of abundance" (verses 9-12, NIV). The psalmist seems to imply a cause-effect relationship.

God is always consistent and never capricious. All things really do work "together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose" (Rom. 8:28). Experience teaches the mature Christian to praise God in all circumstances, since He can turn both our corporate and individual sorrows into joys.

What allows the seeming curses of life to become blessings? Give an example. How does the opportunity for praise in corporate worship differ from that in private devotions?

4. The Human Response in Worship (read Ps. 66:13-15)

"I will come to your temple with burnt offerings and fulfill my vows to you" (verse 13, NIV).

The psalmist now shifts his focus from corporate to individual praise within the church-worship framework. Although we no longer need the ceremonial system of the Hebrews, we should make room in our congregational worship tradition for individual offerings of praise to God.

How many of us have had a near-death experience that elicited the quick offering of a prayer of thanks to God? It is reassuring to know that we hold this experience in common with the author of this psalm. Considering his obligation under the law of vows (see Deut. 23:21-23; Num. 30; and Lev. 27) to be binding, he prepared to discharge his duty by offering the appropriate sacrifice.

He felt compelled to do so in spite of the fact that the oath was uttered under duress. Should we feel similarly obligated today?

How could we create opportunities in a traditional Adventist worship service for the individual to praise God? Would this be desirable? Why or why not?

5. The Psalmist's Personal Testimony (read Ps. 66:16-20)

"Come and listen, all you who fear God; let me tell you what he has done for me" (verse 16, NIV). The progression of praise outlined in this scripture passage culminates with the psalmist's personal testimony of the power of God in his life. He claims this power as one who has committed sin but who has obtained God's blessing because he has not cherished evil in his heart. God accepted his en-

treaty and granted him love and mercy.

Sharing our experience in the Lord is the most intimate form of praise. It is witnessing in the truest sense. Like the psalmist, we simply state what we personally know of God and His life-changing power. We relate what God has done for us and in us. Our testimony may not be eloquent, polished, or complicated, but it has great power to strengthen and convict those who hear it. It is more than mere rational evidence. It gives courage and hope to all. What sweeter praise could there be to God's ears than the sharing of our joy at realizing salvation in Jesus?

Why are we reluctant to share our Christian experience with others? What do we fear?

Living a Joyful Noise

TESTIMONY

Key Text: Ps. 66:1, 2

Psalm 66 invites us to “make a joyful noise unto God.” In fact, Jesus did just that. “This psalm and portions of the sixty-eighth and seventy-second psalms were often sung by Christ.”¹ But He did more than merely *make* a joyful noise—He *lived* it. Like Him, we too can experience the kind of joy that, regardless of circumstances, wells up in praise from deep within and permeates every facet of life.

“As Christians we ought to praise God more than we do. We ought to bring more of the brightness of His love into our lives. As by faith we look to Jesus His joy and peace are reflected from the countenances. How earnestly we should seek so to relate ourselves to God that our faces may reflect the sunshine of His love! When our own souls are vivified by the Holy Spirit, we shall exert an uplifting influence upon others who know not the joy of Christ’s presence.”²

Joy and praise are easiest when things are well with us, but especially in our lowest times, a song of praise may be what’s needed most to reestablish the relationship that can recharge and revive. “The world’s Redeemer ac-

cepts men as they are, with all their wants, imperfections, and weaknesses; and He will not only cleanse from sin and grant redemption through His blood, but will satisfy the heart-longing of all who consent to wear His yoke, to bear His burden. It is His purpose to impart peace and rest to all who come to Him for the bread of life. He requires us to perform only those duties that will lead our steps to heights of bliss to which the disobedient can never attain. The true, joyous life of the soul is to have Christ formed within, the hope of glory.”³

But we are cautioned, “Happiness that is sought from selfish motives, outside the path of duty, is ill-balanced, fitful, and transitory; it passes away, and the soul is filled with loneliness and sorrow; but there is joy and satisfaction in the service of God.”⁴

Joy, real exhilaration, the feeling that life is wondrous, is not manufactured. Rather, it is a by-product of cultivating relationships. It springs from empathy—really knowing and experiencing the interdependence of God, others, and self.

REACT

1. Why was Psalm 66 one of Jesus’ favorite songs?

2. What are the elements of joy? of praise?

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, Ellen G. White Comments, vol. 3, p. 1148.

2. *Ibid.*

3. *Steps to Christ*, pp. 46, 47.

4. *Ibid.*, p. 124.

by Robert R. Mendenhall

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Wednesday, September 26

“Praise the Lord Anyway”

EVIDENCE

Key Text: Ps. 66:8-12

I came face to face with a short, bubbly, obviously charismatic, middle-aged woman. I have long since forgotten the circumstances under which we met, but I especially remember the button she was wearing on her collar. It read “Praise the Lord Anyway.” My reaction at that moment was *Oh, brother, another Pentecostal out to witness by buttonhole evangelism. I’ll bet she has three or four bumper stickers saying the same thing on her car.*

But the incident set me to thinking. It’s easy to praise God when things go well, but it becomes increasingly difficult to praise Him when things start to fall apart. This tendency bespeaks our human nature, but somehow David learned to praise God in all circumstances.

Look again at the key text. Evidently God allowed calamity to befall the Israelites to test their loyalty to Him. He often uses the same *modus operandi* (method of procedure) on us. How do we react to hardship? I know people who blame God for every bad thing that occurs. According to their way of thinking, He should rightly be held responsible for everything that happens—good or bad—since He is in control. But we need to remember that while God has *ultimate* control, He allows Satan *limited* control in the

affairs of humanity.

Consider Job as an example. God granted the devil access to this great man of faith. Satan took from him everything of value but his life, yet his continued trust in God radiated in his words: “Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him” (Job 13:15).

I believe Paul experienced the same searing, purifying lesson as Job. The great apostle remarks: “But we also glory in tribulations, knowing that tribulation produces perseverance; and perseverance, character; and character, hope” (Rom. 5:3, 4, NKJV).

Perhaps God allows us to experience trials so that we can come to know ourselves, develop complete trust in Him, and learn to praise Him in all circumstances. In the crucible of the difficulties in our life He refines and purifies our characters.

A striking modern-day illustration of Paul’s and David’s texts comes from a concentration camp during World War II. Corrie Ten Boom and her sister Betsy were confined in Ravensbruck for hiding Jews in their home. They soon discovered that in addition to filth, stench, and extreme overcrowding, their barracks had an infestation of biting fleas that left welts. One day Corrie, especially disgusted with the fleas, blamed God, complaining about having to endure fleas along with all the other hardships of the camp. Betsy immediately reminded Corrie to “praise God in all

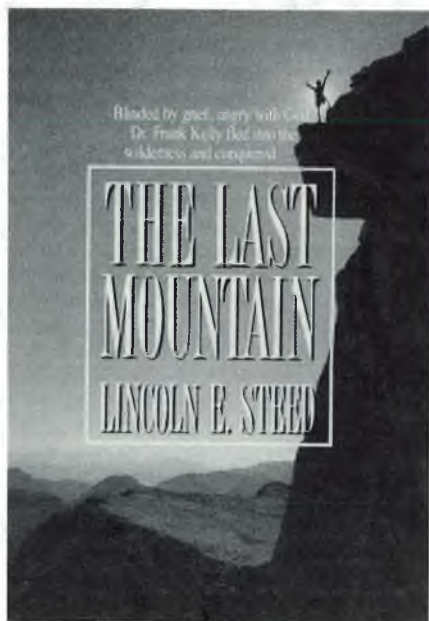
by Larry R. Moore

Larry R. Moore is the senior pastor of the Keene Seventh-day Adventist Church, Keene, Texas.

things” and pointed out that because of the fleas, the guards would not enter the barracks (a circumstance that enabled them to study the Bible and hold prayer meetings every evening). “God sent the fleas, Corrie; praise God in all things.”

A good test of our Christian ex-

perience would be to examine our words when trouble arises. Are they blessings or curses? Psalm 66 was one of those songs Jesus sang while He was on this earth. I understand that He often sang as He went about His daily activities. Maybe we could benefit by following our Saviour’s example.



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Thursday, September 27

How to Praise God Silently

HOW-TO

Key Text: Ps. 66:8, 9

Although we may not agree with the religious philosophy of Ralph Waldo Emerson, many of his ideas concerning solitude and meditation may hold some religious significance for us. For example, in his essay "Self-reliance" the Quaker overtone of the statement "I like the silent church before the service begins, better than any preaching" has a nostalgic note of sadness for me, since I have not exactly experienced, but continually wish for, a specific time of absolute silence in corporate church worship.

In her book *The Human Condition* Hannah Arendt emphasizes that all thought "must culminate in the absolute quiet of contemplation. Every movement, the movements of body and soul as well as of speech and reasoning, must cease before Truth. . . . Christian truth of the living God can reveal itself only in complete silence."¹

1. Meditation, an Act of Worship. Few of us think of meditation as part of corporate worship. We have apparently neglected to create an environment for meditation during the church service. Although we constantly remind one another to praise God by giving our tithes and offerings, we allow little, if any, time for meditation.

The art of meditation had its origin at the time of Ignatius of Loyola (1491-1556), founder of the

Society of Jesus, who insisted that one month each year be set aside for devotional intensity. Ignatius emphasized the importance of the image-forming faculty to provide a concrete and vivid setting for a meditation on visible things. The meditation process included purgation (confession of sins) and meditation on the life of Christ from the Incarnation to Palm Sunday, and on the events of Passion Week, the Resurrection, and the Ascension.

In the seventeenth century Richard Baxter wrote the first Puritan treatise on the art of methodical meditation. According to Baxter, the reason for so many "forlorn, uncomfortable, despairing" Christians was "their ignorance, and unconscionable neglect, of meditation."²

Writing in the late nineteenth century, Ellen G. White emphasized the value of private meditation: "It would be well for us to spend a thoughtful hour each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. We should take it point by point, and let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. As we thus dwell upon His great sacrifice for us, our confidence in Him will become more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His spirit."³

2. Singing Praises With the Mind. Our key text, Psalm 66:8, 9, "Let everyone bless God and sing his praises, for he holds our

by Herbert J. Roth

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lives in his hands" (TLB), can be interpreted variously. For some people, praise may be a nonverbal, existential experience: "Be still and know that I am God" (46:10). Others contend that there is too much formality in our religious services and that we need to be more vocal in our praise. Still others praise God through witnessing. However, for most Christians, hymn singing is one of the greatest human agencies of praise.

Yet we are still at a considerable distance from Saint Paul's ideal as set forth in 1 Corinthians 14:15: "I will sing with my spirit, but I will also sing with my mind" (NIV). "Singing with my spirit" is clearly evident in the history of the early Chris-

tians, the early Protestants, and the Wesleyan revivals of the eighteenth century. The idea of "singing with my mind" may have been neglected by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Christians. Today it is entirely possible that when a congregation gives thoughtful attention to the words of a hymn and appropriates them as an expression of its own worship, the act of praising God in song will take on an entirely new dimension.

REACT

1. Besides providing a specific time for quiet meditation, how would you make the worship service more appealing?

2. What other spiritual insights can be found in Psalm 66?

1. Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 16.

2. Richard Baxter, *The Saints' Everlasting Rest*.

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

Friday, September 28

Objective Praise, David!

OPINION

Key Text: Rev. 4:11

“Shout with joy to God, all the earth! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glory and praise!” (Ps. 66:1, 2, NIV). How intense is the psalmist’s worship! Why should he be fairly bursting with such praise? Has God done something special for him?

Indeed He has. And you can be sure David is not slow in letting his hearers know just what God has done for His people and for David personally. Verses 5-12 list many worthy reasons to glorify Yahweh. Can’t you just hear David? “Come and see what God has done” (verse 5, NIV). “Check out His awesome works! He parted the Red Sea so that Moses could lead the Israelites to safety; He dried up the Jordan to give the Hebrews entrance into the Promised Land.” Calling for Israel to rejoice in God, David continues, “He has preserved our lives and kept our feet from slipping” (verse 9, NIV). Evidently the psalmist and his people are familiar with trial and trouble. God’s testing had brought them into prison with heavy burdens and much persecution (see verses 10-12), but Yahweh rescued them and delivered the Israelites into an abundant land. So now, of course, God is to be greatly praised because of what He has done. Right?

Hold on a minute, David. God is to be praised *because of* what He has done? Are you saying that if the last phrase in verse 12 had not been completed, if you had not been “brought . . . to a place of abundance” (NIV), then God would not be worthy of praise? Would you not have come into His Temple and fulfilled your vows or offered your sacrifices (verses 13-15)? Would God not have been listening to your prayer—indeed, rejected it even (verses 19, 20)—had He chosen not to deliver you to that abundant place?

You know, if I could chat with David for a few minutes, I’d fill him in on pure, objective worship. I’d tell him how we should praise God for who He is, our Creator, not for what He does for us. Come on, I’d say, is God some kind of sugar daddy? Isn’t He worthy of honor, even if He doesn’t act on my behalf, or must I get something from Him before I can worship and praise Him (and mean it)? I’d share with David my reasons for worshipping the Lord—reasons such as . . . well . . . like, for saving me from eternal ruin and . . . let’s see . . . for leading me to a precious, lifelong mate . . . and oh, yes! . . . for working out the opportunity for me to attend college to better myself . . . and . . . whoops! On second thought, David, how about just getting together and talking about the goodness of the Lord?

by Bill Lundeen

Bill Lundeen is a senior religion major at Southwestern Adventist College, Keene, Texas.

Next Quarter's Lessons The Letter to the Romans

For readers who have not yet received a copy of COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY for fourth quarter 1990, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

Lesson 1: Called to Belong

Scripture: Rom. 1

Theme: Salvation Freely Offered to All. God's righteousness, freely available to all, is His gracious gift of eternal salvation.

Lesson 2: Why Do People Need God?

Scripture: Rom. 2

Theme: All of Us Are Sinners in Need of a Saviour. Whatever our nationality, race, social standing, or level of education, we are in need of a Saviour.

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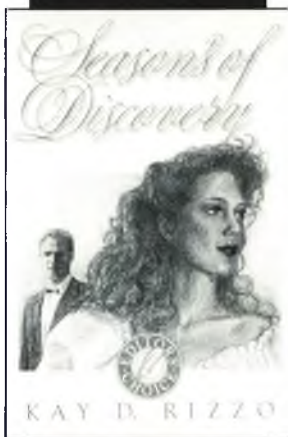
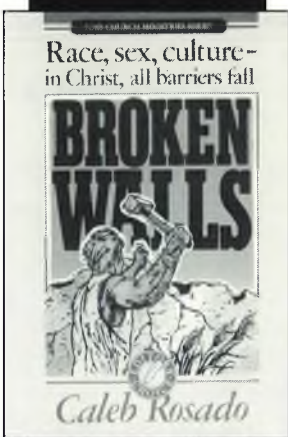
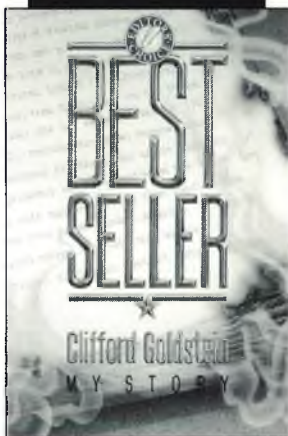
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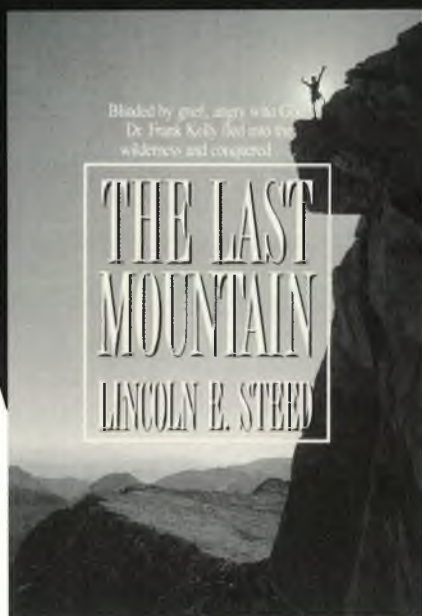


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