

OCTOBER-DECEMBER 1999

*Church:  
A  
Family  
of  
Friends*

COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY





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# CHURCH: A FAMILY OF FRIENDS

OCTOBER - DECEMBER 1999

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

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

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

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

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*CQ* (ISSN 0744-2939). Volume 22, No. 4. Published quarterly by the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. and printed by Pacific Press® Publishing Association, 1350 North Kings Road, Nampa, ID 83687-3193, U.S.A. Place orders with Pacific Press® Pub. Assn., P.O. Box 5353, Nampa, ID 83653-5353, U.S.A. One-year subscription in U.S.A., \$13.50; single copy, \$5.95. One-year subscription in countries outside U.S.A., \$16.50; single copy, \$5.95. All prices at U.S.A. exchange. Periodicals postage paid at Nampa, ID 83687.

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

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Printed in the U.S.A.



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## Welcome to *CQ*'s World!

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

In producing this unique Sabbath School lesson quarterly, more than 300 individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond individually to the subject under study.

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

# Ever think about writing a Sabbath School Quarterly?

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

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

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**CQ**  
COLLEGIATE QUARTERLY

## This Quarter's Illustrator



Annette Agard graduated from art college in the west of England in 1983, after studying graphic design and illustration. She worked first in the art department at Stanborough Press, England's Seventh-day Adventist publishing house. While there she designed and illustrated a variety of publications, including the well-loved children's series, Uncle Arthur's Bedtime Stories. Currently working on a postgraduate degree in art education, she teaches art and design in a London high school.

# Getting the Most Out of *CQ*

## Facts You Should Know

*CQ* is based on the conviction that the Word of God offers transforming power and that group study is one important way to tap into that power. *CQ*'s purpose is to provide Seventh-day Adventist young adults with a resource for devotional study on mutual topics, which can then be discussed each week in Sabbath School. Many who use the adult quarterly find that because *CQ* deals with the same topics as the adult quarterly, it enriches lesson study and discussion as a supplemental aid.

Adventist young-adult groups work together in producing this quarterly. More than three hundred individuals contribute to *CQ* each year. The wide variety—and occasional repetition—of the content reflects the great diversity of its contributors around the world as they respond creatively and individually to the subject.

Circulation of *CQ* is about 59,000.

## Pointers for Study

1. Through prayer, open your mind to the Holy Spirit's guidance as you study.
2. The Bible passage on which each week's lesson is based appears in bold type in the "Logos" (Monday's portion of the lesson). Read this entire passage in conjunction with the quarterly introduction to give you an overview of the lesson.
3. The Bible passage for the week is divided into sections on the "Logos" pages (Monday's portion of the lesson). When studying this section, carefully reread the Bible passages indicated in bold headings before reading the comments beneath the heading.
4. Read the remainder of the sections for the week with the perspective you have gained from your own study of the biblical passage.
5. Keep in mind the purposes of each section of the quarterly:
  - "Introduction" (Sunday) is designed to stimulate your interest and focus your thinking on the week's theme.
  - "Logos" (Monday), as described above, is a guide for direct study of the Bible passage for the week.
  - "Testimony" (Tuesday) presents Ellen White's perspective on the lesson theme.
  - "Evidence" (Wednesday) approaches issues raised by the lesson from a historical, scientific, philosophical, or theological perspective.
  - "How-To" (Thursday) discusses what the abstractions in the lesson mean for day-to-day living.
  - "Opinion" (Friday), a personal viewpoint on the lesson, is meant to encourage further thought and discussion.

## *CQ* and the Church

*CQ* is the General Conference-approved quarterly for the collegiate/young-adult age group. It upholds the beliefs of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. *However, its contents should not be regarded as official pronouncements of the church.*

# WE ARE FAMILY



**“ ‘Here are My mother and My brothers! For whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother’ ” (Matt. 12:49, 50, NKJV).**

# That Sisterly Bond

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Matt. 12:50**

I grew up with a sister who is two years older than me. Like many a younger sister, I often made my sister's life miserable. Although I was rarely punished, my parents used to punish my sister often, even when it was partly my fault. Sometimes she was punished for things that were mostly my fault. Once I stayed out late, and my sister told me later that my parents yelled at her that night as though it were her fault that I stayed out late. When I came home that night, the house was silent.

Another way I made my sister's life miserable was that I often borrowed her clothes without her permission. When she found out about it, she became very angry. But I continued to borrow her clothes for many years, regardless of how angry she became. Although I made my sister's life miserable, like a typical sister, she would eventually forgive me. Because of that sisterly bond that exists between us, we've always remained close, regardless of my faults.

Though faults can be overlooked in a sisterly relationship, they usually cause a permanent strain in a friendship. In many cases, the friendship may end. Between sisters, unconditional love is automatically resident in the relationship; with friends the love must be earned.

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## **My parents yelled at her that night as though it were her fault that I stayed out late.**

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So it is no wonder that Jesus said, " 'Whoever does the will of My Father in heaven is My brother and sister and mother' " (Matt. 12:50, NKJV). He was familiar with that special bond between sisters and brothers. He wanted us to treat everyone, especially our fellow church believers, as sisters and brothers. How powerful our church message could be if we would unite in sisterhood and brotherhood!

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*By Kyung Yang, a registered nurse from Novi, Michigan.*

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## The Unit

### LOGOS

**Ps. 27:10; 34:8; Isa. 41:10; Jer. 31:3; John 3:16; Rom. 5:5; 1 Pet. 2:9**

Growing up in a family of four siblings on our father's meager salary, my siblings and I knew the real meaning of "survival of the fittest." Anything new was snatched up. Though sharing was imposed upon us, we were always struggling for "my share" (and robbing the others of theirs). Many times I would have unblinkingly traded off all my siblings for a room of my own—or maybe even a couple brand new sweaters. But as years have passed, even with the best of friends, blood has proved thicker than water. Though my brother once gave me a bloody nose and my sisters wanted me to "get lost" while they were with their friends, I can't imagine life without even one of them now.

What one word comes to mind when you hear "family"? Warmth? Love? Fear? You may have had abusive parents or a nonsupportive environment that has affected your concept of the word. You may not have been given an example of how a healthy family works. God has given each of us the ability to change, however, and our conscious choices create our futures. Regardless of our backgrounds, God's ideal of a family is truly what a Christ-centered church and family should resemble.

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## My siblings and I knew the real meaning of "survival of the fittest."

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### The Members (Matt. 12:49, 50)

A friend of mine who was adopted as a preschooler has been futilely searching for his biological family. An African-American classmate who is shortly going to visit Africa for the first time tells me she's excited to visit the place of her roots. As humans, we need to know where we come from. Exhaustive family trees and huge family reunions give us a sense of identity. Likewise, a church family gives each member a sense of identity, of roots.

Who are our family members? Whoever does God's will automatically becomes our "brother" or "sister," and a member of Christ's family. We may have a tendency to be exclusive. We may politely avoid church members who don't appear to be like us. But Christ comes to us each Sabbath in the form of church visitors or church sisters or brothers. How we treat them is *exactly* how we are choosing to greet Christ.

### The Need (1 Cor. 13:8)

Two of the deepest needs and greatest reasons for a family to exist is individualized love and care (physical and emotional). In pediatrics, the most common reason for a child to experience "failure to thrive" (inability to follow expected growth rates) is attributable to psychosocial factors. In such cases, the home is hazardous to the child's health, and removing him or her actually brings about remarkable physical benefits in a short time. The before-and-after photographs are striking.

Though earthly parents may abandon their children, God takes care of us (Ps. 27:10). He loves us with an *everlasting* love (Jer. 31:3).

Though we can argue and perhaps even cut ties to our families, we can never return the genes we share. From our blood groups to our bones, we are linked permanently in a most intimate way. The family should be a source of unconditional love, sharing intimacy and support, and so should the church. Though we may disagree at times, this permanent, immovable love should remain anchored in our hearts. In this world of imperfect and dysfunctional families, the church is called to provide an example.

### **The Purpose (Rom. 12:4-10; 1 Cor. 12:12-27)**

My father is idealistic, generous, and inspiring, but he often believes others too easily. In New York this can be a dangerous flaw. My mother, the realist, usually keeps our family from getting “ripped off” and my father’s dreams from carrying him off the cliff of idealism. One sister polishes the rest of us as human beings. Taking us to museums and monitoring our clothes and manners, she has saved us from a barbaric state. The other sister is the one who by her work ethic and self-denial makes the rest of us realize that we are selfish creatures who need to curb our self-indulgence. My brother is the mechanic, the fix-it man, the one who keeps our house from falling apart.

Each of my family members has a unique niche. Each, though very different, is indispensable. In the same way, the church family must include varying roles and responsibilities in order to be a maximally functional and successful unit. Instead of bickering over how poorly others are doing their parts, we should concentrate on doing our best. Each person whom God leads into our church is another “body part” He feels we need. Let’s be thankful and welcome them as an asset.

I may not be the strongest part of the family body, perhaps the fifth toe, but if I get infected with discontent and self-pity, soon I will blacken and shrivel, but not without spreading my “sickness” to the foot and then, if not treated, to the rest of the body. Eventually, if the infection is allowed to progress, the whole body may die, and all from a small toe’s dysfunction.

### **REACT**

1. What would your church be like if all the members were like you? Be specific.

2. Is there any “sister” or “brother” you are failing to love? What can you begin to do to change your attitude?

3. How does God’s love make a church not merely a congregation but a loving family?

# Bonded Together

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: 1 Pet. 3:8**

In today's world life moves faster as time passes, and it isn't always a smooth ride. It actually becomes more difficult. With all the changes that take place, I depend on my family for support and encouragement. Unfortunately, I too often fail to realize who my family includes. It doesn't just include my parents and my siblings. Everyone in God's family is also a part of it.

"Those who accept Christ as their personal Saviour are not left as orphans, to bear the trials of life alone. [Christ] receives them as members of the heavenly family; He bids them call His Father their Father. They are His 'little ones,' dear to the heart of God, bound to Him by the most tender and abiding ties. He has toward them an exceeding tenderness, as far surpassing what our father or mother has felt toward us in our helplessness. . . .

"Christ loves the heavenly beings that surround His throne; but what shall account for the great love wherewith He has loved us? We cannot understand it, but we can know it true in our own experience. And if we do hold the relation of kinship to Him, with what tenderness should we regard those who are brethren and

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## **I too often fail to realize who my family includes.**

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sisters of our Lord! Should we not be quick to recognize the claims of our divine relationship? Adopted into the family of God, should we not honor our Father and our kindred?"\*

The same bond that connects us with God ties us to each other as brothers and sisters. But do we really treat each other as our own blood? Do we support and encourage each other as siblings or as mere acquaintances? As we journey to our heavenly home, wouldn't we feel stronger knowing we can depend on each other as we would depend on our own earthly brothers and sisters?

## **REACT**

1. How would others describe your church?
2. How would you like them to describe it?
3. What can you do to change it into the descriptions of question 2?

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\**The Desire of Ages*, p. 327.

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*By Un Jung Kim, a third-year psychology major at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.*

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# Are We Family?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Matt. 12:49, 50**

Webster's dictionary defines family as (1) parents and their children, (2) relatives, (3) lineage, (4) group of related things. Joseph and Mary were Jesus' parents. Jesus also had brothers and probably many relatives. You can read about His lineage in Matthew and Luke. In dictionary terms, He had family.

But Jesus' definition of *family* does not end there: "Whoever does the will of my Father in heaven is my brother and sister and mother" (Matt. 12:50, NIV). Jesus considers family those who do the will of the Father in heaven. He doesn't mention last names, hometowns, or DNA makeup. An important criterion of family to Jesus is "Are you doing what God is telling you to do?"

Many in the past, like some of the Pharisees, have answered this question Yes. But their actions proved their claim as a contradiction. For it is through one's action that we see the truth of one's proclamation. Matthew 12 has an example of what doing the Father's will is really all about.

The Pharisees are questioning Jesus in the synagogue about His position on lawful Sabbath activity. Jesus answers, "It is lawful to do good . . ." (verse 12, NIV).

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## He doesn't mention last names, hometowns, or DNA makeup.

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For too long, people in need (like the man with a shriveled hand) were pushed aside, and priority was given to other things. Jesus declares His position by showing mercy to the needy man and brings healing to him. Doing good on the Sabbath is an important component of doing the Father's will. Priority is now placed on people—all people—and on helping them to find delight in Christ rather than in things.

Many may come in the name of God, but we can tell through their actions whether or not they come with the spirit of God. The sweet fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control (Gal. 5:22, 23). Only when our lives are bent on fulfilling "the possible mission" that Christ assigned to us are we really doing the Father's will. Only when our lives are the products of the sweet fruit of the Spirit are we really doing the Father's will. When we love, not as the world teaches, but as Christ has shown and is teaching, can we really be doing the Father's will. Only then can we call ourselves family. Only then the word *family* will mean more than just a name. It will become a state of being.

Let us look to what Christ has done so that we do not lose focus on what doing the Father's will really means. We are family only when Christ has become the head of our household.

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*By Young M. Park, a youth pastor for the Detroit (Michigan) Korean Seventh-day Adventist Church and graduate student at Eastern Michigan University at Ypsilanti.*

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# Perfectly Happy

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: John 17:23**

We are all children in God's family. Through the acceptance of Jesus Christ as our personal Savior, we have been reborn into the family with His blood. So many times, however, we forget the reason that we are brought together every Sabbath. As a result, the focus of church tends to shift. Instead of becoming closer to God and to each other, church members allow pride or personal disputes to cause tension among them. Though this happens to every church, it should not stop us from seeking the perfection that Christ wanted. Christ's one wish for His church was, "I in them, and [God] in Me; that they may be made perfect in one" (John 17:23, NKJV).

We have had the saying "practice makes perfect" drilled into us so many times that we are sick of hearing it. Who wants to be perfect anyway? Perfection is a plateau that everyone speaks of but no one ever reaches. If this is so, why did Jesus want us to become perfect? The truth is that there are no perfect churches—at least not yet. In heaven we will all be members of the most awesome church ever assembled. Until then, Christ called us to practice being perfect in love and unity in our churches.

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## Perfection is a plateau that everyone speaks of but no one ever reaches.

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**1. Keep our focus on Christ.** He is the reason we are brought together. We come to church to worship the Creator of the universe, the King of kings, and the Lamb of God, who was willing to die for us so that we might have a second chance. We should never forget this.

**2. Spend time with one another.** As a family, we should be meeting more than just once a week. We have to be willing to share our thoughts and cares with each other. By doing this, we make our problems smaller and our joys multiplied. We have to be there for one another. If we do not love the people in our church in the same way Christ loves, then we will never truly be one happy family.

**3. Keep growing.** The family has to grow. The more people there are in the family, the merrier it is. There are many people out there searching for happiness in the wrong places. Christ has called us to reach out so that the banquet may be filled with people. In families, there is no greater joy than bringing a baby into this world. This is cause for celebration throughout the whole family. Bringing a lost soul to Christ will do the same for the church.

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*By Jukes Namm, a premed student at the University of Michigan at Ann Arbor.*

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# The Family United

## OPINION

**Key Text: John 3:8**

“The church is God’s family; adopted by Him as children, its members live on the basis of the new covenant. The church is the body of Christ, a community of faith of which Christ Himself is the Head. The church is the bride for whom Christ died that He might sanctify and cleanse her. At His return in triumph, He will present her to Himself a glorious church, the faithful of all the ages, the purchase of His blood, not having spot or wrinkle, but holy and without blemish.”<sup>1</sup>

The church as a family, in order to achieve its goals, must remain united. Unity within a church family is often difficult, and divisions within a church are not uncommon. It then remains a question how to achieve unity. Let’s look at the example in our early church. “We would come together burdened in soul, praying that we might be one in faith and doctrine; for we knew that Christ is not divided. . . . After earnest prayer, if any point was not understood it was discussed, and each one expressed his opinion freely; then we would again bow in prayer, and earnest supplications went up to heaven that God would help us to see eye to eye, that we might be one as Christ and the Father are one. Many tears were shed.”<sup>2</sup>

Unity is achieved only through perseverance and prayer. Without this, dis-

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## Unity is achieved only through perseverance and prayer.

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agreements become separations. The example of the early church family serves well to remind us of the difficult work and long hours it takes to achieve unity in purpose. This same method needs to be employed today to overcome the problems that sometimes afflict the church.

We are told that we are “born of the Spirit” into the family of God (John 3:8). This process means that we become a part of the church family, one whose goals are alike but whose methods are different. We are told that although we were all baptized into one body, we are still many members with different roles (1 Cor. 12:12-31). Church members are bound to have differences of opinion, but with one God and one goal (Matt. 28:19, 20) the family must move forward, always to unite and to complete the work commissioned to us.

## REACT

1. What role do ethnic churches of the same language play in church unity?
2. How does one settle differences within the church family if the goals become diverse?

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1. *Seventh-day Adventists Believe . . .*, p. 134.

2. *Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers*, pp. 24, 25.

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*By Andrew Chung, a urology resident at William Beaumont Hospital, Royal Oak, Michigan.*

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# THE NEW YOU!



**“Because of his great love for us, God, who is rich in mercy, made us alive with Christ” (Eph. 2:4, 5, NIV).**

# “I Want You to Be Here”

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 2:13

Peter was a freshman in college. He had barely passed high school, and now he was in college. He had a horrible attitude; he was mean and hurtful to everyone. His classmates used to say that teachers had passed him just so they wouldn't have him in their classroom for another year. People would take the long way to class if it meant not having to confront Peter.

He enrolled in the basic college freshman courses: English 101, introduction to psychology, biology, American civilization, and a P.E. class. He sat through every class with a scowl on his face. He never turned in his homework, and by midterm he was flunking out of every class. A letter was mailed to his home informing his parents of his grades. The academic dean called Peter into his office to inform him of his “options.” Peter understood all that was said to him, and he returned to classes.

His actions and attitude didn't change. A few weeks later, the biology instructor asked Peter to come into his office for a couple of minutes. Peter sat in front of the

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## **The academic dean called Peter into his office to inform him of his “options.”**

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instructor's desk, nervous and fidgety but still with the angry scowl in place. The instructor shuffled some papers, and then he said, “Peter, I want you to be here.” He repeated it again, “Peter, I want you to be here.” As Peter heard those words, something inside him started to open. He now knew that someone believed in him, somebody wanted him at college, someone cared about him.

Peter didn't change overnight. Twenty years of hatred takes a while to go away. But every day he relaxed just a little bit more. Now, years later, Peter looks back at the conversation with his instructor as the turning point in his life. “When I realized that somebody cared about me, I realized that I had a reason to live life fully.”

Jesus is the Someone who cares for all of us. He's always there to tell us that He loves us and that He believes in us. Just think what kind of people we can become when we let Christ work in us.

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*By Summer E. Porter, a senior business/communication major at Columbia Union College, Takoma Park, Maryland.*

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# The Power to Change

## LOGOS

Isa. 55:6, 7; Eph. 2:1-10; 4:17-24; Gal. 5:16-26

Arthur stepped off the bus in Kingston, Ontario, blending into the crowd, looking like everyone else. One would think he were perhaps a salesperson or a grandfather coming to visit his family. But he was not like everybody else. He'd just been released from prison, where he'd been since he was 11. Now he was 53.

No prison seemed capable of breaking Arthur's spirit or reforming his behavior. Of the 42 years in prison, 24 had been spent in solitary confinement, 17 months on death row, and 31 months in Devil's Island, chained by his neck like an animal, confined to a five- by seven- foot cell. He was known for the riots he started, for breaking a guard's arm, another's collarbone, and being responsible for the death of the sheriff. In one prison, he stole 40 pounds of cyanide with the intention of poisoning the entire prison staff.

All who knew him had lost all hope for him. One day a preacher, accompanied by his 14-year-old son Tim, came to visit the inmates. While following his father down the row of cells, for some unexplainable reason, Tim paused by Arthur's cell to smile and wink. Arthur called Tim back to the cell and began to verbally abuse him, calling him everything he could think of. Tim broke down in tears, but he stood his ground. Finally he simply said to Arthur, "I love you."

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## No prison seemed capable of breaking Arthur's spirit or reforming his behavior.

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For the next seven years, Tim regularly wrote to Arthur and prayed for him and Arthur finally felt the love of Tim and the love of God. Arthur said later, "That was the first time in all my life anyone had ever told me that. Every letter was stained with his tears. I couldn't take it anymore. I got on my knees and came to the Lord."

It was a miracle. A hate-filled, violent heart was transformed into a heart of love and grace.

So here he was, stepping off the bus, stepping into the world. He'd been released from prison, released from the power of sin. He was now a changed man, a new creature. His body was old, he was dying of cancer; but he was new and alive in Christ. He now had a purpose. He now had a story to tell. He had found the Power to change; he had found the grace of God.

**Acknowledge the Power to change.** The Power to change is found on the cross. Knowing the story of the Cross should do more than merely make you a good Bible student. There's more to the Cross than its place in history. The personal application of the Cross in your life gives you access to a power that defies all other. On the cross, Jesus overcame sin for you. Acknowledge the awesome power of Jesus' death! And accept the free gift of salvation.

**Claim the Power to change.** The Power to change is yours for the asking. No trick questions. No obstacle race. There are only two prerequisites: You must believe in the Power to change, and you must recognize your need for the Power. That's it. It is yours. Why wait? Claim it today! And see the difference it can make in your life.

**Share the Power to change.** Good news is to be shared. The bubbling joyousness cannot be contained in your heart. The sheer force of the Power will explode through you for all to see. Because of the new creature you now are, doors will open, opportunities will come your way—opportunities to tell the world of the Power that can also be theirs.

Only by beholding Christ on the cross can you be changed. When you accept God's free gift of salvation, the Power to change, you will begin a catalytic reaction! When others see you transformed, reflecting the Christ who rules your heart, they will want to know more.

"By beholding we are to become changed; and as we meditate upon the perfections of the divine Model, we shall desire to become wholly transformed, and renewed in the image of His purity. It is by faith in the Son of God that transformation takes place in the character, and the child of wrath becomes the child of God. He passes from death unto life; he becomes spiritual and discerns spiritual things. The wisdom of God enlightens his mind, and he beholds wondrous things out of His law. As a man is converted by the truth, the work of transformation of character goes on. He has an increased measure of understanding. In becoming a man of obedience to God, he has the mind of Christ, and the will of God becomes his will."

## **REACT**

1. How does being united with Christ through His death change your relationship to sin?

2. In what practical sense is sin no longer your master, even though you may still commit specific sins?

3. What makes it possible for you to live a new life?

4. What are the symptoms when you live in slavery to sin?

5. How does God help a person discard old habits and tendencies?

6. How does being under grace change you and affect the way others see you?

7. What would you say to someone who has been a Christian all his or her life, is thankful for Jesus' death on the cross and wants to serve Him, but is frustrated with the lack of change or improvement in his or her life?

8. How quickly does change take place in the life of a new believer? Is it possible for a nonbeliever to be better-behaved and perform more good works than a new Christian? Why or why not?

9. To what extent do genetics, education, and general environment affect our ability to change? What does this say about our ability to judge the Christian experience of others?

10. What does it mean, in real life terms, to say that "Jesus overcame sin for you"? Is this just a cliché, or does it have practical implications for our lives?

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\**Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 338.

# Making André Angry

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Phil. 4:13**

All the students knew of André's reputation for fighting. All the students claimed they knew how André would react in difficult situations. Not everyone, however, had seen him in action. Therefore, those who had not seen him fight decided to see if they could provoke him into one. They thought of a plan to make André angry and make a fool of himself. While they were plotting, one group member said, "I know how to ignite André's temper! I'll tell him I just saw his girlfriend walking and talking with another man. Surely that will make him angry."

André had a short temper. He also had a history of fighting. When the group confronted him with their scheme, however, André was calm and collected. What the group members didn't know was that André had committed himself to the Lord. No longer would their comments make André angry.

Ellen G. White states, "Words cannot describe the peace and joy possessed by him who takes God at His word. Trials do not disturb him, slights do not vex him. Self is crucified. Day by day his duties may become more taxing, his temptations stronger, his trials more severe; but he does not falter; for he receives strength equal to his need."\*

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## **"I'll tell him I just saw his girlfriend walking and talking with another man."**

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Once God takes control of your life, your whole mind-set changes. You will no longer want to participate in worldly activities such as fighting, partying, stealing, cheating, or womanizing. Philippians 4:13 says, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me" (NKJV). This means that through God you can change old characteristics and negative hereditary tendencies.

The Bible is a storybook of people who had to overcome many barriers. Though Paul was a persecutor of Christians, once he allowed the Lord in his life, he became a major ambassador for Christ. He substituted a life of killing Christians for being imprisoned for Christ, journeying to far places to spread the gospel and living a life totally dedicated to serving his Lord. David was a man after God's own heart, but David had taken another person's life. He had committed a series of serious crimes. So it is also possible for young people today to become new persons in Christ Jesus. In fact, I can testify that the only way we as young people can become new creatures is to consecrate our lives to Christ each day.

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\**Messages to Young People*, p. 98.

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*By McCants L. Carter, a business administration major at Prince George's Community College, Largo, Maryland.*

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# New and Improved

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: John 3:4-9**

What causes a man to be different after being born again? He has the same temptations as before and the same body. He probably still lives in the same house and performs the same job he has been performing for years. Here is the difference: He has a new nature.

Companies often use the term “new and improved” when advertising their products. Human nature leads us to be skeptical about so-called improved products. We suspect that advertisers are just trying to market their product to unsuspecting consumers. To believe that the new product has truly improved, we need to experience some evidence. That is exactly what happens to a Christian: A new nature has been added. When a man is born of the flesh, he inherits his parents’ nature. When a man is born of the Spirit, he is given a new nature from God, and that changes everything.

This was news to Nicodemus. When Jesus used the word *born*, Nicodemus could think of nothing but a physical birth. He probably looked perplexed as he pondered the idea. “How can someone be born again once he is old? Can he re-enter his mother’s womb and be born all over again?” Nicodemus was a good, reli-

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## Companies often use the term “new and improved” when advertising their products.

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gious man. He was a member of the Sanhedrin, the highest governing body of the Jewish people, composed of priests, scribes, and lay elders of the aristocracy. Membership in this group indicated a high rank and standing among his people. He was highly educated, yet with all his spiritual background, we can see that Nicodemus didn’t understand spiritual truths.

Jesus explained what He meant by “born again” (literally, “born from above”). The new birth referred to is a spiritual rebirth that involves a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. It gives us a new nature that helps us live our lives responsive to God’s touch. Through repentance and faith, we will have the indwelling Spirit in our lives and will enter the kingdom of God when He comes to redeem us. Like Nicodemus, we gain nothing from who we are or how high we’ve gone in worldly circles or material wealth. We need the spiritual truths that Jesus teaches.

“Spiritual reality cannot be seen, humanly speaking, any more than the wind that blows. Men can never see where it comes from or where it goes, but they accept it as true because they are aware of its effects.” This is very much like the new and improved product.

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\*Manford George Gutzke, *Plain Talk on John* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1968), p. 34.

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By Lynnetta Siagian Hamstra, associate director of the General Conference Women’s Ministries Department, Silver Spring, Maryland.

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# Faith in God

## HOW-TO

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

How do we go about making changes in our lives? How do we become the kind of people God wants us to be? These questions are tricky because we come to them loaded with our cultural and religious baggage. Ben Franklin has taught us to “pull ourselves up by our bootstraps” and to “meet God halfway.” Our religion has often passed down traditions of striving for personal perfection and self-sufficiency. Our very questions reveal that we are inclined to try to do things for ourselves.

1. The first and most important step in changing our lives is to realize that “how-to” is God’s territory. The Bible teaches us that God is in charge of making changes in us and that we have no ability to do things on our own no matter how hard we try. “By grace you have been saved through faith, and this is not your own doing; it is the gift of God—not the result of works, so that no one may boast” (Eph. 2:8, 9, NRSV).

Ellen White writes that “the Lord is not pleased to have man trusting in his own ability or good deeds or in a legal religion, but in God, the living God. . . . Bible religion is not made up of theological systems, creeds, theories, and tradition, for then it would not remain a mystery. . . . But religion, Bible religion, has a practical,

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## **Our religion has often passed down traditions of striving for self-sufficiency.**

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saving energy, elements proceeding wholly from God—a personal experience of God’s power transforming the entire man.”

2. We must also be willing to admit our weakness, to expose our need. The largest barrier to God’s being able to work in our lives is our unwillingness to let go of independence. God is able to work with greatest strength in those who are willing to admit greatest weakness. That is why Jesus’ followers were primarily people who were poor and outcast, rather than those with wealth, status, and education. He was able to transform those who were willing to admit that they needed it.

3. We must pray that God will give us the continuing vision to see through false human standards of holiness. We have a tendency to measure ourselves and others against large standards. What we must understand is that God’s gifts of grace and faith have nothing to do with our ability to do anything better than anyone else. They have to do only with God’s desire to bring us into closer relationship with Him and with each other. The plan of salvation was enacted not so we may be perfect in a legal sense but so we may be reunited with God.

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*\*Manuscript Releases, vol. 16, pp. 235, 236.*

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*By Erin Reid, an editorial assistant at the E. G. White Estate, Silver Spring, Maryland.*

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## Bridging the Gap

### OPINION

**Key Text: Col. 2:10**

I am known by the name “Luckie” in the motorcycle community. Currently, I am vice president of the Westminster, Maryland, chapter of the Christian Motorcyclists Association. Being involved with outreach to bikers affords me countless opportunities to *witness* people becoming a “new person” in Christ.

Regularly, I find myself surrounded by bikers, a large portion of whom are non-Christians and searching for something to fill the void in their lives. While I was visiting a young man in jail once, he actually described the pain in his heart as “a gap.”

Typically, I meet those who are actively trying to fill that hole. They try alcohol, drugs, sex, violence, and whatever else they can think of. At times, when the situation is right, and the inexhaustible Holy Spirit has gone before, I have the privilege of meeting individuals who are ready to give up trying to bridge the gap themselves. Very simply, I have the opportunity to share with them that the hole is actually in the shape of a cross and can be filled only by Jesus.

Once a man walked right up to me and *told* me he needed God in his life! He knew I was a Christian and felt comfortable with my being a biker like him. He

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### **He carried a 20-year load of guilt for taking another man’s life.**

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carried a 20-year load of guilt for taking another man’s life. Finally, he was ready to listen to the call inside his own heart and wanted God to help him. He went on to confess his addictions to alcohol and other drugs, while admitting that he couldn’t go to sleep at night without seeing the man’s face whose life he had taken.

“I’m afraid I’ve gone too far and God can’t reach me anymore,” he said.

“Who do you think is telling you that you need God in your life?” I asked. “It sure ain’t the devil! That’s God speaking to you, and if God is talking to you, it’s proof that you haven’t gone too far.”

Tears came down his cheeks as we prayed together, and he hugged me until I thought he would squeeze the breath right out of me! Stories like these are modern-day examples of God’s love and mercy and fuel my excitement to reach out to others.

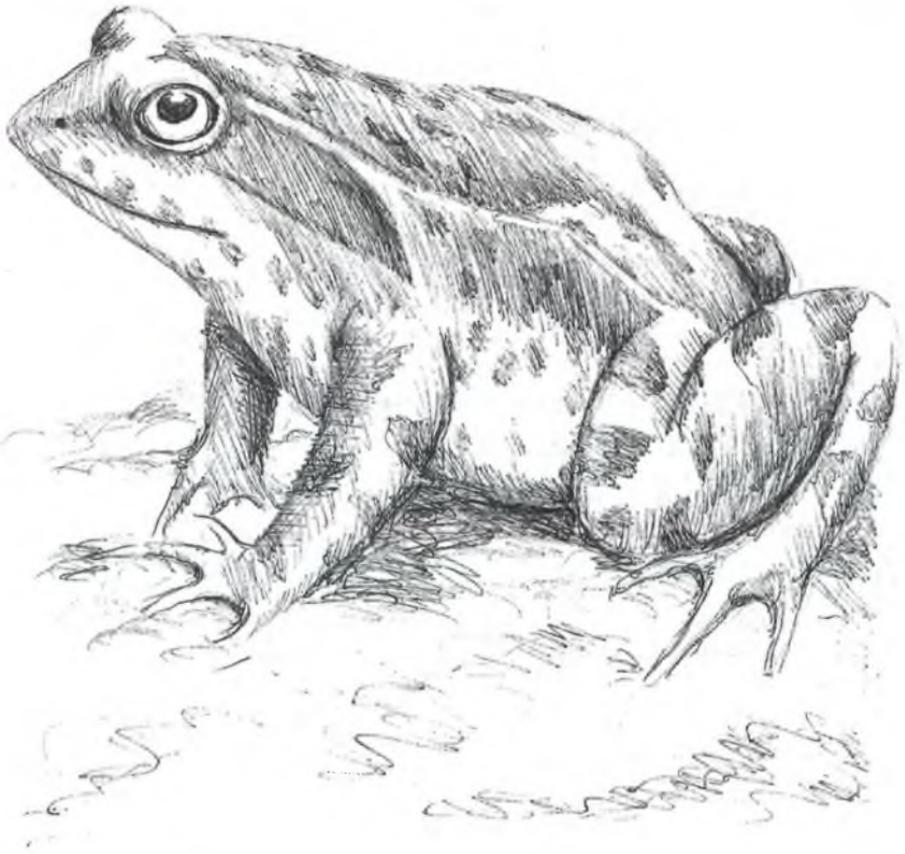
My *thing* just happens to be motorcycles, but I would encourage each of you to reach out into whatever community you are interested. From needlepoint to wind surfing, mountain climbing to plate collecting, chances are, there are others with similar interests. Embrace your commonality and let your Christianity rub off on others!

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*By James Jordan, a computer programmer at the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, Silver Spring, Maryland.*

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# ONE FOR ALL!



**“There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism; one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all” (Eph. 4:4-6, NKJV).**

# The Two Frogs

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Eph. 4:1-6**

Once upon a time, two frogs fell into jars of milk. One, desperate and suffocating, said to itself: "I can't breathe because the walls of this jar are too tall. I'm going to die." Not much time passed before the frog died.

The other frog, however, which was in the same predicament, would not give up. It thrashed its legs until the milk turned into butter. Once there was a firm foundation, the frog jumped out of the jar.

Two frogs were in the same situation. One was able to survive because of its strength, hope, and faith, while the other one just gave up. Maybe if the first one

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### **Two frogs were in the same situation.**

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had not given up, the one that jumped out could have helped it, but they were not united in the same faith and hope for this to happen.

This can be applied to us. In order to be united as a church, we must have the same faith and hope.

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*By Alba Luz Figueroa, a teacher of kindergarten through third grade and graduate student at Puerto Rico University at Mayagüez.*

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# Wind Below Zero

## LOGOS

Rev. 14:6; 2 Tim. 1:12; 2 Pet. 1:16; 1 Cor. 9:16; Titus 2:11-14; Heb. 9:28

Human beings usually create models to be able to understand our lives. We use graphics, figures, text, and illustrations to help us understand those things that are confusing. For example, think of the wind. What comes to your mind? I don't know what you thought, but it is easier to understand the world through models and illustrations. This is the approach I will use so we can understand the significance of being united.

You and your family decide to go on a vacation to the Caribbean. You prepare your bags and get ready to board the plane that will take you to this land of warm beaches and palm trees. Somehow, by mistake, you board the wrong plane, and instead of traveling to the warm beaches of the Caribbean, you are now going to the white expanse of Greenland. Your bags, of course, are going to your original destination. You arrive in Greenland and notice that you don't have your bags or any clothing for the cold weather. Your wallet, you notice, was packed with your bags, so there is no money to buy heavy coats. You find yourselves in a place where it is very cold, there are no coats, and you can die if you don't think quickly of a solution to fight the intense cold. What can you do?

I will tell you what I would do to minimize the cold. I would build a fire, using

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## Somehow, by mistake you board the wrong plane.

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the first thing I could get my hands on. I would huddle with my family to form a circle around the fire until someone came to help us. If I were not to act quickly, the strong, cold winds would cause hypothermia.

Maybe this answer seems simple to you, and it is. In Ephesians 4:3-6, Paul talks about the unity of the church. How can we be united? Unity such as that to which Paul is referring comes from the same spirit, the same hope, the same faith in one body. The danger in not uniting this way is that the strong cold winds of doctrinal confusion can take us away and we can lose the heat that comes from the fire.

Christians know that the battle against the enemy has been won. We don't have to do battle, because our General defeated the accuser in a complete victory. Now we have free access to salvation (Heb. 7:25). There is only one detail to consider: We are in enemy territory, and all around us are minefields. We must be extra careful as we walk through those anticongregational bombs that have been left on the fields from the beginning of the world. If, on the other hand, we can stay together, united in thought and goal, we can get the warmth from the fire that is in the middle of our circle. Naturally, the fire is Jesus, the Source of eternal life, the Light of the world. The hypothermia makes our body cold, reaching temperatures that even fire could not melt. The body becomes paralyzed, we have no vital signs, we can't feel our extremities, and our breathing stops.

In these verses written to the Ephesians, Paul is recommending unity as a strategy against spiritual inactivity caused by the cold. In order to survive in this

dangerous world, we need each other. We must form a strong bond to sustain us until the heavenly hosts come to take us to the Holy Fortress.

## **REACT**

1. If you know a friend who has spiritual hypothermia, what would you do to help him or her?
2. When we are in danger, we do whatever is needed to survive. What are we doing to save those who have walked away from our church?
3. Unity is good. Conformity can be bad. What is the difference? How do you guard against the bad aspects of conformity?
4. Liberals, moderates, and conservatives—does the church need all three of these types of members? How can the church be united with all three?
5. What relationship does unity have with loyalty? Can you be too unified or too loyal? Explain your answer.
6. What role does individuality play in a united group? Be specific.
7. Proverbs 6:6 asks us to consider the ant. What are some of the positive and negative aspects of this imagery?
8. A democratic society tends to be factious and a totalitarian society unified. Why? What implications does this have for the church?
9. An army is unified; so is a sports team or a gang. Which image best fits the church?
10. Unified groups tend to have very strong leaders. What safeguards do we have to protect us from leaders who are too strong?
11. If being unified is so good, why is it so difficult?
12. When is the last time you had a common goal in any group? Did you reach it? How did you feel? Was it more satisfying than an individual achievement? Do you believe that these feelings are evidence that we were made to be unified?

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*By Cesar B. Tavarez, an electrical engineer for Wannar Lambert, in Vega Baja, Puerto Rico.*

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# We Can Be One!

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 17:20-26**

"[Christ] said repeatedly, 'that ye love one another.' His very first injunction when alone with them in the upper chamber was, 'A new commandment I give unto you, that ye love one another; as I have loved you, That ye also love one another.' To the disciples this commandment was new; for they had not loved one another as Christ had loved them. He saw that new ideas and impulses must control them; that new principles must be practiced by them; through His life and death they were to receive a new conception of love."<sup>1</sup>

"These were brought together, with their different faults, all with inherited and cultivated tendencies to evil; but in and through Christ they were to dwell in the family of God, learning to become one in faith, in doctrine, in spirit. They would have their tests, their grievances, their differences of opinion; but while Christ was abiding in the heart, there could be no dissension. His love would lead to love for one another; the lessons of the Master would lead to the harmonizing of all differences, bringing the disciples into unity, till they would be of one mind and

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## **While Christ was abiding in the heart, there could be no dissension.**

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one judgment. Christ is the great center, and they would approach one another just in proportion as they approached the center."<sup>2</sup>

"When men are bound together, not by force or self-interest, but by love, they show the working of an influence that is above every human influence. Where this oneness exists, it is evidence that the image of God is being restored in humanity, that a new principle of life has been implanted. It shows that there is power in the divine nature to withstand the supernatural agencies of evil, and that the grace of God subdues the selfishness inherent in the natural heart."<sup>3</sup>

"If God's professed people would receive the light as it shines upon them from His word, they would reach that unity for which Christ prayed, that which the apostle describes, 'the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.' 'There is,' he says, '*one* body, and *one* Spirit, even as ye are called in *one* hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism.' Ephesians 4:3-5."<sup>4</sup>

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 677.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 296.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 678.

4. *The Great Controversy*, p. 379.

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*By Wilson Burgos, a computer technician who is studying computer engineering at Puerto Rico University at Recinto de Mayagüez.*

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# All for One and One for All

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: 1 Thess. 3:11-13**

We've heard a lot about unity, but we have yet to understand what it means (Acts 2:1). One illustration that can help us to better understand this is the functions of a computer. Computers are made up of a variety of parts, among them: memory, hard disk, auxiliary and video cards, and most important, the microprocessor. Each of these parts has a different function, but they all work united to the signals made by the microprocessor to carry out the function the user has requested. The microprocessor gives them a signal to wait or to continue with the job, so everything can work out well.

Now, imagine a monitor complaining that it is working harder than the keyboard, or the hard disk is unhappy because it is working while the mouse is only playing. This would be chaotic, right? If any of these parts would stop doing its job, we would not be able to enjoy the wonders a computer can offer us.

Jesus Christ has made room for us in His church, and we should be united, even if we are different. Our lives must be guided by Jesus so that our differences will not interfere with our unity and work, with the same faith and hope. Not all of us

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## **We should be united, even if we are different.**

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would do the same thing (Eph. 4:11, 12). The Lord made it so. But He wants us to love one another (verses 2, 3) so that our unity can be manifest in the love of the Father. Then the whole world will see the wonderful things He can do for us when we are united in thought and goals—the heavenly Canaan.

## REACT

What effect, if any, does persecution have on unity?

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*By Wilson Burgos, a computer technician who is studying computer engineering at Puerto Rico University at Recinto de Mayagüez.*

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# God's Purpose for Our Lives

## HOW-TO

### Key Text: Titus 2:11-14

Do you think God needs us? From the beginning God created a plan of salvation for our lives. There is joy in heaven when we accept and give our lives to Jesus. He can transform our character. We obey His word. We hear His voice. Then we will be able to be united with our brethren. Jesus doesn't care about the past or who we were. He cares about the future and what we can become. He needs us just as we are. We only have to:

**1. Have faith.** Genuine faith can be reached only when we know God. He can do great things in our lives if we trust Him. " 'Have faith in God' " (Mark 11:22, NIV). " 'What is impossible with men is possible with God' " (Luke 18:27, NIV). Even if you think it would be impossible to love your brother, as you submit your life to God, this promise will come true in your life. You can do it with God.

**2. Have hope.** You can be sure that God will always be with you. " 'Do not fear, for I am with you; do not be dismayed, for I am your God. I will strengthen you and help you; I will uphold you with my righteous right hand' " (Isa. 41:10, NIV).

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## As you submit your life to God this promise will come true in your life.

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**3. Accept His will.** When you allow Christ to take total control of your being, your character will be a reflection of Him. "It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age" (Titus 2:12, NIV). If we accept His will, our lives will be like a mirror. We won't see ourselves or our brethren but Christ working right next to us.

Let us proclaim this message of salvation, reaching those who haven't yet heard of it, using all our talents in unity for the service of our God, so that the good news of salvation can be shared with all the world.

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## The Same Faith and Hope?

### OPINION

**Key Texts:** Heb. 11:1; 12:1, 2; Titus 2:12-14

Have you seen how hard ants work? The observation of ants may teach us powerful lessons. They work diligently. Together they build their home. Together they look for and store their food. They walk in a line in search of food, and they return home the same way. They are united in the same mission. They stay together even when adversity surrounds them. They become a fierce army if you disrupt their line or injure one of them. They will surround you! If they lose one of their own, they carry the body and whatever it was carrying back home.

How wonderful that we, as a church, have the opportunity to be united, supportive of each other in good times as well as bad times. For this to happen we must share the same faith and hope.

Christ searched for a church that contained different people. Yet each one is special to Him. It's amazing how nature can show us the ideal relationship that should exist between us. In this case, the ants work together because they know they could not survive otherwise. It's ironic to see how small they are and how

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### **The observation of ants may teach us powerful lessons.**

aware of the fact that they can't function alone. Unfortunately, with all our intelligence and wisdom, we want to work by ourselves at a distance from Christ.

Jesus is looking for only one thing: your heart. Let us give our hearts to Him, so we can be united with Him now and forever.

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*By Alba Luz Figueroa, a teacher of kindergarten through third grade, who continues her post-graduate studies at Puerto Rico University at Mayagüez.*

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# LOVE IN ACTION



**“Dear children, let us not love with words or tongue but with actions and in truth” (1 John 3:18, NIV).**

## “Purrfect” Love

### INTRODUCTION

Scripture: 1 Cor. 13; Ps. 71:5

Breathe, Breathe in the air  
 Don't be afraid to care . . .  
 (Pink Floyd)

As I sit here in my little home up in the redwoods, I look out the window and watch my seven cats frolic in the sun. Such diverse personalities, so unique, yet with one common goal: They all love me and want my undivided attention. To give and receive love: that's basically a cat's whole philosophy on life.

We have Kipper—the oldest, the care-giver. He takes heed of all the cats, bathing and protecting them. I often hold him and tell him he's the most beautiful cat in the world. I nuzzle into his soft black fur and listen for the comforting purr—he even takes care of me! Then there is Midnight, brave and self-assured, the one all the other cats like. Make friends with Midnight, and you'll be accepted by all the rest. Calvin, who pretty much minds his own business but seeks out the company of the others, wants to be accepted, a little needier, requiring a bit more attention. We have Stranger, aloof, the loner, off during the day but snuggling in her bed with the others at night. There is Shadow, my wild Manx, who was only a shadow

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### **Make friends with Midnight, and you'll be accepted by all the rest.**

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until Midnight came to live with us. Midnight domesticated my wild cat, who now lets me pet and hold her. Last, there is Sasha and Cée à tée—the sisters. Sasha, my Siamese, oblivious to any feelings of jealousy or anger, always willing to share a lap, happy to be alive, and Cée à tée, who hates all cats, proud and haughty, yet demure enough to lower her head for a pat or a scratch behind her ears. They are all so different!

Sasha comes prancing onto the porch—all smiles—a lizard dangling from her mouth. “Look what I brought home for everyone to play with,” she seems to say. She drops it and then sits back to watch the action. He runs to the family matriarch, Kipper, who looks somewhat amused and confused at the same time. Calvin walks over and gingerly sniffs at it; even Stranger comes over to join in the fun. Long after the lizard has escaped under the house, they bat leaves about to each other, kittens again, playful and innocent in their game of “kitty soccer!” Even Cée à tée romps happily about, forgetting her grumpiness, banging her head into Midnight for a quick rub. They are all so different, yet at any sign of danger they huddle together for warmth, for strength, for courage, for love.

If only we as Christians could bond with our church family, realizing we have a common goal, be accepting of our differences, and celebrate our individuality. Let's learn a lesson from the cats.

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*Carol Williams, a restaurant manager from Fortuna, California.*

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## Christian Love in Action

### LOGOS

**Eph. 5:2; Matt. 22:37-40; John 13:34, 35; 17:26; 21:15-17; Col. 3:12-14**

To my brothers and sisters in Jesus Christ who strive for a character like our Master's, grace and peace to you. Friends, as we read our Father's words, we see that love truly is one of His greatest attributes. His Son died for us while we were yet sinners because of His love (Rom. 5:8). Christ came to give us an example to follow. We need to be attentive to His voice and choose every moment to submit ourselves to God so love may live within us (1 Pet. 2:21; John 14:21, 23; 15:10).

Today relationships like that of David and Jonathan are scarce. Christ said, "By this all men will know that you are my disciples, if you love one another" (John 13:35, NIV). This means that when the world watches us, it is supposed to see that we form different relationships than it does. If we are to be the true followers of Christ—and be called Christians—we must follow the example He set for us (13:15). Christ our Lord was filled with lovingkindness. He was moved with compassion when He saw one of His children hurting. He lived His life as a servant to sinners and the hopeless (Luke 4:18; Isa. 61:1).

Christ condemned no one but those who sought their own righteousness by their deeds. He never backbit His brother (Psalm 15) and never gossiped. He told the truth from His heart and had no slander on His tongue. He always considered the person He was speaking to and corrected him or her out of love, not conde-

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### **Christ condemned no one but those who sought their own righteousness.**

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scension. Jesus is the epitome of love (1 Corinthians 13). If there are any questions about how love is supposed to be manifest, we can read the four gospels and look at Christ's life. We will see love in action—not only in word.

So as we recognize the calling of Christ to follow His example, each of us must consider his or her life. We must examine ourselves to see what kind of example we are presenting to the world (John 13:35). Christ has given us the wonderful privilege to represent Him to the world in His absence (Matt. 5:16). If the world fails to see a glimpse of Christ's character in us, then we are misrepresenting Christ.

As I minister to people on the street, I often hear, "Why should I go to church? All those people are a bunch of hypocrites anyway." This may be true, but for this very reason we are all there—we are all sinners becoming more perfect each day by God's grace alone. We have to pray every day that the Lord will reveal Himself to others through us—in spite of our sinful natures—to those who don't know Him. We are a family of Christ. As a family we need to love one another and esteem each other as more important than ourselves (Phil. 2:3, 4). We should be servants correcting and ministering to one another in love, asking God's wisdom on how to speak kindly to our brothers and sisters (Gal. 6:1-3). The church should be a place of refuge and consolation, not a place of condemnation. The children of God should never turn their noses up at another brother or sister who has fallen but

instead lift him or her up with encouragement.

When a tree stands alone in a strong wind, it is blown and battered; but when that tree is in the midst of a forest, it can lean on other trees and withstand the wind. We, too, as a family must uphold our brothers and sisters and not point the finger when they fall. We must communicate to the world through our actions and open our doors to sinners so that Christ in us may let those of the world know a better way.

Consider the words you say and actions you take against others because for every word you say, you will be held accountable (Matt. 12:37). Let us not do this out of fear but out of love for our heavenly Father. If eternal life (Christ) dwells in you, then the fruit that comes from being in the Vine should be manifest in your life. If the tree is good, then so is its fruit; if it is evil, then the fruit is also (15:1-7).

May the love of Christ and His grace abound within each one of us, and may rivers of living water flow out of us. Consider Christ's example, because you are the only example of Christ some may ever see.

## **REACT**

1. How can a person avoid feeling more important than others? Be specific.
2. How can you show genuine Christian love today and this week?

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## Actions and Deeds

### TESTIMONY

**Key Texts: John 13:34, 35; 1 John 3:16-18**

“The greatest cause of atheism is Christians that acknowledge with their lips, but deny by their lifestyle. That is what an unbelieving world simply finds unbelievable” (Brennon Manning, *DC Talk*).

God had told us to love each other as God has loved us. This is how people will know that we are followers of Christ. By saying we are Christians and not showing Christ through our actions and deeds, we alienate the unbelieving.

“It is not the opposition of the world that most endangers the church of Christ. It is the evil cherished in the hearts of believers that works their most grievous disaster and most surely retards the progress of God’s cause. There is no surer way of weakening spirituality than by cherishing envy, suspicion, faultfinding, and evil surmising. On the other hand, the strongest witness that God has sent His Son into the world is the existence of harmony and union among men of varied dispositions who form His church. This witness it is the privilege of the followers

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**“The greatest cause of atheism is Christians that acknowledge with their lips, but deny by their lifestyle.”**

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of Christ to bear. But in order to do this, they must place themselves under Christ’s command. Their characters must be conformed to His character and their wills to His will.”\*

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\**The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 549.

# Showing Unity

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: 1 Cor. 12:12**

Does unity mean that we all have to think, act, and react in the same way?

If we look at the definition of unity as the state of being combined into one, as the parts of a whole, then we don't need to think, act, and react in the same manner. But we do need to obey and follow Christ as the one who commands unity.

"Even as the body is one and yet has many members, and all the members of the body, though they are many, are one body, so also is Christ" (1 Cor. 12:12, NASB). This text gives the definition of unity. The fact that God created each of us as individuals makes us a lot of different members. Yet, we can all become one through Christ. "So also is Christ" (verse 12, NASB): He is our example. He is the leader guiding us to unity. His love is the glue that holds us together as one.

The Waldenses lived in such united communities that all helped each other out in every way that they could. If someone had extra food and someone did not have any food, the person with food would share. This doesn't seem like a big burden—to share some food. But keep in mind that the Waldenses lived in mountains, where

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## We need individuals who are united with Christ first.

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there wasn't very much food. It was a big deal to give food away or share it with someone else. Yet they overlooked the sacrifice and their own danger of going without in order to share with the needy. Such sacrifices pulled them together in Christian love. Someone would share (sacrifice) food, someone else clothes, someone else money. They were expressing love to each other.

"If the whole body were an eye, where would be the hearing? If the whole were hearing, where would be the smelling?" (1 Cor. 12:17, NKJV). This text brings out that we need certain elements to achieve unity: sight, hearing, and smell in the case of the physical body. In the case of the spiritual body, the church, we need John, Sue, and Mike. We need individuals who are united with Christ first and then who are willing to share their love with the rest of the church, community, country, and world—not only in words or tongue but in deed and in truth. If we practice this, we will achieve unity.

## REACT

Do you know what your resources and gifts are? Are you willing to share them today in deeds and in truth?

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*By Jose Galvez, assistant pastor of the Fortuna (California) Seventh-day Adventist Church.*

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## To Love Like Him

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: 1 Cor. 13:4-7**

You know, Lord, I fully know what Christian love should be: “Love is very patient and kind, never jealous or envious, never boastful or proud, never haughty or selfish or rude. Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy. It does not hold grudges and will hardly even notice when others do it wrong. It is never glad about injustice, but rejoices whenever truth wins out. If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him” (1 Cor. 13:4-7, TLB).

Father, you gave me the perfect guidelines on how to love, *to truly* love, but each time *I* try, *I* fail. That is why I turn to You. I allow You to enter me, for “God is love” (1 John 4:16). I pray that You fill me so full of yourself, your love, that it overflows and soaks those around me, washing their eyes and letting them see You. I pray for You to see fit to change me, to teach me, to make me fully willing to be your love bearer. Give me the strength to follow every one of Your guidelines. Please help me to take each day as it comes, to see the opportunities You will pro-

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**“Love does not demand its own way. It is not irritable or touchy.”**

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vide for me to exercise Your love, and to act on those opportunities. In the name of Christ Jesus I ask these things. Amen.

Step-by-Step Guide to Loving:

1. Drop to knees.
2. Pray for realization of faults.
3. Pray for change.
4. Pray for His will.
5. Keep praying.
6. Listen.
7. And act!

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*By Amber Lea Bishop, a freelance writer from Fortuna, California.*

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## Love in Action

### OPINION

**Key Texts: Eph. 5:2; Col. 3:12-14**

How do we express love? “If you love someone you will be loyal to him no matter what the cost. You will always believe in him, always expect the best of him, and always stand your ground in defending him” (1 Cor. 13:7, TLB).

Almost a year ago, unknowingly, this text became the basis in my dealings with a friend I’ll call Jon. At that time I was not well acquainted with Jon; I’d been around him only a few times. It seemed to me that no one ever had anything good to say about him. I felt bad for him because he was continually criticized. People would say, “He deserves what he gets.” I heard it so often!

Then God pressed it upon my heart to stand up for him.

Let’s say when Allen would make fun of Jon’s stuttering, I would counter that Jon has a great sense of humor. Every time I heard a negative comment, I would say something positive about him. At times I would find myself being ridiculed for defending him.

Over the months I’ve begun to feel a special closeness to Jon. I can actually say that I like him for the person he is.

Tonight as I read 1 Corinthians 13 in the Living Bible, verse seven jumped out at me.

### “We are the only Jesus some will ever see.”

*Wow, I thought, that’s what I’ve been doing all along with Jon!*

It’s a lesson to me of how God loves us! He sent His Son Jesus to die for us. He risked everything because He loves us! Jesus stood in our place and took the death we deserve, all because He loves us! The only thing He asks from us in return is to love Him with all our hearts and to show others the love that He shows us.

Christian love is not telling others about God’s love, but it is rather *showing* them God’s love.

As a song I once heard says, “We are the only Jesus some will ever see.”

### REACT

What is your definition of Christian love?

*By Heather Jamieson, a freelance writer and part-time student at the College of the Redwoods, Fortuna, California.*

# REAL COMMUNITY SPIRIT



**“If you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, ‘You shall love your neighbor as yourself,’ you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors” (James 2:8, 9, NKJV).**

# Love Thy Neighbor

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: James 2:8, 9**

America is considered a melting pot, filled with diverse people. Diversity in cultures, race, and religion; we even differ by region. Yet even within our diversity, racial problems are ever present. These problems exist not only “in the world” but among Christians as well. One of the most difficult things for us to do, as Christians, is to love everyone as we love ourselves. Many of us put ourselves on a pedestal because of what we consider to be our “moral superiority.” We fail to remember Matthew 7:1, “Judge not, that you be not judged” (NKJV).

This means that what we may believe about alcohol usage, drugs, homosexuality, pre-marital sex, and the like should not affect our ability to do what God commands us to do: “ ‘love your neighbor as yourself’ ” (Matt. 19:19, NIV). Though we may feel uncomfortable being around homeless people, people who smell bad,

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### **We may feel uncomfortable being around people who smell bad.**

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who have deformities or abnormalities, we are supposed to love them. If we do not love them, how else are they to experience the love of Christ?

In this lesson we are going to examine how we are supposed to treat people and how we can have a loving heart free from bias.

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*By Nikesha Williams, a biology/premedicine student at the University of Texas at Austin.*

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# Breaking Down the Walls

## LOGOS

**Mark 7:24-30; Luke 10:30-33; John 4:7-15; Acts 17:26; Rom. 10:5-11; James 2:1-9**

Jesus Christ and His disciples had traveled a long way. They had come to a place called Schechem. At the entry to this place sat a well.

Jesus' disciples had left to get food. He rested at the wellside waiting for someone to come and draw water. Then came the Samaritan woman to whom Jesus spoke, "Will you give me a drink?" (John 4:7, NIV). The Samaritan woman responded by saying, "How is it that You, being a Jew, ask me for a drink since I am a Samaritan woman?" (verse 9, NASB). Jesus saw this not only as an opportunity to win a soul but also to deal with prejudice. The Jews and the Samaritans were enemies; there was much hatred between the two. But Jesus Christ Himself has the ability to break down the wall of prejudice between Him and the Samaritan woman.

Jesus Christ ministered about the living water to this Samaritan woman at the well. But when He spoke, He did it without regard to nationality, rank, creed, race, or color. Jesus Christ was reaching out to this woman to give her the living water so she would not thirst again. It was He who was laying the foundation about how we should treat one another. He showed us that it doesn't matter who we are, that we should share the Word of God and help anyone who is thirsting or in need.

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## **This was an act of true religion and true love.**

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In today's society, we have a tendency to be judgmental of or prejudiced against one another. Rather than opening up and reaching out to one another, we are a society segregating ourselves from those who are not of our religion, race, and/or color; therefore, we are building barriers out of differences.

Even the Canaanite woman cried to the Lord, asking Him to cast the demon out of her daughter (Mark 7:26). We must understand that this woman was considered "a heathen, and was therefore excluded from the advantages which the Jews daily enjoyed." Jesus Christ pretended not to hear this woman calling out to Him. Jesus was making a point of showing His disciples just how *they* responded to people who were not Jews. He was declaring that they needed to change their traditional ways.

We as human beings need to open up to all people, showing no discrimination or prejudice at all. If we as a people would do this, then not only would our community be a better place, but the world would too.

Jesus then shows us in the parable of the Good Samaritan that when the Samaritan came upon the victim, he felt compassion. This Samaritan cared for this man who was in need. He didn't ask who he was. He just reached out and helped. This was an act of true religion and true love. This is the way we are to be as Christian brothers and sisters. We are to be prepared at all times to show our love to all people. The way we love the Lord is the way we should love our neighbors.

"You shall love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:39, NKJV). We should not be partial, judgmental, or discriminatory toward anyone. We should give love

equally. There is no room for prejudice in the kingdom of heaven. We as Christians need to be the example of what an open community is. Jesus has placed before us the guidelines that we must follow. It is He who has broken down the barriers, the partition, and the wall that keep us from one another. Let's start reaching out to those who are of a different religion, rank, color, or race and begin to show and give true religion and love as Jesus Christ did freely.

## **REACT**

1. What prejudicial attitudes or behaviors do you hold?
2. How can you change them?
3. Do you agree or disagree that to some degree we can't help some prejudice?

Why or why not?

4. How can you follow Jesus' example by confronting your own prejudices in dealing with the people around you equally? Be specific.

5. What are some nonracial prejudices in your own life (in addition to racial ones) that are challenged by Jesus' example?

6. How can you be a proactive rather than a simple reactive Good Samaritan in your daily life?

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*\*The Desire of Ages, p. 399.*

# Jesus, Our Example

## TESTIMONY

**Key Texts: James 2:8, 9; Matt. 25:31-46**

Have you ever been treated differently because of the clothes you wear? Or where you live? Or what you look like? Or a wrong you committed in the past?

Needless to say, you probably did not like being treated differently from others because of your status in life. Scripture tells us that "if you really fulfill the royal law according to the Scripture, 'You shall love your neighbor as yourself,' you do well; but if you show partiality, you commit sin, and are convicted by the law as transgressors" (James 2:8, 9, NKJV). "These walls of prejudice will tumble down of themselves as did the walls of Jericho, when Christians obey the Word of God, which enjoins on them supreme love to their Maker and impartial love to their neighbors."<sup>1</sup> It will take the love of Christ in your heart to overcome the walls of prejudice.

"The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste, a religion by which Jew and Gentile, free and bond, are linked in a common brotherhood, equal before God. No question of policy influenced His movements. He made no difference between neighbors and strangers, friends and enemies."<sup>2</sup> Jesus showed us how we should treat all people, no matter who they might be. "Christ recognized

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### **"The life of Christ established a religion in which there is no caste."**

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no distinction of nationality or rank or creed. The scribes and Pharisees desired to make a local and a national benefit of all the gifts of heaven and to exclude the rest of God's family in the world."<sup>3</sup> James 2:9 tells us that it is a sin to show partiality. As Christians, we should take our lead from Jesus and the Holy Spirit; and we should continue to uphold the examples of how Jesus treated all people. Let your life be a testimony to those who are watching you (Matt. 5:16). As you go throughout the week, remember these points of today's lesson:

**Examine yourself.**

**EXclude no one.**

**Accept others for who they are.**

**Marvel at Jesus' life.**

**Pray always.**

**Love everyone.**

**Everyone is equal in God's sight.**

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1. *Selected Messages*, book 2, pp. 486, 487.

2. *The Ministry of Healing*, p. 25.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 190.

# Love Begins at Home

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: James 2:1-9**

The book of James was written around A.D. 49 to address several issues that the Jewish-Christian church was facing at that time. Persecution was on the rise, so the Christian communities had to disperse throughout the Roman Empire. As a result, several new churches lacked strong leadership and support. This made it difficult for the members to stand firm in their beliefs or even to know how their new beliefs differed from the Jewish beliefs they were accustomed to. James wrote this letter to all the churches who had relocated to the Gentile communities to give them both encouragement and guidance on such issues as faith, how to endure trials, wise speech, giving to others, and having love for one another.

As with our church today, the one issue out of those listed above that seemed to be the most difficult for the Jewish-Christian church to accept was the concept of loving one another. The idea of accepting people for who they are without prejudice or favoritism was the hardest for them to comprehend. In chapter 2 of James, he admonished them that showing favoritism was against Christ's teachings and that they should treat everyone equally.

But just like us today, the sermon went in one ear and out the other. As a result,

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## **Just like us today, the sermon went in one ear and out the other.**

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as new Gentile converts began to join the church, they didn't have the foundation that they needed to be able to welcome them with open arms and true Christian love. They wanted everyone to be, look, talk, and act just like them, which led to the convening of the Jerusalem council (see Acts 15). Although the specific point of contention at this council was far different from what we have heated discussions on today, one of the underlying lessons of this time in Christian history is still applicable today. Love begins at home.

How can we love our neighbors if we don't first love ourselves? How can we love visitors, new converts, or just people in our communities if we don't first love our brothers and sisters in Christ?

## **REACT**

1. How does Christ's teaching that we should treat everyone equally apply to politics? Should it make Christians more democratic or more socialistic? Explain your answer.

2. Once we have learned to love ourselves the way we should, how can we express our love for all others? Be specific.

3. How do you differentiate personal taste from prejudice?

4. If we are to love one another equally, how can we demonstrate our love for sinners while not loving their sins?

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*By Sharon Booker, a process engineer for IBM, Austin, Texas.*

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# How Do I Love Thee? Let Me Count the Ways

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 25:31-46**

I have found that Adventists, *generally*, are not an open, loving, inviting people. We tend to have a better-than-thou attitude toward those of different belief systems. We at times act like the Pharisees of Jesus' time. We are so busy following the letter of the law that we miss the spirit of the law.

At times I have even wondered, if Jesus were walking here on earth today, would we tell Him how to keep the Sabbath holy and then look down upon Him if He didn't do it the way we said? We tend to turn our noses up at alcoholics, thieves, murderers, adulterers, even Catholics. Is this how Christ would have us view or treat one another? It this how Christ treats us now? Didn't His grace and mercy cover you even before you came to enjoy a relationship with Him? How then can we treat *any* of God's children any differently?

1. If we have a true relationship with God, we will be able to treat all people as if they were Christ. If Christ lives in our hearts and we die daily to self and live for Him, then we will have the God-given ability to see others in a way that we might not have known was possible. We will truly be able to accept and appreciate

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## If Jesus were here today, would we tell Him how to keep the Sabbath holy?

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*all* God's children. This does not mean that we have to agree with their views on certain things, but we will be able to love them as Christ did.

2. We must try to be more agreeable and more open with those who have beliefs other than our own. I once heard a man say that he asked God to help him seek the truth—but to spare him the company of those who had already found it. Are we those people who have found the truth yet are so arrogant that others no longer choose to be in our company? We may not necessarily agree with the views of another, but how do we go about expressing that? Is our response in accordance with how Christ would have us respond?

3. We should do our best to see Jesus in all His children. God created each rose and every snowflake different from the other. Even more important to Him than flowers and snowflakes are His precious children. We are all children of God. Do we try to see the face of God in others, or are we so caught up in doctrinal beliefs that we don't even get past what God is trying to get us to see in others?

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*By Cheryl Taylor George, attorney in the Travis County (Texas) Attorney Criminal Division, Austin.*

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# Unconditional Love

## OPINION

**Key Text: Matt. 25:31-46**

Our attitude, as those who claim to know and love the Lord, should be one of true acceptance toward our brothers and sisters of all faiths (or no faith). Christ said to love the sinner and hate the sin. Too many times we as Adventists are unable to disconnect the two. We are so concerned about ourselves that we miss the blessings that God has in store. We sometimes act as though the only people who are going to get into heaven are Adventists.

I have news for each one of us: There will be no denominations in heaven. Heaven won't be divided as we are here on earth. Far too often we are divided in our churches into races. Some churches are known as the "Hispanic" church, another one is known as the "Black" church, and there are the "White" churches. Which church does your congregation fall under?

Wouldn't you rather your church simply be known as the church where the people are on fire for the Lord? Well, what are you doing to make that a reality? What are you doing to make other races, cultures, and nationalities feel welcome and at home in your church? If Jesus walked into your church today and he was African and had hair that appeared to be in dreadlocks . . . would He feel welcome

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## **There will be no denominations in heaven.**

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at your church? What if He were Asian and did not have on a suit and tie? How about if He were a Native American who came to church in native garb? Perhaps Jesus walks into your divine hour and was of no distinguishable race, but He looked a little dirty and grungy . . . would He feel the urge to want to stay and worship with your church?

You get my point: How we treat others is based largely on how we see Jesus. And how we see Jesus is rooted in how we see ourselves. If we ask Jesus to help us first love Him, then we will love ourselves and thus be able truly to love others.

In order to see God, all we have to do is read His Word. And when we allow God to be reflected upon each and every person whom we see, then we will be able to treat everyone as God would desire us. God will give us the ability to put aside our racial and cultural differences and love one another as He loves us.

What have you done in the recent past to foster diversity in your church? When visitors come to your church, do you go out of your way to make them feel welcome? Would you go out of your way to make Christ feel welcome? Remember Jesus said, "Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40, NIV).

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*By Ana Gonzales, a receptionist for a law firm in Austin, Texas.*

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# UNITED IN DIVERSITY



**“ My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me’ ” (John 17:20, 21, NIV).**

# Rising Above the Obvious

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Matt. 28:19**

The biggest exhibition hall in town is under siege. Tens of thousands of people are descending on it. They come from all walks of life, all colors, cultures, nationalities. But there are no limos, bodyguards, and tense faces that accompany a gathering of world politicians. There are no slogans chanted as on a march.

In fact, these people are friendly and look ecstatic to be there. It is the quinquennial General Conference Session, and if you have ever been to one, you will know what I'm talking about. Only there does the miracle of the church that we belong to, start coming home. With some 10 million members in almost two hundred countries around the world, you cannot believe that everyone could possibly be united in one cause. And as you watch this display of diversity and unity, as you watch men and women whose countries are at war embrace each other, you realize that there is a higher call to which these people have surrendered their lives. These are the people who have answered God's commission: " 'Go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit' " (Matt. 28:19, NIV).

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## **The biggest exhibition hall in town is under siege.**

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Jesus' message is simple. To this day His prayer is: " 'May they be brought to complete unity to let the world know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me' " (John 17:23, NIV). Jesus is calling us to rise above the limitations placed by this world and with God's love accept and nurture one another with our differences.

"The body is a unit, though it is made up of many parts; and though all its parts are many, they form one body. So it is with Christ. . . . Now you are the body of Christ, and each one of you is a part of it" (1 Cor. 12:12, 27, NIV). While men use our differences to divide us, God has a greater plan. Each of us, with our own personality, background, and talents, has a unique and special part to play in God's work. Our diversity enables us to fulfill God's commission, by being able to reach out to people in a way they understand and can relate to. Methods will be different, but one focal point must remain: God.

At the GC session while we all stood up to sing, I dared let myself dream away to the glass sea, when our commission is complete, *united* in singing *one* song of praise to our Maker, a multitude united in diversity.

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*By David Lorencin, an administrator in Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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# Are You Rowing?

## LOGOS

Rom. 12:4-8; 1 Cor. 12; Eph. 4:1-3, 11-16; John 17:17-23

If you have been connected to the Web or have subscribed to e-mail like myself and collect masses of junk mail, one of your friends may have sent you the following already, but I think it makes for a good illustration for this week's lesson:

The Americans and the Japanese decided to engage in a boat race. Both practiced hard and long to reach their peak performance levels. On the big day they felt ready. The Japanese won by a mile. The American team was discouraged by the loss. Morale sagged. Corporate management decided that the reason for the crushing defeat had to be found, so a consulting firm was hired to investigate the problem and recommend corrective action.

The consultant's finding: The Japanese team had eight people rowing and one person steering; the American team had one person rowing and eight people steering.

After a year of study and millions spent analyzing the problem, the consultant firm concluded that too many people were steering and not enough were rowing on the American team. So, as race day neared again the following year, the American's team management structure was completely reorganized.

The new structure: four steering managers, three area steering managers, and a new performance review system for the person rowing the boat to provide work incentive.

## One pastor plus 74 members equals 75 ministers!

The next year, the Japanese won by *two* miles!

The strategy for running the church is simple, we *all* need to row. Christ steers us, and as He does so, we must actively be "heaving and hoing" away with our oars. One pastor plus 74 members equals 75 ministers!

A long-distance runner does not rely solely upon his legs to win a race. His arms provide him with momentum, his heart pumps oxygenated blood to his muscles, his lungs help regulate his breathing, his eyes keep him on track, etc. He relies on more than one part of his body—at least, if he's going to be effective.

Let us now take a little closer look at 1 Corinthians 12. It is clear that the body is a single unit with many parts (1 Cor. 12:12). Just as a Rubik's Cube puzzle has many faces made up of many squares, it is still a single unit with many parts. In 1 Corinthians 12:7 we read, "To each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good" (NIV). The Spirit of God manifests itself in each member of the body, so that the member parts may work toward the good of the body. What is the use in having an eye that cannot see or an ear that cannot hear? Although human beings may have physical defects that restrict them from doing certain things, nothing can stop the work of God when His Spirit empowers any of us to do His work.

God arranges all the parts of the body (1 Cor. 12:11, 18). Just as the brain tells the arm how to move, so Christ, the head of the church, instructs the members of His body.

Christ's allegorical body, the church, must be the most important, life-changing organism in the world, pumping enthusiasm to all its members, catching a vision, preparing the saints for ministry. The church too often remains like the lifeless bodies described in 1 Samuel 31:10, 12, dead and inactive. Paul wants to encourage his readers to act together. To work as a team. To be unified in God.

In being a Christian, we must take at least three steps:

- **Claim God's Spirit.** God is more than happy to pour out His Spirit upon those who truly yearn for it. We shouldn't just sit back and wait for God to fill us; rather we need to ask God for it constantly and prepare ourselves spiritually as God pours out more and more of His Spirit into us.

- **Discover our spiritual gifts.** Search for them. Prayer is essential. Ask God to reveal them to you. There are questionnaires on spiritual gifts that can be quite helpful in your search. Seek advice—directly from a spiritual mentor, perhaps (bearing in mind that they may not always be correct), and indirectly, as people comment on things you do.

- **Utilize your spiritual gifts.** If your church isn't allowing you to utilize your gifts, then there is a serious problem. God gives us gifts for a purpose. Don't be like the servant in Matthew 25 who hides the talent the master gives him, because in the same way the master rebukes the servant, so will God rebuke us if we don't utilize our gifts. Christianity is not a spectator sport; it is an active God-driven mission to win souls for Christ.

"You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light" (1 Pet. 2:9, NIV). Here in this powerful verse we can see that:

- we have a sense of belonging—to Christ's body;
- we have a mission to declare God's glory because we are saved and we want others to be saved also.

When members of the church come to a full realization of the church's God-ordained mission, we will see what I once heard Bill Hybels call the "inverted system of the world."

Not my system, but Thy system, O Lord. It is this system that unifies the churches all over the world.

## **REACT**

What could *you* do in your church to unite and edify the body? Be specific.

# Blended in Unity

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: John 17:20, 21**

The best illustration I ever heard on the subject of unity is that of a key ring. The ring provides the unity for the keys. When one key is taken off, it does not make it any less probable that another one will be detached. If, however, a key is not connected to the ring but only touching other keys, it will fall because it is not really connected to anything at all.

“It is the purpose of God that His children shall blend in unity. Do they not expect to live together in the same heaven? Is Christ divided against Himself?”<sup>1</sup> In John 17:20, 21, Jesus speaks of His closeness with His Father and prays that we, too, will share that closeness. We need to search our own hearts for hatred toward brothers and sisters in the church. If every member would honestly love everyone as God taught us to, we would have much less discord.

Ellen White points out that when we focus on each other, and our human frailties and mistakes, we take our eyes off Christ and are much more likely to fall.<sup>2</sup> This results in a legalistic attitude toward any who do not conform to our viewpoints. Our standard should be to conform to God’s standards, not those of often well-meaning but legalistic people.

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## God created us different, and He wants us to stay that way.

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So, how can we be united? I have experienced this situation in a personal way. My boyfriend and I come from different countries, and as we became better acquainted, we noticed troubling habits in one another. At first we would always say that our own way of doing things was preferable. Although those jibes may have been meant jokingly, they sometimes ran deep. Then we learned to focus not on our differences but on our common interests, our love for God and for each other. We learned that the things we valued in one another were more important than our different cultures. As we grew closer together in love, our differences began to be appreciated as adding variety to our lives. Those contentious issues are no longer problems, because love finds a way around seemingly irreconcilable differences.

God loves variety. He loves all people of all colors and all shapes and sizes. He loves straight hair and curly hair, Scottish people and Americans, fat people and skinny people. He created us different, and He wants us to stay that way. We don’t have to conform to one another’s habits and cultures as long as our love for God stays the same. The key to unity is a relationship with God.

1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 8, p. 240.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 241.

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*By Leilani Edwards, a second-year biblical and pastoral studies student of Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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# Experiencing the Power of Unity

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts: Matt. 12:24, 25; 18:19, 20**

It had been a busy day for Jesus. It was the Sabbath, a day of rest, yet the Pharisees had been trying to trap Him all day. Because He healed on the Sabbath, they held council to destroy Him. When Jesus healed the devil-possessed man, they thought they had Him. But, as only Jesus can, He gave one of the greatest sermonettes ever, which you can read in Matthew 12:24-30. We must be united or we are destroyed. Jesus said, "He who is not with me is against me" (Matt. 12:30, NIV).

As Seventh-day Adventists, we are members of a worldwide church of over ten million individuals. Yet we are divided by race, nationality, language, and even theology. The church does not look like the remnant of Revelation that we see ourselves as. Instead, we are more like scattered sheep "carried about by every wind of doctrine" (Eph. 4:14, NASB). An image comes to mind. I see millions of lights flickering in the distance, some brighter than others. Like the stars in the sky, these are all God's children. If only they would unite! Then they would shine brighter than a thousand suns.

When a church family is divided, it cannot stand; the church becomes a political

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## When a church family is divided, it becomes a political wasteland and dies.

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wasteland and dies. "Together we stand, divided we fall" has become a political motto in Northern Ireland. Unity is essential for growth. If we are not united, we fight against ourselves. When Paul wrote to the Corinthians, a divided church (1 Cor. 1:10-16), he simply asked one question that we must ask ourselves: Is Christ divided? (1 Cor. 1:12). It is Christ who unites, and it is our goal to be like Christ (Eph. 4:11-16).

I want to share one promise that may shock you when you read it, but the Bible says it, so it must be true. If we are united in prayer, all prayers will be answered (Matt. 18:19, 20). If only we could agree together in twos and threes, the gospel would be preached to every nation, kindred, and tongue. Only then can the floodgates of the latter rain be poured out on every soul.

## REACT

1. Make a list of the benefits and problems involved with unity. Which list is longer?
2. What is the role of prayer in a united church?

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*By Stephen Wilson, an Irish student studying biblical and pastoral studies in Newbold College, Bracknell, Berkshire, England.*

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# From Passivity to Activity

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Rom. 12:4, 5**

If we are to fulfill our global mission (Matt. 28:19, 20), we cannot be passive spectators, but active, participating members. With many parts to the body, all have their specific part to play, so, too, it is with the church. Each member has something to do within the church; we simply need to identify it and use it.

Throughout this week, we have studied how important it is as members of the Seventh-day Adventist Church to be united in Christ. Now, let's take a look at some of the practical ways in which we can achieve unity as Jesus had with His Father. "That all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me" (John 17:21, NIV).

How, then, can we become actively united within our church? The following are just a few guidelines to help you.

**1. Personally seek Christ.** Unite in Christ through personal prayer. Pray to God for your unity in Him. In order to be united with Christ, we must first know Him. The church is simply made up of people just like you. Open yourself to the Holy Spirit. Spend time with Him. Study the Bible to deepen your understanding of Him and His work, and let Him do His work.

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## **“Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.”**

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**2. Establish your spiritual gifts.** In order to be effective in a united church, you need to know what part you are to play. Pray together that God may uncover the gifts of the Spirit in each member of your church family. This is important in working together. There are many parts to the body, so also it is in Christ (Rom. 12:4, 5).

**3. Unite with each other.** Pray for others, each member of your church. Together as a church family we should help one another to grow in love. "Let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds" (Heb. 10:24, NIV).

**4. Pray.** Spend time with God. Talk to Him about the unity you would like for yourself and your church. With passion, pray for a united church. Only then will we come close in fulfilling our global mission (Matt. 28:19, 20).

## **REACT**

1. What steps could be taken to establish your spiritual gifts as a church?
2. How can we actively utilize our spiritual gifts?

# United With and by God

## OPINION

**Key Text: Eph. 4:1-3**

New Zealand, Kenya, Brazil, U.S.A., England, China. The Seventh-day Adventist Church truly spans the continents. Only a few days ago I was telling a non-Adventist what makes our church special and how Adventists are “just one big family.” You can go into an Adventist church anywhere in the world and feel completely at home, unlike the majority of other churches.

But what is it that makes this difference? Why is it that in the Adventist church everyone is accepted no matter what race, nationality, or color you are? We can see that in today’s key text Paul urges us to live a life worthy of God’s calling. In the next verse he then goes on to tell us how to live this kind of life. The ingredients are humility, gentleness, patience, love. Once we lead a life full of these things, then we will be living our lives in accordance with God’s will.

I believe that this is the difference in our church. And this is why Adventists accept one another with unconditional love. The Holy Spirit is the force that binds us together with God and with each other and gives us these essential ingredients for a love-filled life, a life led by God. Unfortunately, life isn’t always as easy as it may sound, and there will always be hardships along the way that can easily take our focus off God and the life that He has called us to lead.

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## The Holy Spirit is the force that binds us together with God.

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But, fortunately, God is continuously working on our behalf through the Holy Spirit to keep us united with Him and with His church. We need always to remember that it is not through our power that we are able to live the God-called life, but through the inexhaustible power of the Holy Spirit.

The successful spread of the gospel requires us to be united to God and to each other. Only then can the gospel reach every corner of the universe. Until we are united like this, God can’t use us to our full potential, so it is essential for all of us to have these ingredients in our lives. Our lives are the greatest witness to those who don’t know Jesus, so let us ask God to unite us to Him and to each other so others may see the difference in our church and in our God-led lives.

## REACT

1. Is there anything in your life that is keeping you from being united to Christ? If so, what?

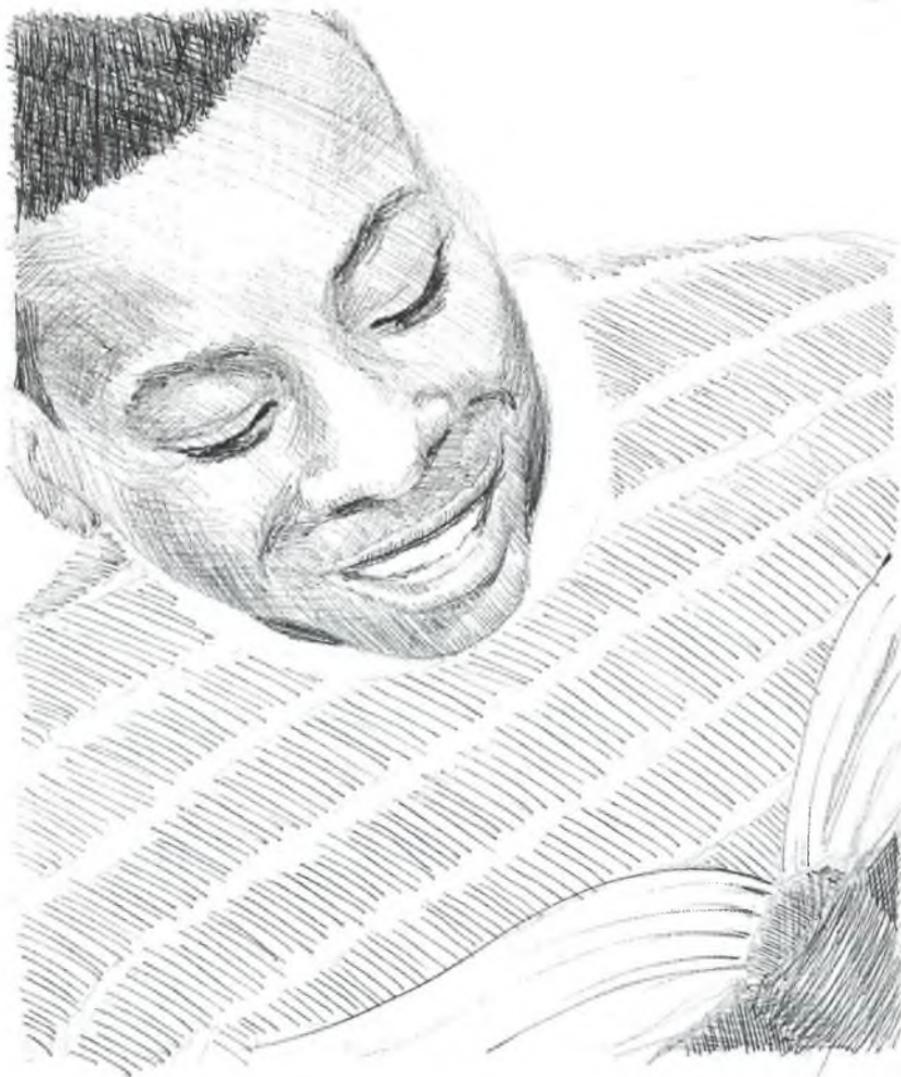
2. How can we show God’s uniting love for others more than we do at the moment?

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

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# IN BUT NOT OF?



**“Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him”  
(1 John 2:15, NKJV).**

# Bravery in the Face of Fear

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Josh. 1:9; John 14**

When I was a teenager, sin surrounded me like flies around a carcass. I struggled every day to live a happy life, but it seems that I always followed a path of failure and destruction. I wondered if God had intended me to live in this hateful world. *Am I of the World?* I wondered.

I was encouraged to smoke, drink beer, and even stop going to church. Later I became attracted to a girl in church. I went to church just to meet her, and as I listened to the sermon, I came across Joshua 1:9. "Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous. Do not be terrified; do not be discouraged, for the Lord your God will be with you wherever you go" (NIV). It is then that I noticed that God was always with me. Even though I had given up on Him, He had never given up on me. He uses any method to bring you back to Him. He attracted me to a girl, who is now my wife, just so I could share His glory once more.

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## **I even had to quit my job in order to honor the Sabbath day.**

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Today I still struggle to be a good Christian. I even had to quit my job in order to honor the Sabbath day. But God is always on my side and yours. No matter what we have done, no matter where we have been, He will never abandon you. John 14 illustrates the way to Jesus and how His teachings will always be with us.

It is not easy to live in this world, because the enemy knows our weaknesses. The closer we get to God, temptation is always at work. The world is infested with sin, and sometimes we can be pushed to our limits. We have to be brave in order to face our fear. As we get closer to the end of the century, the world watches us to see whether we will fail. But Jesus conquers for us so we won't have to suffer in this world. He gave us a better option in His kingdom. He has already won the battle against sin; the only thing you have to do is accept it!

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*By Lazaro Portillo, a construction worker in Washington, D.C.*

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# You Are Not of the World!

## LOGOS

**Phil. 3:17-19; John 17:14-16; 2 Tim. 3:1-5; 1 John 2:15-17; Gal. 5:18-25**

“‘They are not of the world, even as I am not of it’” (John 17:16, NIV). “Our citizenship is in heaven” (Phil. 3:20, NIV). “God raised us up with Christ and seated us with him in the heavenly realms in Christ Jesus” (Eph. 2:6, NIV).

What do you understand from these texts? Do you believe what they say? Do you accept it? Above all, do you feel such assurance?

The challenge is, “Do not love the world or anything in the world” (1 John 2:15, NIV). But why? It’s simple. “If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him” (verse 15, NIV). To love the world is an indication that the heavenly Father is not in the life of one who professes to be a Christian.

What conflict! Certainly we all fail, we all sin. If we give in to our failings, does this mean that the love of the Father is not in us? It’s a fact that Christians feel little security in God when their actions go against the principles that they have been taught. In many cases, this results in hypocrisy. Such Christians live a superficial life: go to church, pay tithe, give offerings, and fulfill those obligations by which we know we will be judged—the things that can be seen. But the key in this text is love. What focus does love have? Focus on what?

*Agape* is the word used here, translated as “love.” *Agape* means unconditional

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## It’s all a matter of how you look at the glass— half empty or half full.

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love, purposely aimed at something. If this love does not originate with the heavenly Father, then it becomes diseased. This is because its focus will be on the wrong thing.

Inner motivation is not a result of being told, “Don’t do this” or “Do this.” Rather, it is an inner matter and not an exterior one (Matt. 15:18). Many focus on how to change their behavior, when all they really need is to put their trust in the power to overcome: Jesus Christ. They don’t experience the certainty of victory but rather worry about being defeated. It’s all a matter of how you look at the glass—half empty or half full? The children of God are not avoiding defeat; they are experiencing victory. “Thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ” (2 Cor. 2:14, NIV).

“Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God” (1 John 4:7, NIV). This matter of being born of God is not new. It is a promise whose fulfillment is recorded in the Old Testament (Jer. 31:31-34; Ezek. 36:26, 27). Essentially, what the Scripture tells us is that God will do the work (John 3:6; 7:38; Phil. 1:6). “It is God who works in you to will and to act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13, NIV).

“To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God—children born not of natural descent, nor of human decision or a husband’s will, but born of God” (John 1:12, 13, NIV). How can you be one of His children? By accepting Christ, by believing in His name, because

“the Spirit himself testifies with our spirit that we are God’s children” (Rom. 8:16, NIV) “because those who are led by the Spirit of God are sons of God” (verse 14, NIV).

The greatest evidence of a Christian is the internal warring versus the exterior acts. The apostle Paul talks about this warfare and concludes, “Thanks be to God—through Jesus Christ our Lord!” (Rom. 7:25, NIV) “for the sinful nature desires what is contrary to the Spirit, and the Spirit what is contrary to the sinful nature” (Gal. 5:17, NIV). This is no excuse to give sin free reign, but rather, it shows that there is an inner battle because of Christ’s presence in our lives. Do you feel awful when you sin? Thanks be to God! This is God’s message to you. You are not of the world! The world is your temptation, but it is not the object of your love.

Our frailties are reflected in the world, but we are not of the world. The challenge is not to love the world. The fruit of the Spirit alone, love, can keep you from the world. He who confesses his weakness does not need to worry about strength. “I can do everything through him who gives me strength” (Phil. 4:13, NIV). When you read or hear this, what goes through your mind? What do you think? What does it mean to you? Do you believe it? Do you accept it? Do you have assurance? Jesus says, “You are not of the world!” (John 15:19, NASB).

## **REACT**

1. What kind of love of worldly things is Paul speaking of in 1 John 2:15?
2. What are the “worldly things” in 1 John 2:15?
3. In practical terms, how can we keep our minds pure?
4. How are God’s laws useful to humankind?

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*By Isidro Morell, pastor of the Spanish Council of Churches, Allegheny East Conference, Washington, D.C.*

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# The Quest to Belong

## TESTIMONY

**Key Texts: 2 Tim. 3:1-5; Phil. 3:20**

The day of Jesus' second coming is closer and closer. We see signs of His return every day in the world. Every day we hear about suffering, wars, hunger, and mistreatment occurring in the world. Furthermore, the future of the world was explained by Ellen White: "I was shown the state of the world, that it is fast filling up its cup of iniquity. Violence and crime of every description are filling our world, and Satan is using every means to make crime and debasing vice popular."<sup>1</sup>

The Bible also illustrates the future. Satan will use temptation to produce sin. "We must not, as a people, become careless and look upon sin with indifference. The camp needs purging. All who name the name of Christ need to watch and pray and guard the avenues of the soul; for Satan is at work to corrupt and destroy if the least advantage is given him."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is important to become closer to God, today, to prepare ourselves for tomorrow.

However, one cannot fear the things that await the world. Our faith is the key to combating the things of the world. Fear is not an option. Since we are not of the world, then our faith will combat any fear the world introduces in the final days.

If we are not of the world, even though we live in the world, then where do we

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## **Faith is the key to combating the things of the world.**

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really belong? The Bible tells us that we are not of the world, and our citizenship is in heaven (Phil. 3:20). People want to join sport teams, clubs, and even become part of a certain ethnicity and culture. Yet, God has a place for us, not a place in some fairy-tale world, but a real promised place for all His children who have believed in His Word and salvation.

Furthermore, the apostle John explains that the children of God are not of this world even though we live in the world. As the second coming of Jesus approaches, our faith becomes tested more and more. Violence, terror, sorrow, hunger, and despair are placed on us because we do not belong to the world; we are not of the world; therefore, the world hates us. We must avoid things of the world because we are the children of God. God loves you and cannot allow you to belong to a hateful world. You must believe, however, that you belong in a place where the color of your skin has no significance, where all people are treated equally, in a majestic place that knows only joy, happiness, and the love of God.

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1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 3, p. 471.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 476.

# Do Not Love the World

## EVIDENCE

### Key Text: Eph. 2:19

In Scripture the word *world* comes from the Greek word *kosmos*, which has several applications: (a) the universe (Gen.1:1); (b) persons or peoples (Matt. 24:14); (c) sinful practices (Eph. 2:2).

When 1 John 2:15 says “Do not love the world” (NIV), it is referring to the sinful practices that exist in our society, such as drugs, alcohol, tobacco, prostitution, etc., which have the purpose of destroying us physically and spiritually.

In God’s immeasurable love for us, He wants us to avoid these consequences. Yet those who follow the world “have chosen its service, accepted its perplexities, adopted its customs. Thus their character is marred, and their life made a weariness. In order to gratify ambition and worldly desires, they wound the conscience, and bring upon themselves an additional burden of remorse.”<sup>1</sup> Knowing the consequences and because of His great love for us, He says, “Do not love the world” (verse 15, NIV). Do not love its customs. Do not love “the cravings of sinful man, the lust of his eyes and the boasting of what he has and does” (verse 16, NIV).

The Bible itself says that all this passes away (verse 17). The enjoyment and the experience, although pleasant, pass away, but the consequences remain and destroy the life.

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## You deserve to live a happy, healthy life.

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God sees in you a being who belongs to Him and who means a lot to Him. Even though you live in a world full of perversions, He will love you forever (John 13:1). As God’s child you do not belong to this world. This is why He said you are “fellow citizens with God’s people and members of God’s household” (Eph. 2:19, NIV).

To fall for the customs of the world is to “neutralize all . . . of the gospel”<sup>2</sup> and “squander the precious years, squandering the powers of mind and heart and soul, and working to make himself bankrupt for eternity.”<sup>3</sup>

You deserve to live a happy, healthy life, with a quick and dynamic mind and a healthy body, ready for action, with a pure smile and a friendly face. How can you do that? The Bible says, “ ‘If you love me, you will obey what I command’ ” (John 14:15, NIV). We must ask God to help us love Him. His love in us will inspire us and will help us abhor the destructive customs of the world. God desires the best for you, and He provides the Holy Spirit to help you (16:8).

You can live like the white water lily, that white flower that grows in the marshlands. You can live in a perverted world and yet lead a happy, healthy life that is pleasing in God’s sight.

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1. *The Desire of Ages*, p. 330.
  2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 34.
  3. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 201.

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*By Bolivar Ascencio, pastor of the Hispanic Seventh-day Adventist Church of Washington, D.C.*

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# Living in a World Where We Do Not Belong

## HOW-TO

**Key Texts:** John 15:18-20; Gal. 5:13-26

As children of God, we have been promised eternal happiness in God's kingdom. Furthermore, as children of God, we live on this world to spread His Word to others, to represent Him and all His glory. We have the responsibility to represent His love, power, and glory to the rest of the world. Yet we must love all sinners and learn to avoid the things of the world. Sin is all around us, and it's spreading. However, we are to be pure in impurity, through the ministry of God's Spirit. We must live by the Spirit and the love of God.

Your environment may sometimes contrast with your Christianity. Your friends may not accept you, your education can be affected, and life itself may be problematic just because you have devoted your life to God. One must love everyone, even one's enemies. "The entire law is summed up in a single command: 'Love your neighbor as yourself'" (Gal. 5:14, NIV). Love is the key to life. If you love God, then you will not worship other gods. If you love your neighbor, then you will not ridicule his or her faults.

As our communities become larger and more mobile, we tend to ignore the idea

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## Your environment may sometimes contrast with your Christianity.

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that we all share the same planet. Socrates believed that the only perfect human being is a combination of all people. We forget that we are all creatures of God and are all connected to each other. Therefore, we must learn to live with one another, or, at least, learn how to tolerate one another. One cannot evaluate others by their faults and weaknesses, because true greatness is in all of us. The best things in life have nothing to do with success, money, and possessions. They are things like truth, imagination, kindness, compassion, and love.

God has given us freedom but not to do wrong. The laws of God were created to protect and serve humankind; however, one must live by the Spirit. When one has the fruits of the Spirit, one doesn't feel like indulging in sinful nature. The Spirit allows us to avoid the things of the world, the sinful nature, as described in Galatians 5:19-21. We must pray to be filled by the Spirit to truly understand God's message.

## REACT

1. What do you consider spiritual impurities? How can you avoid them?
2. How can you love your enemy?

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*By Kelly Ballena, a criminal justice and religion major, George Washington University, Washington, D.C.*

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# Mind Over Matter

## OPINION

**Key Text: 2 Cor. 5:6**

Karl Marx regarded religion as a means by which the ruling class controlled society. The elite encouraged people at the bottom of society to be religious so that they would accept their disadvantaged situations in the present and look forward to greatly improved circumstances in heaven. Therefore, Marx considered religion an illusion, referring to it as “the opiate of the masses,” because it dulls their sense of outrage and influences them to accept their exploitation.<sup>1</sup>

Current religious society, especially Christian people, prove Marx’s theory wrong. Religion is a way to live. Religion has become a strong force in defining who we are, developing our politics, ethics, and morality. In 2 Corinthians 5:6, however, the apostle Paul explains: “We are always confident and know that as long as we are at home in the body we are away from the Lord” (NIV).

In other words, as long as we depend on the physical aspects of life, then we cannot be closer to life. Our spirit and soul must be completely devoted to God. One must not love the things of the world (1 John 2:15). Furthermore, one must not love things that take away the love from our spirit and soul, such as hate,

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## “Every man dies, but not every man really lives.”

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jealousy, and selfish ambitions.

Sin begins in the heart, resulting in the destruction of ourselves; therefore, sin is not the actual act of evil but the intention to act evil out. Physical destruction of our life comes only as a result of our love of worldly things. We must keep our hearts pure in order to allow the love of Jesus to fill them.

We have been created to serve the Lord. In turn, He offers us a place with Him. Therefore, every day must be lived to its fullest. “Every man dies, but not every man really lives.”<sup>2</sup> We must treat *all* our brothers and sisters equally, helping them whenever possible. We have to stop worrying whether or not we will sin. No individual can possibly keep all God’s laws and do everything He wants from us. As long as we live in this world, sin will always be a part of us. We must believe, however, that God does not measure how many times we have sinned but whether or not we have belief in His salvation; whether we have lived each day as though we believe He will return to take us with Him. If we have been filled with the love of God, then our desire to sin will no longer be a factor. God will show us right from wrong in a chaotic world.

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1. William C. Cockerham, *The Global Society*, pp. 488, 489.

2. Randall Wallace, *Braveheart*.

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*By Elizabeth Montanez, a public relations student at Northern Virginia Community College, Alexandria.*

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# THE ULTIMATE WORKOUT



**“We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good” (Titus 2:13, 14, NIV).**

# What Might Have Been

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Prov. 23:26**

The minister sighed as he peered through the rain pelting his windshield. It was becoming too much of a habit, people dumping things on the steps of the church. Climbing out of the car, he pulled up his collar and made a dash for the steps. "Dirty old rags," he muttered in disgust as he stooped to pick up the bundle. Suddenly it moved. It was a wizened old man, soaked to the skin and in danger of pneumonia. He grasped the minister's arm with a gnarled hand. "I must pay my tithe," he said.

"Where do you live?" the minister asked. He helped the man into the car and drove him home. In ensuing visits, the minister heard the old man's story.

As a young man, Mr. M had been active in the church, a pillar of the youth department. Whatever was happening, he was in the thick of it. Then he married. She was charming, beautiful, gifted, witty, but had no time for God. Early on she made it clear that if he continued to return his tithe, she would leave him. They had a whole world to explore, and that 10 percent would make all the difference in what they could do. He capitulated.

Their marriage had been long and happy. She had died a few months earlier.

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## Life is not a rehearsal, nor is it reusable.

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Now he was alone, grief-stricken. He had picked up his dust-covered Bible, opened it, and read, "Will a man rob God?" He must return his tithe. The next few months transformed Mr. M. He returned his tithe, started coming to church, studied his Bible, and radically changed his lifestyle.

Finally the day came when he was baptized. As he sat at the front of the church, I looked at him: bright eyes, sunken cheeks, nicotine stumps for teeth, cracked voice—a bag of bones. Heaven rejoiced that day for the sheep that was lost and found again, but I couldn't help thinking what might have been. What if he had stayed faithful? What if he had been firm and returned his tithe? What if . . . Life is not a rehearsal, nor is it reusable.

"Consecrate yourself to God in the morning; make this your very first work. Let your prayer be, 'Take me, O Lord, as wholly thine. I lay all my plans at Thy feet. Use me today in Thy service. Abide with me, and let all my work be wrought in Thee.' This is a daily matter. Each morning consecrate yourself to God for that day. . . . Thus day by day you may be giving your life into the hands of God, and thus your life will be molded more and more after the life of Christ."\*

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

# Anyone Can Do It

## LOGOS

**Titus 2:11-14; 3:8; Eph. 2:8-10; 5:25-27; 1 Thess. 5:23; 1 Pet. 1:13-16; Rom. 6:12-14**

The old gypsy woman came to my home regularly. Her aged face was weather beaten. Her visit was a ritual. She would ask for help. I would give her some money. In return she offered a few withered flowers or some colored ribbons which I would decline to accept. I always felt good after she went away. I was doing a good work. It was no burden to give her some money. It was an easy way to virtue.

I was responsive to this woman because she made me think of my mother. I would often reflect that if my mother were in such a position and had to beg from house to house, I would want her to receive some kindness and care.

The woman came on a particularly hot day. As usual I went to get some money. I noticed she was trembling. Her lips were cracked. Dried saliva was white at the corners of her mouth. In a whispering voice, she said, "Could I have a glass of water, sir?" I took her into my home, sat her on a comfortable chair, and got her a glass of cool water. She asked for a second glass. The change in her was remarkable. She seemed energized. I gave her some money, and away she went.

I could not forget her request for a glass of water. The effect it had upon her was less than it had upon me. For a few moments the old woman and I shared an intimacy that had never happened in the four or five years she had been calling at

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## **It was no hardship for me to give her the equivalent of five dollars.**

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my home. I'd always given her money. It was no hardship for me to give her the equivalent of five dollars. But it was giving her the glass of water that I remember and value. It was an act that cost me nothing. Anyone could have done it. Yet it was more significant for me than anything else I had done for her.

Jesus says, "I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in" (Matt. 25:35, NIV).

The hope of Christ's return is driven by the love of God. The God who freely gave the costliest of all possessions, His own Son, for our redemption. Salvation is not an idea; it is an experience with Jesus. It is active, not static. It is an experience that brings change. Things happen in our lives. The promises of God, the grace of God, the love and mercy of God, become real and effective in our life day by day. As the hymn writer expressed it, "something lives in every hue Christless eyes have never seen."<sup>1</sup>

Anyone can experience it.

Christ in the heart and mind creates holiness and love in the life. "Zeal for good works" is neither an impossible goal nor an intolerable burden. The works of grace are not limited to an exclusive elite. Anyone can perform them. No one is excluded because of gender or race. No one needs academic degrees or higher education in order to qualify. Riches do not confer privilege, nor does poverty disqualify. Race or gender do not give any advantage or create any disadvantage.

Anyone can do them.

Which of us could not share a meal? Give a drink of water? Be a friend? Share some clothing? Visit a sick, elderly, or discouraged person? Which of us cannot if we choose lend a sympathetic ear or speak a kind word? Anyone can do it.

You may spend your life to sow and reap,

The more to have and the more to keep:

But you'll find at last in life's great day

All you have left is what you gave away.

The kind words said and the good deeds done

Are never regretted at setting sun.<sup>2</sup>

God wants us, not our possessions. He wants the whole; not parts, bits, and pieces. Good works and holiness are possible for everyone. Anyone can be holy. Anyone can do good works. But never as payment for salvation. Holiness, zeal for doing good, come only from the converted heart. They are the consequence—not the cause—of salvation. They are always and only done with and through Jesus. Never without Him.

“The one who calls you is faithful and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:24, NIV).

“ ‘Apart from me you can do nothing’ ” (John 15:5, NIV).

God's grace that brings salvation teaches us that it is not caused by good works, but it is never without them. Grace without gratitude expressed in part by deeds of kindness is never the experience of one in whose heart Christ is formed within the hope of glory (Col. 1:27).

## **REACT**

1. Are there special qualifications required before we are equipped to do good works? Explain your answer.

2. If there is a difference between “doing good” as a Christian and as a non-Christian, what would it be?

3. How does the grace of God teach us to be negative to evil but positive to good?

4. In what way does the “blessed hope” encourage us to do good works?

5. What are some possible reasons that we may fail to do good works?

6. If my heart is truly converted, what motivates my actions?

7. How can I practically demonstrate my faith to other people?

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1. G. W. Robinson, “Loved With Everlasting Love,” *New Advent Hymnal*, No. 431 (England: Stanborough Press, 1952).

2. Leonard C. Lee, *Golden Stairs* (Washington, D.C.: Review and Herald Pub. Assn., 1950).

# Just Do It

## TESTIMONY

**Scripture: Titus 2:11-14**

Teetering on the edge of a six-foot stone ledge, I trembled with fright. The fact that 20 outstretched arms waited to break my fall didn't calm my nerves. I was supposed to lean backward and tumble into arms I couldn't see. I had to trust that they were there.

Why couldn't I just tell them "I trust you" and be done with it?

Because true faith involves action as well as conviction; taking steps to demonstrate our faith reinforces it in our hearts and minds.

"Genuine faith will be manifested in good works; for good works are the fruits of faith. As God works in the heart, and man surrenders his will to God, and cooperates with God, he works out in the life what God works in by the Holy Spirit, and there is harmony between the purpose of the heart and the practice of the life. Every sin must be renounced as the hateful thing that crucified the Lord of life and glory, and the believer must have a progressive experience by continually doing the works of Christ. It is by continual surrender of the will, by continual obedience, that the blessing of justification is retained."<sup>1</sup>

Back at the ledge, I somehow mustered the courage to fall. And I'm glad I did.

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## **Exercising my faith has a ripple effect on those around me.**

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Landing in those supportive arms strengthened my trust even further.

The experience of stepping out in faith—whether it be in a free fall or on my spiritual journey—is so gripping, I feel compelled to share it with others. Exercising my faith then has a ripple effect on those around me.

"Like the wind, which is invisible, yet the effects of which are plainly seen and felt, is the Spirit of God in its work upon the human heart. That regenerating power, which no human eye can see, begets a new life in the soul; it creates a new being in the image of God. While the work of the Spirit is silent and imperceptible, its effects are manifest. If the heart has been renewed by the Spirit of God, the life will bear witness to the fact."<sup>2</sup>

"In the heart renewed by divine grace, love is the principle of action. It modifies the character, governs the impulses, controls the passions, subdues enmity, and ennobles the affections. This love, cherished in the soul, sweetens the life and sheds a refining influence on all around."<sup>3</sup>

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1. *Selected Messages*, bk. 1, p. 397.

2. *Steps to Christ*, p. 57.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 59.

# Secret of Holy Living

## EVIDENCE

### Key Text: Titus 2:13, 14

*"We wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ, who gave himself for us to redeem us from all wickedness and to purify for himself a people that are his very own, eager to do what is good" (Titus 2:13, 14, NIV).*

Paul's message to Titus is an appeal for holy living. God desires that His people be pure, holy, special, and zealous for good works. Ethical demands and behavioral change, however, are difficult to measure up to unless we understand the secret of holy living. To Paul, the secret is found in the grace of God. True ethical Christian conduct is grounded in and motivated by the grace of God. Paul could not imagine holy conduct apart from God's grace. To Paul, God's grace is the foundation of salvation (verse 11), righteous living (verse 12), the second advent (verse 13), and the completion of God's redemptive work (verse 14).

God's grace is instructive in nature (verse 12). It instructs us as children are instructed. It is, as it were, our teacher. This teaching process is similar to that of training a child. Such training includes discipline as children need discipline. God's grace teaches us to say No to ungodliness and worldly passions. When

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## **True ethical Christian conduct is grounded in and motivated by the grace of God.**

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tempted, it teaches us to deny temptation. It gives us the will and the strength to resist them.

God's grace is also positive in nature. It teaches us to say Yes to sober, righteous, and godly living (verse 12). It transforms. For this reason, Paul emphasizes that sin shall not "have dominion" over us, for we are "not under the law, but under grace" (Rom. 6:14, KJV). Sin may tempt and fuss, but it will not have mastery over us. The law does not save: God's grace does. Hence, Christians are not saved legalistically by their own works of obedience and right behavior. Under grace, the struggle with sin will result in victory and holy living.

God's teaching grace is tenable in view of the Second Advent. It prepares the human heart for the blessed hope (verse 13). Those who have been trained by God's grace look forward to the glorious appearing of Jesus. That event marks the ultimate deliverance from sin.

Thus, God's grace is the foundation of holy living. Christian behavior is but the outcome of allowing this grace to teach us and transform us. Adventism is a positive religion, not a religion of dos and don'ts.

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*By G. T. Ng, dean of the theological seminary at the Adventist International Institute of Advanced Studies, Manila, the Philippines.*

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# Performing Good Works Is a Spiritual Activity

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Rom. 15:1-3**

To be spiritual means to be aware of that which is beyond yourself—God. Being involved in service through good works in you produces two practical benefits. First, such service potentially communicates to those people being served that a supernatural, universal Being is interested in them. Second, service also helps those performing the service to become more aware of themselves, more aware of their world, and more aware of what God is like. It is in service for the world rather than in seclusion from the world that most people are able to grasp and experience God. The spiritual disciplines of prayer, Bible reading, fasting, and journal keeping become more meaningful when connected to service rather than when practiced as isolated, “holy” activities.

To be holy is to be set apart for a special or particular use. It is not an innate characteristic, nor is it internally generated. It is a value that is applied by one who deems something to be holy. That is, holiness has nothing to do with any intrinsic value found in some human beings but not in others. Therefore, holiness is not a price tag that humans can ascribe to one another as a means of determining who is more or less valuable in the sight of God. Our worth is determined by the value that God places equally on every human. Holiness is practical. It is only in service

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## **To be holy is to be set apart for a special or particular use.**

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and good works to other human beings, as Jesus’ disciples, that we express, experience, and grow in holiness. In this holy activity we keep hope alive in our own life, and we may rekindle the flame of hope in other people.

To live in a state of mutual interdependence and community is the way God intends societies to exist. Ideally, the church is intended to model this approach to living in the hope that all societies will follow. Though our relationship with God is a personal, individual matter, we are to live out that relationship in community with other people. The practice of good works, because it is other-centered, expresses the communal nature of life.

If you want to develop spirituality and experience holiness, become involved in your community in service and good works. It will take some effort, but it is easy to begin. Perhaps your church has a regular local community services project. Why not join in as a team member? Alternatively, you can volunteer to become part of a reputable service organization in the community where you live. If this does not work out, you can visit with government helping agencies and authorities to determine the needs in your community that are not being met. Select one need, and then, with the support of people you know, begin servicing that need in your community. It will change your life forever.

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*By David Foster, director of the South Pacific Division Personal Ministries/Sabbath School Department, Wahroonga, Australia.*

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## Follow Me . . . (Well, Not Too Closely)

### OPINION

**Key Text:** Ps. 43:3

“Leadership Lesson 1” came unexpectedly within the initial weeks of my indoctrination summer at the nation’s premier leadership institution. As I waited for the officer to come by our room for the first big inspection of the summer, I heard him stop just short of knocking on my door. He began to yell, but it was not directed at us. He was chewing out the upperclassmen!

In the colorful vocabulary describing their substandard room, coupled with the pounding of my heart, one particular phrase wedged itself deep within my mind that day that has stuck with me up until now: “Do as I say, not as I do”: simply the worst possible example of leadership you can instill in your subordinates.

Soldiers follow a leader in battle for a variety of reasons: a genuine commitment to the leader, promise of reward for compliance, fear of punishment for noncompliance, bravery, stupidity, or even through just a plain I’ve-got-nothing-better-to-do-than-follow-this-guy-for-now attitude. But who wants to go to war and place his life and trust in those who are in it only for the money? Ideally, the leader wants his subordinates to obey him out of a genuine commitment and respect for himself. The leader achieves this genuine commitment by showing, and not merely stating, that he is capable and willing to do everything he asks of them.

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### **Soldiers follow a leader in battle for a variety of reasons.**

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Who wants to spend eternity in a heaven with those recruiters who can only “talk the talk” but not “walk the walk”? What person hungry for Christ and seeking a change in his worldly lifestyle will be encouraged by the Christian leader who abuses alcohol, tobacco, and curses like an infantryman? What searching soul will be inspired by the congregation at the nice, expensive-looking church on the corner whose members do not even acknowledge him as a visitor? And what weary heart looking to come back to the Lord will be inspired by the unforgiving and critical attitude of his former church family?

Make no mistake. There is an abundance of hungry hearts in the world looking for leadership to bring them to Christ, to show them the way. But you’d better be correct. Are you telling your friends to have more faith in God? Then *show* them your faith in God. Are you describing to them the traits of selfless service? Then first make sure your life is a clear example of such service.

Does Satan have your church pinned down in a holy fire fight? You’d better believe that the only way your soldiers will continue moving forward for Christ is if you stand up first and yell, “Follow me!”

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*By CDT Cyril S. Paulo ('99), a junior systems engineering major, United States Military Academy, West Point, New York.*

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# SALT OF THE EARTH



**“For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Walk as children of light” (Eph. 5:8, NKJV).**

# Can the World See Jesus in Us?

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: John 8:12**

One afternoon in 1985, I was on my way home from the university. As I was in the middle of heavy traffic on a freeway in Miami, Florida, another car was passing slowly on my left. The three teenage girls in the car waved at me and shouted, "Yeah! Loma Linda!" I had just moved from Loma Linda to Miami a few months earlier, and the girls had spotted the Loma Linda University parking sticker on the bumper.

A year before this incident, I was visiting the Caribbean island of Barbados. One Sabbath afternoon, on my way to my apartment from church, I was walking across an empty supermarket parking lot. A security guard who was patrolling the supermarket building looked toward me and smiled. I did not think I knew him, thought he was smiling at someone behind me, so I looked around, but there was nobody. "You must be a Seventh-day Adventist," he said. I had a Bible with me, but that should not be enough to let people know I was a Seventh-day Adventist. "There are only two groups of people on this island who worship on Saturday," the security guard said, "and you do not look like a Jew to me."

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## A security guard looked toward me and smiled.

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It is nice that people know I came from Loma Linda. It is nice that people know I am a Seventh-day Adventist. But I think it is much nicer for people to know that I am a Christian, through acts of kindness, love, mercy, and encouraging words. When my wife graduated with her master's degree in religion from Loma Linda University, I asked her what she had learned that she did not know before. I thought she would say she had learned more about Adventist doctrines, traditions, rules of dos and don'ts, etc.

She paused for a moment before saying she had learned that God was love, kind, and merciful. I was surprised at her answer, so I asked her how she knew that God was love, kind, and merciful. She then said she had learned that God was love, kind, and merciful through Dr. Neils-Erik Andreasen, Dr. Ivan Blazen, and Dr. John Jones. I also noticed that from that day on my wife practiced what she had learned from her professors.

Can the world see Jesus in me? Can the world see Jesus in you?

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*By Nithat Sirichotiratana, preventive-care specialist at Bangkok (Thailand) Adventist Hospital, Dusit.*

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# Salt and Light

## LOGOS

**Matt. 5:13-16; Mark 9:50; John 8:12; 2 Cor. 4:6**

### **Salt to Preserve the World (Matt. 5:13, 14; Mark 9:50; Col. 3:5)**

At one point in his life, Gandhi inquired into Christianity. After attending several Christian church services, he concluded that the congregation did not seem to be particularly religious or devout, that the members appeared to be rather worldly minded. He decided that Christianity offered nothing that he did not already possess. So Gandhi was lost to the Christian church with incalculable consequences to India and to the world. Today many people regard the Christian church in the same way.

In Thailand the word *salt* has two meanings: a beneficial flavoring and preservative for food; and, in opposite connotation, someone described as salty is considered mean-spirited. When a salty person conflicts with others, people say, "Don't change your Borneo camphor for salt," meaning don't waste your time and means. Because there is no more saltiness in him or her, why waste your camphor? Many people outside the church may feel the same way when, like Gandhi, they observe Christians.

Many Christians mingle only among themselves and ignore other people who are different. When these others come to church, they feel unwelcome and usually

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## **"A Christianity whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone."**

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will not return. Being Christian is not merely reading the Bible, praying, paying tithe, joining church activities. This kind of Christian is only a *follower*, not a *disciple* of Christ. "Joining the church is one thing, and connecting with Christ is quite another. Not all the names registered in the church books are registered in the Lamb's book of life."<sup>1</sup>

In the ancient world, salt was highly valued as a preservative and seasoning. When Christ says we are the salt of the world, He means that without Christians in this world, it would perish. " 'Good salt is worthless if it loses its saltiness; it can't season anything. So don't lose your flavor! Live in peace with each other' " (Mark 9:50, TLB). When Abraham asked the Lord to spare Sodom, he bargained for the sake of the righteous in that wicked city. When these people were evacuated from Sodom, the judgment fire struck. Without Christians, what would happen to the world today? "Do not withdraw yourselves from the world in order to escape persecution. You are to abide among men, that the savor of the divine love may be as salt to preserve the world from corruption."<sup>2</sup> "If Christians are such in name only, they are like the salt that has lost its savor. They have no influence for good in the world. *Through their misrepresentation of God they are worse than unbelievers.*"<sup>3</sup>

### **Light of the World (Matt. 5:14; Phil. 2:14-16)**

At the top of Doi Suthep (the mountain of angels) in northern Thailand are the king's winter palace and a 700-year-old temple. At night the lights from these two

important places can be seen 50 kilometers away. People have often turned toward the mountain to pray for help and protection, for they knew that their king and god were there. When they were lost in the jungle at night, they looked to the mountain to give them direction.

When Christ says, “ ‘You are the light of the world’ ” (Matt. 5:14, NIV), He doesn’t mean that we ourselves produce light. We are a reflection of Jesus’ light. A Christian’s radiance shines because of the presence of Christ in the Christian’s heart. How many people, when faced with problems, turn to the Christian for help? Does our light shine? Paul said, “Do everything without complaining or arguing, so that you may become blameless and pure, children of God without fault in a crooked and depraved generation, in which you shine like stars in the universe as you hold out the word of life” (Phil. 2:14-16, NIV).

In Jesus’ day people used small clay lamps that burned olive oil. Jesus wants Christians to shine no matter how small their clay lamps, because their oil supply will never fail. “The oil is a symbol of the Holy Spirit. . . . The anointed ones therefore represent heavenly instrumentalities through which the Holy Spirit is imparted to human beings who are wholly consecrated to His service. ‘The mission of the two anointed ones is to communicate light and power to God’s people.’ . . . Those who receive such a heavenly imparting are expected, in turn, to communicate these blessings to others.”<sup>4</sup> No matter how small your lamp, do not keep it for yourself. Let it shine!

“Christianity should not be visible only within the Church. A Christianity whose effects stop at the church door is not much use to anyone. It should be even more visible in the ordinary activities of the world. Our Christianity should be visible in the way we treat a shop assistant across the counter, in the way we order a meal in a restaurant, in the way we treat our employees or serve our employer, in the way we play a game or drive or park a motor car, in the daily language we use, in the daily literature we read. A Christian should be just as much a Christian in the factory, the workshop, the shipyard, the mine, the schoolroom, the surgery, the kitchen, the golf course, the playing field as he is in church. Jesus did not say, ‘You are the light of the Church.’ He said, ‘You are the light of the *world*,’ and in a man’s life in the world his Christianity should be evident to all.”<sup>5</sup>

## **REACT**

1. What are the main factors that are working to take the saltiness out of your Christian life?
2. Light can help illuminate, or it can totally blind people. What sorts of light in our Christian lives can hurt the eyes of others?
3. In what ways could an observer tell the difference between a good Christian and a good Buddhist, a good Muslim, or a good nonbeliever?

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1. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 278.

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

3. *Ibid.*, italics supplied.

4. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 4, p. 1095.

5. William Barclay, *The Daily Study Bible*, vol. 1, p.123.

# What Did He Mean by That?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 5:13-16**

When Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13, NIV) and “the light of the world” (verse 14, NIV), what did He really mean? The word *you* means all believers.

In ancient times salt had a value that we might fail to understand today. The use of salt was a bond of fidelity; therefore, the Arab expression “there is salt between us.” Cakes of salt were used as money in Abyssinia, Tibet, and Rome. In Southeast Asia and some other parts of the world, salt is used to preserve food.

Many ancient roads were built to accommodate the desire for salt. The Via Salaria in Italy is between the salt pans of Ostia and the Sabine. Herodotus speaks of the caravan route uniting the salt oases of Libya. Salt was used to seal the covenants; sometimes they were called a “covenant of salt” (Num. 18:19).

Salt that had lost its savor was then good for nothing. When Jesus said, “You are the salt of the earth” (Matt. 5:13, NIV), He was saying that you have value like a binding contract, money in the bank, and a preservative in communities against evil things. To perform the act of preserving, believers must mingle themselves with the earth. “Salt must be mingled with the substance to which it is added; it must penetrate and infuse in order to preserve.”<sup>1</sup> “When God calls His

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## “Not all the books written can serve the purpose of a holy life.”

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children salt, He would teach them . . . that they may become agents in saving others.”<sup>2</sup>

In Matthew 5:14-16, Jesus told His disciples to be the light of the world, to lighten spiritual darkness and misconceptions of God. Satan tries to picture God as a stern, harsh God. Jesus came to counter that idea. He is our only source of power. “In him was life, and that life was the light of men” (John 1:4, NIV). What a privilege and an important commission for Christians to undertake now, to let our lights shine so that Satan’s deceptive power will be broken, that the world might be brought back to God.

“Not all the books written can serve the purpose of a holy life. Men will believe, not what the minister preaches, but what the church lives. Too often the influence of the sermon preached from the pulpit is counteracted by the sermon preached in the lives of those who claim to be advocates of truth.”<sup>3</sup>

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

2. *Ibid.*, p. 35.

3. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 9, p. 21.

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*By Pakdee Tawinno, dean, faculty of business administration, and Maggie Pang, Mission College, Muak Lek Campus, Saraburi, Thailand.*

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# Life Seasoned With Salt

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Mark 9:50**

In Palestine salt was gathered from marshes along the seashore or from inland lakes. During Christ's time it was a valuable commodity. The Latin word *salarium* means salt money; from it comes the modern word *salary*. Sometimes the Romans even paid their soldiers' salaries with it.

Before the days of refrigeration and other modern ways of preserving food, salt was used for preserving. In ancient Palestine, salt was used almost exclusively for this purpose and for seasoning. In Old Testament times, salt was added to every sacrifice in the ancient ceremonial ritual (Lev. 2:13). God Himself sealed His alliance with the children of Israel in the wilderness with a covenant of salt (Num. 18:19).

Salt has been known for its many characteristics and functions. It is estimated that humankind uses it in more than 10,000 ways. Salt brings out flavor in the food. In Thailand, some people eat pineapple with salt. It makes the pineapple taste even sweeter.

In a spiritual sense, what influence do Christians salted in Christ have on the society? Should there be any difference in our attitude? Christians, by becoming an agent in saving others through the diffusion of the gospel, exert a preserving

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## Salt was added to every sacrifice in the ancient ceremonial ritual.

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and purifying influence in the world. Salted Christians should develop a sense of responsibility in leading fellow humanity to Christ, the source of life.

Without the connection with Christ, it would be impossible to reflect the true character of God in our lives. "When the love, power, and righteousness of Christ are lost from the life of a professed Christian, there is no other source to which he may turn to supply their lack. A nominal Christian cannot pass on to others that which he does not himself possess."<sup>1</sup> The love of Christ, "cherished in the heart, . . . sweetens the entire life and sheds its blessing upon all around. It is this, and this only, that can make us the salt of the earth."<sup>2</sup> Further, the apostle Paul connected salt with gracious, tasteful words: "Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned with salt, that you may know how you ought to answer each one" (Col. 4:6, NKJV). Let your conversation be seasoned with God's grace each day. When we do that, there will be many more whose lives will be touched by our lives salted by Christ.

1. *The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 5, p. 330.

2. *Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing*, p. 38.

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*By Somchai Chuenjit, human resources director, Bangkok (Thailand) Adventist Hospital.*

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## Two Metaphors

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 5:13, 14**

When Christ admonished us to be the “‘salt of the earth’ ” and the “‘light of the world’ ” (Matt. 5:13, 14), He entrusted us with two distinctive duties. We should understand the spiritual implications of these two metaphors and, through God’s guidance, learn how to adopt them practically in daily living.

**The salt of the earth.** The principal function of salt is to add flavor to bland food. A little salt makes an otherwise tasteless dish flavorful and appealing. Similarly, our Christlike character and godly life should enhance the spiritual flavor of this otherwise “bland” world.

However, salt has a distinctive characteristic. When used in cooking, the salt blends so completely with the food that the salt itself becomes unnoticeable. It enhances the flavor of the food. To serve God as His salt of the earth, we must be willing to forget self-aggrandizement. Instead of pursuing egoistic gratification, our priority should be to enhance the spiritual welfare of others through our righteous way of living. For a saltlike Christian, the interests of other human beings should transcend one’s own. Being salt means being selflessly loving, humbly

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### **Our Christlike character and godly life should enhance the spiritual flavor of this “bland” world.**

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sympathetic, and righteous. A true Christian will season the bland life of the spiritually deprived with encouragement and hope through life witnessing.

**The light of the world.** By contrast, light, when serving its function of brightening darkness, is highly visible. One not only sees the effect of the light but also the light itself. Similarly, in addition to witnessing, Christians are called to play an active role in proclaiming God’s words as well. Before His ascent, Christ admonished His disciples to “be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth” (Acts 1:8, NIV).

It is not enough for Christians merely to witness through their righteous way of living. God has called us to illuminate this spiritually dark world by actively and openly proclaiming His words, spreading His gospel, and going to the ends of the world to bring salvation to our fellow human beings. True Christians should understand how important it is to realize their missionary duty and willingly undertake this responsibility. They must be both salt and light.

In the same manner that the full moon casts the reflection of the sun to illuminate the dark night sky, we should also always remember our real Source of light. It is very important that we realize that we are never the source of the light but a mere reflection of the supreme light of God. As light of the world, we must through our active works, bring praise and glory only to God and never to ourselves.

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*By Trakarn Chensri, a businessman in Bangkok, Thailand.*

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# Christians as Salt and Light of the World

## OPINION

**Key Text: Prov. 4:18, 19**

Late on a Friday afternoon, the telephone rang as I was ready to leave my office. A woman's voice was asking for information about Mission Health Promotion Center (MHPC). As I was telling her about our NEWSTART program, she asked if we had programs for Friday, Saturday, and Sunday. I told her that as a Seventh-day Adventist institution, MHPC did not conduct health programs on Friday afternoon or the whole day Saturday. I explained to her that the Sabbath day was our religious holiday, when we go to church.

She said she was a businesswoman who could afford to take time off work only on weekends. She also added that she had been trying to find time to attend our health program for more than a year but could not attend any of our programs because we did not hold any weekend programs.

After almost an hour, I finally told her that if she could go to MHPC for a Rest & Recreation weekend, I would be there to help answer her health problems. A few weeks later, the woman, her daughter, and her sister went to MHPC. Even though we did not have formal health lectures, I was able to help them understand our

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## I explained to her that the Sabbath day was our religious holiday.

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health principles. On Sabbath, I did not take them to church; instead, we went to sit under the trees near the garden and swimming pool. I shared with them why Saturday was our Sabbath day by telling them the Creation story and health principles from the Bible.

On our way back to Bangkok on Sunday, she asked if Friday afternoon and Saturday were my day off, and I said Yes. She asked if I was paid overtime for spending the weekend with her family at MHPC, and I said No. I also told her that I spent the weekend with her family because I noticed from our telephone conversation that she sincerely wanted to learn about our health principles but could not find the suitable time to come to MHPC. She paused for a moment then said that one of her brothers was an editor for SE-Education Publishing (Public) Company, another brother was an executive at the Thai Farmers' Bank (Public) Company, and another brother was an executive at Siam Cement (Public) Company. She wanted to bring her brothers to MHPC and would like to introduce them to me, so they could influence their corporate colleagues to come to MHPC.

## REACT

1. Can legalists be salt of the earth and light to the world? Explain your answer.
2. What was the key factor that most impressed the businesswoman about the writer and his beliefs?

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*By Nithat Sirichotiratana, preventive care specialist at Bangkok (Thailand) Adventist Hospital, Dusit.*

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# BUILDING A HOME



**“Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it” (Ps. 127:1, NKJV).**

# Built to Last

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Heb. 3:4**

*“Every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything” (Heb. 3:4, NIV).*

It was an adventure I could hardly wait to begin. As a young boy, I loved snow. Where I grew up, however, big snowfalls were measured in inches (not feet) and usually stayed on the ground for only a few days (or even hours). Now my family and some friends were headed to the mountains for a week of fun in the snow. It was a dream come true to step off the porch of the mountain cabin where we were staying and literally sink to my waist in snow.

With snow this deep, we had to do more than just build a snowman; we had to have a full-sized fort, or at least a tunnel through the snow. With this in mind, a friend and I began construction on what was to be a magnificent cave. We spent many hours on our hands and knees digging with our gloves and sometimes with a shovel. We hauled out bucket after bucket of snow, and, slowly but surely, we found ourselves disappearing farther and farther into our small mountain of snow. At last, we had a short tunnel with a room big enough that we could crawl into on

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## We hauled out bucket after bucket of snow.

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our hands and knees and be completely hidden, while still being able to see what was going on outside our hideout.

We were proud of our cave and had visions of expanding our project into a vast network of tunnels and rooms, which could be an actual home under the snow. With sledding and skiing and snowball fights, however, several days went by before we were able to enlarge our construction plans. In the meantime, something else had happened. The sunshine had been playing its part, and though we hadn't noticed that the snow had been thawing, the roof of our magnificent snow cave had been melting. Late one afternoon I had been asked to take some food scraps to the animals around the cabin. As I returned, marching through the snow, I suddenly crashed through the roof of our cave. Our secret snow house was disintegrating before my very eyes.

What can we do to make our homes secure? How can we make sure that the homes we are building today will outlast the forces trying to tear them down? The answer is simple—Jesus.

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*By Ross Harris, a pastor in the Arkansas-Louisiana Conference.*

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## Devotion or the Dishes

### LOGOS

**John 2:1-11; Eph. 5:21-31; 1 Cor. 7:2-6; Exod. 12:3, 5-7, 13, 26-28; Luke 10:38-42; 19:1-10**

To all outward appearances, the first-century world appears different from yours. But it really wasn't. The same basic human issues filled people's lives: never enough hours in a day; not enough wheat (or money) in the storehouse; no such thing as the perfect family, etc.

You may think that no one knows what it is like to face the pressures you do— to juggle the responsibilities of family, study, work, play, God. You may be finding that it is too hard to find time to involve God in your family and life, let alone make Him the center of it. If this is you, then you have lost sight of one simple God-given message. It's a message that will turn your life around.

Martha was a woman to whom many of us are able to relate. She was driven! She knew what she wanted to accomplish, when, and how. Being the older sister in the family, Martha took on the responsibilities of keeping house, so when it came to entertaining guests in her home she took it seriously. Jesus noticed this when He went to her place for a meal, and He said, "You are worried and distracted by many things" (Luke 10:41, NRSV). And why wouldn't she be? She had an

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### **Martha was a woman to whom many of us are able to relate.**

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extremely important guest at her house that day. It was her job to see that the barley buns weren't burned. In a flurry and a blur she was the definitive picture of the social host. Just to balance the family, however, according to the human point of view, Mary, her younger sister, was a constant embarrassment.

Instead of rushing here and there assisting Martha, she deemed it more important to sit "at the Lord's feet and listen to what he was saying" (verse 39, NRSV). Meanwhile, back in the kitchen, Martha was bubbling over with grumbings. It's hard to know what was stewing more—the pot of veggies on the wood stove or Martha over Mary's lack of help. Finally the pressure valve gave way, and out Martha marched, convinced that she was the only responsible person in the house. Somewhere between curt and courteous, Martha blurted, " 'Lord, do you not care that my sister has left me to do all the work by myself? Tell her then to help me' " (verse 40, NRSV).

Now, Luke doesn't say that there followed one of those uncomfortable silences; but if I was there, I sure would have been looking at my shoes or something. Humanity had surfaced through the pleasantries, and God was put on the spot. After all, what is more important? Conversation with Jesus or stew? Don't tell me you haven't asked a similar kind of question. Maybe something like study or *Seinfeld*? Family worship or football? Unselfishness or pride? In an appeal that rings of empathy and understanding, God spoke her name and prophetically ours too, " 'Martha, Martha, you are worried and distracted by many things; there is need of only one thing. Mary has chosen the better part, which will not be taken

away from her' ” (verses 41, 42, NRSV).

It's the hardest lesson to learn. It's a lesson of faith. It is the lesson of letting go of the control over your family and your life and trusting the great Father of us all to parent your home. It is the lesson, “ ‘Strive first for the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well’ ” (Matt. 6:33, NRSV).

Martha's mistake wasn't that she wanted to make sure that Jesus got to eat that night. It was that she had placed the priority of human details above the priority of spiritual realities. You'd have to admit that it's an easy mistake to make. Luke doesn't say how Martha responded to Jesus' answer. But we do know from other stories what a positive thing it is for a house when Jesus enters into it.

Consider Zacchaeus (Luke 19:1-10) who, over a meal with Jesus, grew from a sinner to a man who said, “ ‘Half of my possessions, Lord, I will give to the poor; and if I have defrauded anyone of anything, I will pay back four times as much’ ” (verse 8, NRSV).

From the story of Mary and Martha, and many others in the Bible, we can learn that if you are not allowing Jesus to be central in all that you do, then you are missing the boat to true happiness. Don't be fooled into thinking that this means staying on your knees 24 hours a day, never stopping to do the dishes. It means in all things, family life included, desiring and requesting Jesus' genuine involvement, guidance, fathering, and love. It means openly making Jesus the highest priority in everything from how you treat the dog to that important dinner party.

It is Jesus' plan for you to experience in your home life what He means when He says, “ ‘Today salvation has come to this house’ ” (verse 9, NRSV).

## **REACT**

1. Who do you relate to more in the story of Martha and Mary? Why?
2. Write down what you consider the top five priorities in your family life to be. Now list beside these how much time you actually spend with each in any given week.
3. Name specific ways that you are tempted to be a Martha in your life.
4. What can we do to make sure our priorities are straight and that we choose devotion rather than dishes?
5. Although Jesus commended Mary's devotion, was she without fault? On the other hand, although Martha was gently corrected by Jesus, was she totally wrong? How do we achieve the correct balance between devotion and dishes?

# Owner Wanted!

## TESTIMONY

**Scripture: 1 Cor. 6:19; Exod. 25:8**

Who wouldn't like to own a house? Of course everyone would. Really? During Old Testament times people were concerned about something special: How can we please God? Their understanding was: God has a whip, and He will punish us if we disobey Him. How surprised they must have been when God asked Moses to make Him a sanctuary, so He could dwell among His people.

The mighty God asked humankind to build Him a place so He could dwell among them. The tabernacle should be in the center of the camp. God's presence should show them how approachable He was. He wanted to be center, wanted to be recognized by all, and at the same time be part of their life. By focusing on Him (on the sanctuary) they would always be remembered by their Creator and Redeemer.

"Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own" (1 Cor. 6:19, NIV). Before Jesus finished His ministry, He promised to send the Holy Spirit. The Holy Spirit is God's representative, who guides and helps us grow in knowledge. The Holy Spirit is God's presence in each follower.

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## **He wanted to be center, wanted to be recognized by all.**

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I am not my own? Of course I am! I want to lead, want to have power, want to . . . Today's text is totally contrary to the New Age thought that in you there is a god, which you have only to discover. That you are god and need no one else. With this, all struggle and pain begins.

Paul asks us to rethink our opinion: "Didn't you realize?" (verse 19, The Message). Why do you want to have control over yourself? Why don't you want to be God's temple? Is it because you then can't compromise anymore or because you fear to lose your freedom? As in the old days God says: I want to be the owner and center of your house. This is no burden, it gives freedom. David, who was no perfectionist, someone who often failed, knows God when he says: "Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the man who takes refuge in him" (Ps. 34:8, NIV). David knew that the center of all life is Christ in us. Apart from Him I can do nothing. The center of any Christian home—single or family—is God's presence in us. The fruit of our actions and interactions will show if we have accepted Him as the owner of our home/temple or if we want to take over the leadership of our lives.

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*By Burkhard Olschewski, head nurse of operating theaters and graduate student, Fribourg, Switzerland.*

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# McMarriage

## EVIDENCE

**Key Text: Gen. 17:7**

A sudden desire for a burger and fries is easily fulfilled at the drive-through window. A sudden desire to get married can be satisfied by a quick trip to Reno, Nevada. A license can be purchased and a chapel ceremony performed within the hour—at almost any time of the day or night—with no engagement period necessary. The ceremony can be performed even in drive-through chapels. The traditional prerequisites of love and commitment are replaced with lust and impulse. Hardly a healthy start to a marriage.

Contrast the Reno drive-through with a traditional Hindu wedding ceremony. The ceremony goes for at least three days, with much celebrating and excitement among family and friends. The marriage ceremony is completed on the third day after guests have offered their blessings and support. Not only is the marriage a commitment between the bride and groom, but it shows the commitment of all those present at the celebration to support and nurture the new relationship.

Genesis 17 recalls the covenant made between God and Abraham. A covenant is an agreement that has benefits and obligations for both parties. In this case, God promised wealth and prosperity to Abraham if he obeyed God in return. When

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## The ceremony can be performed even in drive-through chapels.

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God makes a promise, He intends it to be forever (Gen. 17:7). The Ten Commandments represent our obligations to God as part of our covenant to Him. When God delivered the Ten Commandments to the children of Israel, it wasn't mere impulse. Moses had been told to prepare the people to receive these instructions. It wasn't a commitment to be entered into lightly. Once God had delivered His instructions, the children of Israel gladly accepted all that had been asked of them (Exod. 24:7). Forty days later they had forgotten their commitment to God's covenant and committed adultery against Him. God was not happy at this failure but was able to forgive them when they asked for it.

A marriage made without a covenant will be as lasting as those burgers and fries.

## REACT

1. What role should commitment play in a marriage?
2. God forgave the children of Israel for breaking the original covenant and renewed it. What does this imply, if anything, in a marriage covenant?
3. If you were in a marriage that you felt had irretrievably broken down, how could the story of the Ten Commandments help (Exodus 34)?

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*By Bill Truscott, business manager at Fulton College, Suva, Fiji Islands.*

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# Heaven on Earth?

## HOW-TO

### Key Text: Eph. 5:21

“[Home] should be a little heaven upon earth.” Is this a fitting description of your home, your family?

We as human beings are naturally self-seeking. We want to be first in line, to be in control. So, perhaps the act of submission makes you feel somewhat uncomfortable because it is often associated with being weak.

Yet we can't ignore Paul's striking words in his prescription for happy family relations, “Submit to one another out of reverence for Christ” (Eph. 5:21, NIV). Submitting means putting the interests and needs of others before your own. It means letting the Spirit of Christ prevail—having an attitude of mutual respect, consideration, and acceptance of others—not inferiority.

Here are some thoughts that may help in making Paul's admonition a reality in your own experience:

**1. Bow low before Jesus.** When we recognize His sovereignty, His “bigness” compared to our “smallness,” we can only, through His grace, humble ourselves before Him. This practice will, in turn, teach us to be humble in our relationships with others.

## He was able to place our need for salvation before His own needs.

**2. Follow the example of Jesus.** Consider how mighty Jesus really is and yet how willing He was to humble Himself. Read about His attitude in Philippians 2:5-11. Meditate on His prayer of submission in the Garden of Gethsemane (Matt. 25:36-44). He was able to place our need for salvation before His own needs.

**3. Ask God to change your will.** Sometimes our emotions and our will do not correspond. It is sometimes hard to do things God's way, when your own will keeps seeking control. When you commit yourself to obeying God, in spite of the way you may feel, He will change your heart, and through His Holy Spirit, He will bring you to the point at which you “will and . . . act according to his good purpose” (Phil. 2:13, NIV).

**4. Pray and study the Bible together as a family.** The old adage that says “a family that prays together, stays together” has never been more true.

In a world in which individualism and self-autonomy is desirable, people will be touched as they see a family committed to doing things God's way in spite of life's uncertainties. Your family may not exactly be heaven on earth, but through God's amazing grace, let its Christian influence be seen as you reflect God's healing and saving grace to a world that desperately needs to know Him.

*\*The Adventist Home, p.15.*

*By Belinda Alexander, secretary for the Sabbath School Department, Southern Africa Union Conference, Bloemfontein, South Africa.*

# The Trip Is What You Make It

## OPINION

**Key Text: Luke 10:38-42**

“Looking for a vacation that combines grace and grandeur? That is, graceful biking and grandeur witnessed in the architecture and images of courtly life from days gone by?” the brochure inquired.

“What a cool plan!” my friends exclaimed enviously.

“What a glamorous, sporty figure I’ll be,” I fantasized.

“Another day of slogging through the cold rain. Tried to dry out our soaked T-shirts under the hand dryer in the Chateaudun restroom,” I glumly recorded in my diary.

Ah, my much-anticipated cycling trip through the Loire Valley in France. When coworkers and friends quizzed me after my return, I asked if they wanted the outsiders’ view or the insiders’ view.

The outsiders’ view: gliding effortlessly through stunning fields of sunflowers; leisurely exploring magnificent castles, lush gardens, and quaint villages; and lingering in the sun at outdoor cafes.

The insiders’ view: struggling to pedal into a strong wind, during the worst weather France had recorded in 50 years; stiffly climbing off our bikes at the

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### **I asked if they wanted the outsiders’ view or the insiders’ view.**

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entrance gate to a chateau—only to discover it was closed for two hours during lunch; paying for a loaf of bread before stopping to think about currency conversion; trying to stay awake during interminable late-evening three-hour French dinners and pestering the waiters for “More water, more water!”

If that had been all that my diary contained, it would have been quite bleak and unappealing indeed. But there was more, much more: eating sweet white grapes right off the vine at a famous vineyard; receiving directions from an old man who gestured with half a baguette; strolling at night past magnificent Chartres Cathedral under an inky blue sky; savoring delicious pastries and not sparing a single thought for calories!

It seems to me that creating and maintaining a Christian home—whether as a single, couple or family—encompasses the same mix of expectations and reality. There’s a quote that has stayed with me for years: “A family is what you want it.” We each have our own vision of the ideal home life, and we have the power to make choices—every day, on issues large and small—that bring us closer to realizing that vision. We also have the power to choose our outlook, whether to let the negative color our entire experience or instead learn to relish the unexpected detours that help us to grow in ways we never imagined and become memories we cherish forever. What choices are you making today?

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*By Shelley Nolan, editor of the Canadian Adventist Messenger, Oshawa, Ontario.*

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# HOW ARE WE TODAY?



**“Behold, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears My voice and opens the door, I will come in to him and dine with him, and he with Me” (Rev. 3:20, NKJV).**

# One Night. Three Men.

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Rom. 8:35-39**

**Pete:** Others may be intellectual couch potatoes, but I am alive. I am action. In my dreams I am Samson with the jawbone. God has prepared me to be champion and protector for His Chosen One.

**Jude:** Men of action have always seemed somewhat brutish to me. I have preferred influence to bravado. I have studied the arts of persuasion and motivation until others are mere clay in my hands. The Chosen One can no more understand the subtleties of power than a warrior. God has prepared me as His guide and counselor.

**Josh:** My Father does not force His will on anyone. He allows His children the freedom to wrestle with Him in the darkness of their own night. He bears their unfaithfulness even as they curse Him from a hell of their own making. My only dream is to disappear into Him, to become a small facet of His love.

**Pete:** When the moment came, I was ready. I drew my sword and attacked. For just an instant I felt like a hero. Then the Chosen One spoke: "No more of this!" One hand was on me, holding me back. The other reached out to my victim—in healing! Confusion washed over me. All that had given my life structure and hope crumbled before His hand. Then, when they challenged me, I denied that I knew Him—for I did not. In anguish I fled into the night.

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## Each lash dragged me one step closer to the place of the Skull.

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**Jude:** My final move was a brilliant strategy. I kissed Him, acknowledging Him as Master. But He failed to grasp the significance of my gesture. Instead, He winced as if my lips were the lips of death. Could He not see? Did He not know that the kingship of the nation—of the world—was His if He would only reveal Himself. But no! He did not. He was bound and beaten. Each lash dragged me one step closer to the place of the Skull. He was the Chosen One. I had failed. My life's work was over before it began. Despair, deeper than midnight, settled over me, and I stumbled into the darkness.

**Josh:** The long arm of the accuser reached out for me. The screaming, mindless mob in the hands of Judas. The raw energy of Peter as He sought by brute force to conquer the unconquerable. Above sat the Father. I could no longer see His face, no longer feel His presence, but I knew Him. For a moment I stood quietly. Alone. Then I acted. I acted out His love as I had done all my life. Healing the victims of the battle. Guiding the honest of heart toward truth. Striking at the root of delusion and pride in hope of salvation. Even as I was carried off to the horrors of that night, His love reigned supreme.

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*By Steve Scott, a physician in Noble, Illinois.*

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## False Prophets and Self-Deception

### LOGOS

**Matt. 7:15-20; 24:4, 5, 11-13, 24; Rom. 8:35-39; 13:11-14; Rev. 3:15-20**

Sin is deceptive by nature; to live in a sinful world is to be surrounded by deception. Jesus recognized this threat as two different but related dangers. We are vulnerable to: (1) deception from external sources, such as false prophets; and (2) deception from internal sources—self-deception. Our lesson deals with both of these.

#### **Matthew 7:15-20; 24:4, 5, 11-13, 24**

In Matthew 7:15 Jesus warned us against external deception in the form of false prophets. His reason for doing so was to give us instructions on protecting ourselves against them. The falsehood of their work is detected, not in their appearance but in the fruit of their lives. By saying, “You will know them by their fruits” (verse 16, NASB), Jesus promised that false prophets can be accurately identified by examining the results of their ministries.

#### **Matthew 24:4, 5, 11-13, 24**

In Matthew 24 Jesus described the work of these deceivers in more detail. They will claim to be Christ Himself, and they will win followers. We must notice also that the ministry of these false prophets will include supernatural manifestations that seem to confirm the truth of their ministry.

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### **There is no demonic deception that can pull us away from Him.**

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But then Jesus makes a statement calculated to rouse Christians from their sleepy state. These deceptions are designed by the enemy to sweep away not only the uninformed multitudes but those who are in a saving relationship with the real Jesus Christ (the “elect” [Matt. 24:24, KJV]). Jesus lets us peer, as it were, through the gun sights of the enemy only to find that *we* are the target. And suddenly we are confronted with our own vulnerability to deception.

#### **Romans 8:35-39**

With all the fears of falling prey to deception before us, we come to this text in Romans. Paul describes a great list of evil things, asking, “Can this separate us from Christ?” The answer is known before he gives it. Nothing can separate us from Christ. There is no demonic deception that can pull us away from Him. This text is about conquering through Christ. He Himself is the way through the maze of twisted ideas. There really *is* a pathway to eternal life. Though it may be narrow, it is a constant path with no breaks or detours. Through Christ we don’t ever have to be deceived.

This text teaches another truth as well. This pathway is not for the careless, ease-loving individual. If you look at the context of this passage, it is suffering—personal suffering. Paul says that suffering will be present all along the way to heaven. We must never confuse personal suffering with the question of whether we are saved. In fact, suffering is not the focus of submissive, vigilant believers.

Their focus is on the eternal rewards that await them. Their focus is on that love of God from which nothing can separate them.

### **Romans 13:11-14**

So, what do these submissive, vigilant believers look like? This is where the internal issues begin to put on the squeeze. This is where suffering begins to take a definite shape. Paul describes those believers in these verses. They are aware that Christ is coming soon. They realize that now is the time to prepare. They know they don't have time to play around with godless activities. They realize that taking half measures in godliness won't work. In fact, to them the flesh is dead, and they do nothing that would foster the growth of their sinful nature. They cut off their right hand if it's keeping them away from Christ. They die to self every day. To sum it up, they wear Jesus Christ as they would wear clothes. They invite Jesus to surround them constantly.

Let's face it. The kind of religion this calls for is not "church as usual." A church and the individuals in it that don't meet these standards is a church in lethargy; a church in lethargy is in a sinful state, not a saintly one. It's religiosity versus spirituality. It's pretend Christianity versus the real thing. It's a form of godliness versus the real power.

### **Revelation 3:15-20**

In these verses we are confronted by our need for Jesus Christ. Apparently we are capable of completely deceiving ourselves. It is possible for us to think we have the most going for ourselves when in fact we are spiritually bankrupt. We can be completely wrong and think we're completely right. What's interesting about self-deception, as made so plain by this warning to Laodicea, is that it feels no need. Self-deception is partially defined here as feeling no need. So we *need* Jesus to tell us that. We need Him to step into our lives personally, jar us with the plain truth about ourselves, and point us to what we really need. If we're walking with Him, surrounded by His influence, He will be sure to warn us if we are deceiving ourselves.

The best part is that Jesus Christ is knocking at our heart's door. If we don't want to be deceived by others and if we don't want to be deceived by ourselves, all we have to do is let Him in. It's when He comes in that we suddenly realize who He is. As He sits on the couch with us and eats with us, we begin to learn that He is a God of awesome power and full of holiness. Just as we recognize our own stature when we're around someone very short or very tall, so we can't help recognizing our spiritual poverty in the presence of infinite spiritual wealth.

## **REACT**

1. How can I properly identify a false prophet in a Christian way?
2. Ellen White has identified some of the characteristics of Laodicea. What are they, and how are we supposed to come out of it?

# How Do We Stand Today?

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text: Matt. 7:1, 2, 15-20**

In a practical application of Matthew 7:15-20, Ellen White suggests the following questions. "What message do they bring? Does it lead you to reverence and fear God? Does it lead you to manifest your love for Him by loyalty to His commandments? If they tell you that they are not concerned about teaching or observing the law, be afraid of them, even though they heal the sick and cast out devils. They are doing the very work that originated with the prince of darkness, the enemy of God. The beginning of all the sin and woe and death that have deluged our earth, was this very disregard for the plain commandment of God."<sup>1</sup>

Within the context of warning against false prophets, God's people are further instructed to avoid the spirit of criticism (verses 1, 2). "Christ puts his rebuke upon those who are criticising others, upon those who are self-sufficient, presumptuous, and censorious, judging the motives of others, and seeking to condemn them. This class give evidence that they are looking for failings in others, and these are what they will see and comment upon. They pass by many estimable qualities, to dwell upon and distort and magnify seeming inconsistencies."<sup>2</sup>

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## **"Christ puts his rebuke upon those who are criticizing others."**

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Satan works to organize things in the church so that people become lethargic to their duty. "The ordained minister is depended upon to pray, and to open the Scriptures to the people who assemble for worship; but God would have every one do a work for the Master. . . . It is humble men whom God will use,—those who will open their hearts to the voice and knock of Jesus, that he may come in and abide with them. And because they have neglected their God-given work, many have lost their first love. A hard, selfish spirit has taken possession of a large number of those who, if they had loved the souls for whom Christ has died, would work for them in a variety of ways as God's instrumentalities."<sup>3</sup>

"The Lord has rich blessings for the church if its members will seek earnestly to arouse from this perilous lukewarmness. A religion of vanity, words devoid of vitality, a character destitute of moral strength,—these are pointed out in the solemn message addressed by the True Witness to the churches, warning them against pride, worldliness, formalism, and self-sufficiency. . . . But to the lowly, the suffering, the faithful, the patient, who are alive to their weakness and insufficiency, are given words of encouragement: 'Behold, I stand at the door.'"<sup>4</sup>

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1. *The Signs of the Times*, April 13, 1888, "Sanctification."

2. *The Signs of the Times*, March 14, 1892, "Judge Not."

3. *Advent Review and Sabbath Herald*, October 6, 1896, "Whosoever Will, Let Him Come."

4. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 484.

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*By Lisa (Eisele) Poole, co-minister with her husband, Glenn, in the Mattoon, Noble, and Stewardson (Illinois) Seventh-day Adventist churches.*

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## Fruit and Jesus' Remedies

### EVIDENCE

**Key Texts: John 15; Rev. 3:18**

What did Jesus mean by “fruit” when He promised that we could recognize deceitful prophets by their fruits (Matt. 7:16)? To answer this question, we must search the biblical usage of “fruit” and its context.

First, the word itself implies reproduction. A tree reproduces itself through the bearing of fruit. A Christian reproduces himself or herself by teaching others to grow into solid disciples of Christ. Paul seems to use “fruit” with this meaning in Romans 1:13.

When Jesus used the word in Matthew 12:33, He was speaking to the Pharisees. They had accused Him of using satanic powers to cast out demons. In return He had cautioned them against committing the unpardonable sin. Bad fruit can be attributing God's mighty power to Satan.

In John 15:1-16 Jesus spoke extensively about fruit, using the vine analogy. One thing we learn about good fruit from this is that it will be produced naturally. It does not grow from forced, strained, or coercive effort. Manipulation and con-

### **Manipulation and control will not be found in the life of someone bearing good fruit.**

trol will not be found in the life of someone bearing good fruit. Furthermore, the power to bear the fruit comes only from Jesus Christ, the True Vine.

Jesus went on to talk about love in verses 9-15 before mentioning fruit again in verse 16. The kind of love that would motivate someone to give his or her life for someone else is a good fruit!

The Laodicean church of Revelation 3:14-22 is not accused of any specific sin. The members haven't left their first love of Christ, they aren't compromising, or involved in idolatry and sexual immorality, nor are they spiritually dead. They are simply lukewarm instead of hot or cold.

What is the real problem with the Laodicean church besides being self-deceived? The answer lies in examining Jesus' suggestions to them. First, He suggests they need “gold refined in the fire” (verse 18, NIV). A cross check with 1 Peter 1:7 reveals that this is faith “tested by fire” (NRSV). Jesus also says they need “white garments” (Rev. 3:18, NASB). Revelation 19:8 defines this as “righteous acts” (NIV). Finally, Jesus tells Laodicea that they need eye salve (verse 18). This could be referring to the same thing as Malachi 3:18, the ability to “discern between the righteous and the wicked” (NKJV), i.e., telling right from wrong. Now, Laodicea's problem becomes clear. They don't have faith that can stand up under trials. They don't have acts of goodness and kindness toward others. And they can't tell the difference between right and wrong.

*By Glenn Poole, II, who pastors the Mattoon, Noble, and Stewardson (Illinois) Seventh-day Adventist churches.*

# Avoiding Deception

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Rom. 13:11-14**

Avoiding deception cannot be accomplished without a knowledge of the truth. "My people have gone into captivity, because they have no knowledge" (Isa. 5:13, NKJV). By becoming a student of the Bible, we are blessed with the understanding that God bestows on all those who seek Him through His Word. "All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness" (2 Tim. 3:16, NKJV). When we study Scripture, we are able to compare everything we encounter to the Word of God to see if it holds any truth.

We must also guard against deceiving ourselves. We must take inventory of our motives and our morals and decide which are to be held to and which are to be discarded. As we strive toward spiritual maturity, we need the understanding that there is something of great consequence at stake. It is our eternity.

But our eternity is a matter of choice. When we see our lives exposed by the Son of Righteousness, we will recognize our moral and spiritual poverty. The only way for us to find the path that leads to eternal life is to die to ourselves and let God's will take the top priority in our hearts. We have been empowered by the Lord

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## We must take inventory of our motives and our morals.

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with the responsibility to make our own decisions. Being deceived is a choice born out of ignorance and selfishness. It is each individual's privilege and responsibility to choose knowledge and truth.

## REACT

1. If you choose knowledge and truth, what are you going to do differently today?
2. To what degree would you say that loving others depends on knowing them?
3. If prejudice begins with fear (of the unknown), how do we overcome any fear we may have of others?
4. How do we deceive ourselves in our daily lives?

# Am I Ready for Dinner?

## OPINION

**Key Text: Rev. 3:20**

Few things are more enjoyable than sharing a meal with a friend. You are the host of the dinner. The anticipation, the preparation, the fellowship, and the memories. Inviting the guests, planning the menu, buying the foodstuffs, and preparation is all part of the event. But the joy can turn to worry and/or fear if one is not prepared.

We have all underestimated the culinary task at one time or another. The guests sit in the living room while the half-baked veggie loaf cooks like a “watched pot.” Stress and anxiety have a dampening effect on the grandest occasion, and instead of being a Mary entertaining your guests, we are a Martha in the kitchen. Mary’s ecstasy becomes Martha’s neurotic fear.

We get out the finest place setting (although it might be on the card table and folding chair set from the neighbor’s garage sale last summer). The house is cleaned better than any Friday before sundown. You buy the fresh produce rather than the canned store brand that almost balances the budget. Nothing is too good for your guests. Some might buy a new apron or outfit. All is in preparation to receive your honored guests. What preparation, what concern, what attention to

## We hear about the state of the government, but what is the state of your heart?

details for this brief festive and temporal event.

How much more important and permanent is our relationship with God. This is a matter of eating or not eating at the tree of life. We hear about the state of the government, the state of the church, but what is the state of your heart?

Jesus is coming to dinner. He stands at your door. When the doorbell rings, will you be Mary or Martha? The embarrassment of a temporal dinner will pale in comparison to not being ready when Jesus calls on you! Are you ready right now for that feast (Rev. 3:20)? What is your spiritual readiness right now?

Our banquet should be a success because “we are more than conquerors” (Rom. 8:37). When we buy gold and cloth from our heavenly Father, we will be more than overcomers (Rev. 3:18, 19). Let us enjoy the feast with our Father, present our very best by buying the very best products available from Him, and be prepared.

## REACT

1. What are some of the benefits of being prepared for Christ’s return, aside from the eternal rewards?
2. What are some of the ways we can prepare ourselves for Christ’s return? Be specific.
3. How can we combat procrastination in preparing for Christ’s return?

*By Tom Mejeur, who works for North American Lighting, Flora, Illinois.*

# THIS MEANS WAR!



**“Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him” (James 1:12, NIV).**

# Standing Firm in Faith

## INTRODUCTION

Scripture: Eph. 6:10

During my sixteenth and seventeenth years, my life underwent some pretty drastic changes (no, not late puberty!). It was during this time that I experienced a rebirth in my Christian experience. I found myself becoming very interested in prophecy.

Till this time, I found church rather formalistic as it generally followed a set liturgy that I struggled to imbue with fresh meaning. As I explored differing interpretations of prophecy, however, I found my Christian experience deepening. Looking back I can see God's hand leading as a similar interest seemed to be developing in the rest of my family. A few months later a friend of my mother's invited us to a Revelation Seminar, which culminated in serious decisions and new friendships with wonderful people. If it weren't for the friendships we made that year, I would probably not be where I am today.

I remember the close of one of my first Sabbaths. We had gone to the beach as a group of friends and family. As the sun was setting, someone suggested we form a circle and share our favorite Bible text. I was suddenly filled with an emotion

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## **We had gone to the beach as a group of friends and family.**

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ranging somewhere between extreme panic and terror. Here I was with a group of Adventists who've been memorizing a verse every week for years, and the one verse I could probably have quoted (John 3:16) did not even enter my head! Perhaps some of you can imagine the pressure as my turn came closer and closer. (Little did I know that I would experience this feeling again during my twelfth-grade math paper!)

Then the miracle happened. The current speaker was only about two persons away when suddenly I remembered my favorite T-shirt. Yes, my T-shirt! On the back was a picture of a glowing sword and helmet on a marble background, and below it an inscription of Ephesians 6:12. It was my turn and I began to fumble my way through, "For our fight is not against . . ." At that time I did not realize the full implications of this text. It was just really cool to imagine angels and demons battling it out with flashing swords.

As my faith deepens, however, I realize more and more how applicable Paul's words are to us—living at the eve of the millennium. The future seems both hopeful and uncertain, and Satan attacks our weak faith with the wicked words: "Do you really think you are ready for the end time? Do you really think Jesus will accept you?" Yet I am filled with hope, even joy, as I find my rest in the armor of God—the salvation won for us by the Lord of hosts, our Jesus Christ.

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*By Rocco Naudé, a senior theology student at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Republic of South Africa.*

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# Standing Strong

## LOGOS

**2 Pet. 1:5-11; Eph. 6:10-18; 1 Cor. 10:12, 13; Heb. 2:18; John 5:39; Acts 2:1, 2**

I don't know if you've ever been afraid of a final religious persecution, but I certainly have. Chills run up and down my spine as I picture prison cells, electric chairs, and gas chambers. Will I really stand for Christ when it comes down to the nail-biting end? Peter and Paul in this week's study give practical advice. You can't stand alone; you need Jesus' strength.

### Fully Prepared for the Crisis (2 Pet. 1:3-11)

Peter writes to a church that had experienced real persecution. Peter tells them the secret to surviving their terrible persecution—keep their eyes on the coming kingdom (2 Pet. 1:3, 11). However, it's not just a matter of passively waiting for our pie-in-the-sky by-and-by. Waiting Christians are active Christians who “make every effort” (verse 5, NIV) to reflect Christ more fully.

In a grand list of virtues, beginning with faith as their foundation and culminating in the overarching impulse of love, Peter describes prepared Christians. They are those from whom goodness flows, who know right from wrong, have self-control, persevere in hardship, are aware of God in every aspect of life, and show kindness to others (verses 5-9). Christians with these virtues are fully prepared for the coming crisis and “will never fall” (verse 10, NIV).

Peter particularly deals with the need to persevere. What causes us to give up

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## Waiting Christians are active Christians who “make every effort.”

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on our faith just when it matters most? “It is not primarily the hard times or hardship that, Peter fears, will cause Christians to stop persevering, but the insidious enticements of those who have ceased to believe that there is any point to biblical behavior once we remove the return of Christ.”<sup>1</sup>

You may wonder why many Christians no longer “walk the talk.” Peter's answer is this: we've stopped believing that Jesus is coming again. It's only as we live our lives as pilgrims of promise—sons of the messianic hope—that it makes any difference how we act. Peter's picture of prepared Christians is a group of on-fire Christians, radically growing in those graces that build on faith and show themselves in love. They live as if they were already citizens of the kingdom.

It's important to note that we can't make it on our own. “His divine power has given us everything we need” (verse 3, NIV). As we surrender ourselves to Christ, He helps us through the final crisis and assists us into His coming kingdom (verse 11).

### Armor for the Battle (Eph. 6:10-18)

If Peter sees Christians as living on the edge of the promise, then Paul reminds us that the messianic promise will never be realized without a dark and ominous battle. In his letter to the Ephesians, Paul talks about deadly spiritual warfare in

which the church must engage. He explains that the opponent of the church is none other than the devil himself, with his powers and principalities.

Paul speaks of three characteristics of the powers and principalities arrayed against us. They are “powerful, wicked and cunning.”<sup>2</sup> Likewise, Revelation pictures the final spiritual crisis—Armageddon—as being sparked by three evil spirits going out to deceive the whole world (Rev. 16:12-16). How can we withstand such a spiritual onslaught? Paul gives the answer, “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Eph. 6:10, NIV).

We cannot expect to stand in the final battle in our own strength. “The battle is not yours, but God’s” (2 Chron. 20:15, NIV). Four times Paul urges us to put on the armor of God—an armor supplied by Him but useless unless we apply its active protection to our lives. Think about each part of the Christian’s armor as it applies to you:

• **A belt of truth.** Do you show integrity in your life? Or is your life filled with hypocrisy, scheming, and deceit?

• **A breastplate of righteousness.** Are you in a right relationship with God so that His righteousness fills your life and your heart?

• **The shoes of the gospel.** Do you show a “readiness to announce the Good News of peace?” (Eph. 6:15, TEV) or are you ashamed of admitting that you are a Christian?

• **The shield of faith.** Have you taken God as your refuge so that He becomes your shield (Prov. 30:5)? Do you flee to Him every time the devil throws at you the darts of false guilt, doubt, or disobedience?

• **The helmet of salvation.** Do you experience the assurance of salvation? Are you willing to do all and be all that salvation requires you to be?

• **The sword of the Spirit.** Have you drunk in God’s Spirit by feeding on His Word every day (Ps. 119:11)? Do you study the Scriptures so that you carry Christ with you through the day (John 5:39)?

• **Prayer.** Do you intercede for others through Spirit-driven prayer? Or does your prayer life focus on self interest?

As we face this final crisis, reflect on what God has done to help prepare us. He has provided every resource that we need and amply given every protection. Yet He also calls us to ready ourselves, to become Spirit-filled Christians, active in prayer and founded in the Christian graces. We stand under God’s protection, awaiting the promise of Christ’s return and putting on the armor of His Spirit!

“If you think you are standing, watch out that you do not fall. . . . [But] God is faithful, and he will not let you be tested beyond your strength” (1 Cor. 10:12, 13, NRSV).

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1. Dick Lucas and Christopher Green, *The Message of Second Peter and Jude: The Promise of His Coming* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1995), p. 60.

2. John R. W. Stott, *The Message of Ephesians* (Leicester: InterVarsity Press, 1979), p. 265.

# It's Time to Enlist

## TESTIMONY

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

“Protestantism shall give the hand of fellowship to the Roman power. Then there will be a law against the Sabbath of God’s creation, and then it is that God will do His ‘strange work’ in the earth.”<sup>1</sup>

“If we place ourselves on the side of God, of Christ and the heavenly intelligences, the broad shield of Omnipotence is over us, the mighty God of Israel is our helper, and we need not fear. Those who touch the people of God, touch the apple of His eye.”<sup>2</sup>

“Servants of God, with their faces lighted up and shining with holy consecration, will hasten from place to place to proclaim the message from heaven. By thousands of voices, all over the earth, the warning will be given. Miracles will be wrought, the sick will be healed, and signs and wonders will follow the believers.”<sup>3</sup>

“The completeness of Christian character is attained when the impulse to help and bless others springs constantly from within—when the sunshine of heaven fills the heart and is revealed in the countenance.”<sup>4</sup>

“When men press close to the side of Jesus, when Christ is abiding in their hearts by faith, their love for the commandments of God grows stronger in

## **“Make no calculation for months or years; these are not yours.”**

proportion to the contempt which the world heaps upon His holy precepts.”<sup>5</sup>

“Make no calculation for months or years; these are not yours. One brief day is given you. As if it were your last on earth, work during its hours for the Master. Lay all your plans before God, to be carried out or given up, as His providence shall indicate.”<sup>6</sup>

“The only safety for us is to enter into the counsels of heaven, ever seeking to do the will of God, to become laborers together with Him. No one company is to form a confederacy, and say, ‘We are going to take this work, and carry it on in our own way; and if it does not go as we want it to, we will not give our influence to have it go at all.’ This is Satan’s voice, not God’s. Do not obey such suggestions.”<sup>7</sup>

1. *Last Day Events*, p. 130.

2. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 373.

3. *The Great Controversy*, p. 612.

4. *Christ’s Object Lessons*, p. 384.

5. *Maranatha*, p. 239.

6. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 44.

7. *Selected Messages*, book 2, p. 374.

*By Johan A. Japp, associate professor of theology at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Republic of South Africa.*

# Defining the Battle

## EVIDENCE

### Key Text: Eph. 6:10-18

The book of Ephesians was probably written by Paul while he was imprisoned in Rome as “an ambassador in chains” (Eph. 6:20, NIV; cf. 3:1; 4:1). At this time the might of the Roman Empire stood alone and unchallenged. The *pax romana* (Roman peace), while ensuring the safety of citizens and travelers, could be enforced only by martial law. No earthly power could approach the military might of Rome. The readers of Paul’s letter were well aware that the weaponry and military prowess of Rome made her a foe virtually impossible to resist. In fact, a few years later, in A.D. 70, the Jewish rebellion was to be ruthlessly crushed by Roman forces, resulting in a horrendous loss of life and the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem.

In this context, then, Paul uses the armor of the Roman legionary as a powerful metaphor. Each article of the Roman legionary’s armor symbolized how truly weak each individual was in the face of Rome’s might. Was not Paul himself in chains? How could anyone hope to stand?

Paul, however, does not seek to condemn his persecutors. He is ever cognizant of how recently he was guilty of persecuting the Christians: “Godly men buried

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## No earthly power could approach the military might of Rome.

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Stephen and mourned deeply for him. But Saul began to destroy the church. Going from house to house, he dragged off men and women and put them in prison” (Acts 8:2, 3, NIV). Paul realizes firsthand that Christ shows mercy to all, no matter how wicked they may appear. “Even though I was once a blasphemer and a persecutor and a violent man, I was shown mercy because I acted in ignorance and unbelief” (1 Tim. 1:13, NIV).

In a dramatic turnaround Paul redefines the battle. It is not “against flesh and blood” (Eph. 6:12, NIV). No! We are called to love all people. These are the ones that Christ came to save. In the words of Jesus: “ ‘I tell you: Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you’ ” (Matt. 5:44, NIV). We are called to love all who are part of humanity, not struggle against them. “The full armor of God” (Eph. 6:11, NIV) enables us to take our “stand against the devil’s schemes” (verse 11, NIV). Satan is the adversary, and just as earthly nations were powerless against the might of the Roman war machine, so is the devil powerless against all who are clothed in the armor of God.

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By Adrian Platts, a senior theology major at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Republic of South Africa.

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## Strong in Faith

### HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 5:43-45**

Seventh-day Adventists are eagerly awaiting the “blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ” (Titus 2:13, NIV). Yet we are warned of a time of tribulation that precedes our Lord’s coming. How are we to stand? How can we be sure that we will not fall when the going gets tough?

The answer has been the same for all Christians throughout the history of the world. The adversary is Satan, and in the book of Ephesians Paul gives us the solution that can alleviate all our doubts and fears. “Put on the full armor of God so that you can take your stand against the devil’s schemes” (Eph. 6:11, NIV). But how are we to put on this armor?

In order to answer this question, we need to understand certain factors:

- The armor is a spiritual protection against a spiritual foe.
- Satan is the foe, and he is more powerful than even the strongest human agencies.
- The power that this armor grants is not our own: “Be strong in the Lord and in his mighty power” (Eph. 6:10, NIV).

This is a battle that impacts upon human experience but cannot be seen. We

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### **How can one defeat a foe who is not only more powerful, but invisible?**

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cannot see Satan, we cannot see the armor, and we cannot see God. This does not mean that the battle is not real; it just defines the battlefield. We are not fighting against “flesh and blood,” and we are powerless against Satan’s might. At least, if we were fighting against human enemies, we would know how to fight. But how can one defeat a foe who is not only more powerful, but invisible?

It is here that we can unravel the part played by humanity. The battle belongs to God. We have the victory in His strength by faith. God will never forsake His trusting children. We, however, are called to witness to Christ and His love no matter what the circumstances. Though Paul was in chains, he remained Christ’s witness. Despite his imprisonment, Paul himself was fully clothed in the armor of God. The strength of Paul’s faith through all his hardships testifies to this. While Christians are striving for the souls of those around them (whether they be the persecutors or the persecuted, the oppressors or the oppressed, rich or poor, whatever their walk in life), they can have assurance that God, in His grace, will clothe them in His “full armor.”

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*By Dewald Kritzinger, a senior theology major at Helderberg College, Somerset West, Republic of South Africa.*

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# Greater Than the Final Crisis

## OPINION

**Key Text: Jude 24**

The notion of a *final crisis* conjures up images of catastrophic and cataclysmic events in one's mind. It is not uncommon for people, even believing Christians, to be overawed by the finality of the earth's closing events. Often gross pessimism, anxiety, and intense fear overwhelm the recipients of sermons and other audio-visual presentations that focus on the final crisis.

Has this been your experience lately? Confronted by the reality of an imminent crisis that may well determine your eternal destiny, how do you respond? Are you among those who are frantically scurrying around in search of the ultimate human indestructible machine? Perhaps your creative ingenuity may realize an invincible superman or superwoman who may execute a timely and dramatic rescue! Perhaps not! What then?

As a church, our quest and zeal to sound the clarion call to the world, announcing the imminence of the impending crisis, is exhibited with unstinting and unparalleled resoluteness. This attribute exhibited by a church called to intensify the warning lights must be applauded. But greater applause, indeed celestial joy and celebration, awaits the church when it does not confine itself to warning lights

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## **It is not uncommon to be overawed by the finality of the earth's closing events.**

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alone. The church, in true Christlike spirit, exhibiting a self-giving, community-forming love, is summoned to switch on the searchlights across life's storm-tossed sea and lead helpless victims, through the sheer brilliance and reassuring rays of the Holy Spirit's guiding light, to the blazing hope of an eternal reality beyond the final crisis!

It is only as we allow ourselves to fall under the illuminating and transforming influence of the Holy Spirit's guiding light that we are led to experience the reassuring and comforting radiance of the Son's light, which "is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24, NIV).

## **REACT**

1. Share your views on how the message of the final crisis could be couched in language that is less intimidating and more reassuring.
2. How can our preoccupation with the final crisis avoid degenerating into self-righteous attempts toward perfectionism?

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*By Noel Lazarus, a final-year theology student, Helderberg College, Somerset West, Republic of South Africa.*

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# A REALISTIC LOOK AT HEAVEN



**“Our citizenship is in heaven, from which we also eagerly wait for the Savior, the Lord Jesus Christ” (Phil. 3:20, NKJV).**

# Pack It Up—Throw It Out!

## INTRODUCTION

**Scripture: Phil. 3:14**

We were ready to go! Eight backpacks groaned with the necessities of the trek out of the Colorado Rocky Mountains. Sleeping bags, stoves, food, extra clothes, mess kits, and first-aid pouches were crammed into the stuffed packs. Our feet were covered with moleskin, while sunburn glowed over the rest of our bodies. Because my youngest son had been hurt that morning in a fall and needed to see a doctor, we all felt the urgency to leave. The trip out promised to be tiresome, but the thought of returning home was uppermost in all our minds, so we tramped down the mountain trail, ever cautious of pitfalls and wrong turns; our precious destination before us.

I remember that trip well. We were exhausted when we reached the trail head. We were wiped out from carrying heavy loads of material necessities and from the emotional stress of a wounded child. What blessed sights that little mountain hospital and kind physician were. So gently he cast our little boy's arm and soothed our worries, while the hospital staff kindly gave us cool water and places to rest.

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## **My youngest son had been hurt that morning in a fall.**

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We shed our backpacks for clean clothes, comforting showers, and good news. What a prize!

The Lord has a prize just for us. The great news is that He is eagerly waiting for us to receive it. The trip to heaven won't require any packing, so you can just leave those backpacks hanging on their nails. God has it all; no bags to stuff or first-aid kits will be needed, and His food won't even be dehydrated. If you fall in that great city or down those heavenly mountains, your arms won't need casts or even ointment. Will the journey be tough? Well, maybe, but our Leader and Guide, Jesus, has never lost a hiker yet. The beauty of this heavenly trip is the destination. If you think you have seen some pretty incredible sights in this world, just wait until the heavenly scenery unfolds around you. "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him" (1 Cor. 2:9, NIV).

This free trip is just for you; all you have to do is accept it. The Great Physician is waiting for you to come to Him for healing. Check the contents of your earthly backpack for excess baggage. The lives we now live and the loads we are hauling about may keep us from making that ascent. The psalmist, David, wrote, "Cast your cares on the Lord and he will sustain you" (Ps. 55:22, NIV). Heaven is waiting. Shed your pack and be there!

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*By Kathy Bollinger, a middle school teacher at Helen Hyatt School in Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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## Heaven: Now and Later

### LOGOS

**Matt. 24:29-44; 2 Cor. 5:1; Rom. 8:18-23; Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5; Isa. 65:17-25**

“We are living in a most solemn period of this earth’s history. There is never time to sin; it is always perilous to continue in transgression; but in a special sense is this true at the present time. We are now upon the very borders of the eternal world and stand in a more solemn relation to time and to eternity than ever before. Now let every person search his own heart, and plead for the bright beams of the Sun of Righteousness to expel all spiritual darkness and cleanse from defilement.”

All our lives we have lived with the awareness that Jesus’ coming is soon—perhaps so much so that many of us have become numb to that reality. At this time of year, you are no doubt acutely aware of Jesus’ first coming—a coming that would culminate with a cross and that would further exercise His right to destroy sin. Christmas brings with it a host of warm, fuzzy feelings—particularly if in your family it is a time for togetherness. But even apart from that, how we loved the story of little Baby Jesus when we were kids. As we project into the future, however, most of us are not filled with warm, fuzzy feelings as we think about the return. We fear the unknown. Who will stand? Who will fall? Will we like the new

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### **The city is as wide as it is high as it is long— it’s a cube!**

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earth as much as the old one? We know the answer is supposed to be Yes, but we’re still a bit hesitant to let our earthly home go, fearing that somehow we’ll miss out on some experience here that is important to being human.

Not much is said in Scripture about “life after earth”—just enough to whet our appetites and make us want more. We know what our ears have heard and our minds have conceived (1 Cor. 2:9), and that should thrill us with the sheer excitement of anticipation!

What we do know about the life that awaits us is that wolves and lambs will rest side by side (Isa. 11:6-9), suggesting that the so-called natural order of things will not only be improved but will be radically restored to what must have been in Eden.

We know there will be no more tears, death, mourning, or pain (Rev. 21:4). If you have experienced the loss of someone you cherish, this promise is even more dear and is no doubt more valuable to you than streets of gold or mansions on hilltops.

### **A New Heaven**

We know that the new heaven and the new earth are two separate places (Rev. 21:11). We will spend our first thousand years in the Holy City looking over the books before the final judgment is carried out (see Revelation 20). Once that is accomplished, the earth will be purified by fire making it new, and it will once again be home for the human race.

The Holy City is unlike anything we've ever seen here on earth! Read Revelation 21, paying special attention to verse 16. The city is as wide as it is high as it is long—it's a cube! Does that imply a multilevel city? And if so, then are the streets transparent (Rev. 21:21) so that one can see from level to level?

### **A New Earth**

Our "Eden home," as earth in its pristine form is sometimes referred to, was created especially for humans in their pristine form. Life was complete and wonderful beyond our ability to grasp. When sin is finally past, the restoration of life to how it should have been will not only equal, but exceed, that of Eden (Rev. 21:5). Life after earth will by no means be a lesser trade! It is, without a doubt, a trade *up*.

We know we will build our houses and plant our vineyards (Isa. 65:21). We started out with a gardenlike environment, and we are restored to another. Many of us, even now, are drawn to gardening, landscaping our yards, growing house plants—there's something very gratifying about growing things. And if that doesn't appeal to you, then maybe the message here for you is that we will not be idle in the new earth! We will engage in activities that fulfill us and bring us joy!

The very best thing about having the perfect life is having access to the perfect Savior! In many respects, the worst thing about hell is the separation from Jesus. Therefore, the very best thing about heaven is eternal access to Him. All other rewards pale in comparison.

We know that not only will animals that are incompatible here nap together there but that our human relationships will be harmonious as well. To live in an atmosphere of love without even the hint of selfishness is so good it *has* to be true!

### **In the Meantime**

So, as we anticipate a future we can hardly begin to imagine, why don't we get a head start and practice living as Jesus did? The question that has been recently popularized in the Christian realm is a timeless question applicable, without exception, to every move we make: What would Jesus do? If we would apply this mindset to the lives we lead, we would begin to live in the atmosphere of heaven (Phil. 3:20) and would affect the world around us (including our families) in such a way that the population of heaven would undoubtedly increase.

May you be challenged to live a life *now* that makes heaven seem nearer for all you come in contact with.

### **REACT**

1. Why does there need to be a "new heaven" as is described in Revelation 21:1?
2. What concerns you most about leaving this life behind?
3. Apart from interaction with Jesus, what do you look forward to most?
4. How has your concept of heaven changed since you were a child?
5. In what specific ways can you live more like Jesus?

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*\*Testimonies to Ministers and Gospel Workers, p. 147.*

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*By Jan Yakush, a Bible teacher at College View Academy, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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# Heaven in Our Hearts

## TESTIMONY

**Key Text:** Rev. 21:1-5; 22:1-5

“Those who wait for the Bridegroom’s coming are to say to the people, ‘Behold your God.’ The last rays of merciful light, the last message of mercy to be given to the world, is a revelation of His character of love. The children of God are to manifest His glory. In their own life and character they are to reveal what the grace of God has done for them. . . .

“All around us are heard the wails of a world’s sorrow. On every hand are the needy and distressed. It is ours to aid in relieving and softening life’s hardships and misery.

“Practical work will have far more effect than mere sermonizing. We are to give food to the hungry, clothing to the naked, and shelter to the homeless. And we are called to do more than this. The wants of the soul, only the love of Christ can satisfy. If Christ is abiding in us, our hearts will be full of divine sympathy. . . .

“There are many from whom hope has departed. Bring back the sunshine to them. Many have lost their courage. Speak to them words of cheer. Pray for them. There are those who need the bread of life. Read to them from the word of God. . . .

## **“No man can impart that which he himself has not received.”**

“No man can impart that which he himself has not received. In the work of God, humanity can originate nothing. No man can by his own effort make himself a light bearer for God. . . . It is the love of God continually transferred to man that enables him to impart light. . . .

“Christ does not bid His followers strive to shine. He says, *Let your light shine.* If you have received the grace of God, the light is in you. . . .

“When Christ reigns in the soul, there is purity, freedom from sin. The glory, the fullness, the completeness of the gospel plan is fulfilled in the life. The acceptance of the Saviour brings a glow of perfect peace, perfect love, perfect assurance. The beauty and fragrance of the character of Christ revealed in the life testifies that God has indeed sent His Son into the world to be its Saviour. . . .

“To His faithful followers Christ has been a daily companion and familiar friend. They have lived in close contact, in constant communion with God. Upon them the glory of the Lord has risen. In them the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ has been reflected. Now they rejoice in the undimmed rays of the brightness and glory of the King in His majesty. They are prepared for the communion of heaven; for they have heaven in their hearts.”

\**Christ’s Object Lessons*, pp. 415-421.

*By Janya Mekelburg, a freelance writer from Lincoln, Nebraska.*

# Why Go to Heaven?

## EVIDENCE

**Key Texts:** Isa. 65:17-25; Rev. 21

“Can you imagine anything more appallingly idiotic than the Christian idea of heaven?” quipped British mathematician Alfred North Whitehead. “What kind of deity is it that would be capable of creating angels and men to sing his praises day and night to all eternity?”<sup>1</sup> George Santayana adds, “Men have feverishly conceived a heaven only to find it insipid.”<sup>2</sup>

They have a point.

Christians have done a poor job of promoting heaven, although it’s not for lack of trying. With the best of intentions we paint pictures of the peaceable kingdom. With the best of intentions we itemize New Jerusalem’s luxurious mansions and golden streets. With the best of intentions we may be taking the wrong road.

Our acquisitive natures focus on heaven’s material blessings: “Alex, for our latest heavenly arrival, we have a resplendent Tiffany crown and an opulent new Weathertite home!” But how long can one sustain the ecstasy of an acquisition? At other times we turn heaven into celestial Tylenol, seeking, as Robert Frost puts it, “escape from so great pains of life on earth it gives a sense of letup calculated to last a fellow to Eternity.”<sup>3</sup> Or we focus on our aching for deceased loved ones,

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**“Men have feverishly conceived a heaven only to find it insipid.”**

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trusting that the afterlife will, of course, find us all in the same vicinity.

To be sure, the Bible does promise the faithful, wonderful things. “Rejoice and be glad, for your reward is great in heaven” (Matt. 5:12, NRSV). The citizens of heaven *will* own property (Isa. 65:22). Heaven’s inhabitants *will* find release from sorrow (Rev. 21:4). Yes, let’s concede that heaven is a pleasant destination, and don’t let’s quibble whether its delights will hold our attention eternally. Yet, let us examine exactly what draws us heavenward.

If we focus only on those heavenly features that amplify earthly pleasure or mitigate travail, we rob heaven of its glorious center. In our zeal to make heaven alluring to earthlings, we overlook its best feature. We unwittingly create a cartoon image that is, yes, idiotic.

So, here’s one more reason to go to heaven: “The home of God is among mortals. He will dwell with them as their God; they will be his peoples, and God himself will be with them” (Rev. 21:3, NRSV). With such a resident, it’s hard to get bored with the neighborhood.

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1. George Seldes, ed., *The Great Thoughts* (New York: Ballantine Books, 1985), p. 446.

2. *Ibid.*, p. 368.

3. Connery Lathem, ed., *The Poetry of Robert Frost* (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1969), p. 475.

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*By Mark A. Robison, who teaches English and drama at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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# How Will You Spend Your Time?

## HOW-TO

**Key Text: Matt. 24:44**

When I was a child, I often spent lazy summer afternoons lying on the soft grass, gazing into the sky and watching the fluffy clouds while daydreaming of what it was like on the other side of those clouds—in heaven. In my imagination I thought about what it would be like to live in heaven on those streets of gold but didn't give much thought to what I had to do to get there. Did one board a plane and ask to get off on the other side of those clouds at the pearly gates? Or was heaven so much farther away that even a plane couldn't reach it?

Seemingly in a blink of an eye, my childhood was gone. No longer did I have those same thoughts or the luxury of daydreaming a summer afternoon away. I knew for sure that God's dwelling place was indeed up beyond those clouds, but what must we do to gain entrance to that Holy City?

Every year my life seems to go more quickly than before, with work days full of schedules, deadlines, goals to reach, plans to make, and, yes, managing a family and home as well. But wait! My busyness must allow for what is most important in my earthly life: building a growing relationship with God, followed closely by time with my family. Paul reminds us, "Be very careful, then, how you live—not as unwise but as wise" (Eph. 5:15, NIV). Every day we must fully commit ourselves to God and His power to be the Master of our lives.

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## **Every year my life seems to go more quickly than before.**

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How in our sin-filled lives can we anticipate with joy the opportunity to meet Christ face to face? We must have clean hearts, and to get them, we must purify ourselves before the Lord every day. Are our days spent wisely? A plaque in my office counsels, "God has given me this day to use as I will. I can waste it or use it for some good purpose. But what I do with this day is important because I have exchanged a day of my life for it." The way we spend every minute of every day counts far more than we realize. Our lives are as a "mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes" (James 4:14, NIV). Make the most of those moments.

## **REACT**

1. What must you do personally to prepare for your step from earth into eternity?
2. Is your relationship with God growing daily? What steps can you take to ensure this growth?

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*By Linda Skinner, director of development, Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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# The Practice of Eternity

## OPINION

**Key Text: Prov. 24:16**

Many years ago my father, a superb basketball coach, watched from the sidelines while I shot baskets in an empty gymnasium. I was feeling lazy, enjoying the echoing thud of the dribble and squeals from my shoes, and I began carelessly flinging the ball at the hoop. My father advised something then that made a lasting impression on me. He said, “Don’t practice missing. You might get good at it.”

What we practice matters. From waxing on *Karate Kid* moves to memorizing multiplication tables, we become what our practices make us. Imagine, then, what we would think of a swimming coach who challenges her charges to prepare for an upcoming meet.

“Okay, team, we’ve got districts coming up, so today we’re going to practice the pole vault. When we’re through with that, we’ll work on picking up the 4-6 split in bowling. You never know when that will pop up. Tomorrow, we’ll attack some pesky dangling modifiers. Then, on to cross-stitching . . .”

As ludicrous as it appears, many people look at God this way. Would God coach us to practice habits all our lives if we never had to use them later—in the eternal game? What does God ask us to practice now? Paul describes the practices and habits familiar to those who inherit the kingdom of God: love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (see Galatians 5).

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## I believe we will have “accidents” on the new earth.

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What might we need patience or self-control for in a perfect environment? Suppose we *can’t* all do the activities we want at precisely the instant we want? Is it possible that we’ll need to demonstrate self-control? Will building our own houses require patience?

We say we would like to have everything go our way in paradise, but we also realize that much of life’s pleasure comes from accomplishing difficult tasks that were anything but a sure thing. I believe we will have “accidents” on the new earth. All will not go precisely according to our plans. We will overcome obstacles and learn lessons, but the obstacles won’t be overwhelming, nor will we ever be tempted to despair. In a perfect environment, surprises happen.

So if someone drops a new earth rock and it lands on your toe, what will you do? How do you react now when you miss a plane connection or a close relative begins to be irritating? Are you practicing the fruits of grace, or are you practicing missing?

## REACT

Did Jesus ever make mistakes? Explain your answer.

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*By Chris Blake, who is a professor on the humanities faculty at Union College, Lincoln, Nebraska.*

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## Next Quarter's Lessons

# ASSURANCE OF SALVATION

If you have not received a copy of *CQ* for first quarter 2000, here is a summary of the first two lessons:

### **Lesson 1: The Foundation of Our Assurance**

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

*Theme:* Understanding God's message for us individually and accepting it wholeheartedly brings with it the gift of assurance of salvation.

### **Lesson 2: The Person of Christ: Our Assurance**

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

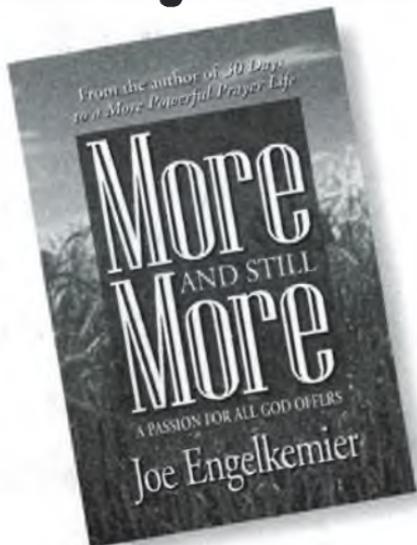
*Theme:* Christ redeems us from sin, death, and Satan as revealed through the Scriptures.

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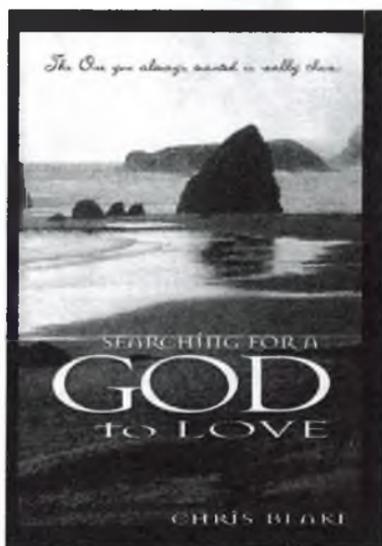
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# MISSION PROFILE



**NAME:** Sidinha, Cachoeira

**COUNTRY:** Brazil

**BACKGROUND:**

As a young girl, Sidinha went to a neighbor's home for Friday evening worship. When her father found out that she had been to the home of a



South American Division

Protestant, he became angry and told her not to go again. But his threat did not stop her. The next time she went, her father beat her hands with a stick. He burned every Bible in the house and continued to punish Sidinha, but she continued going to her friend's home. Read *Mission* this quarter to find out how Sidinha followed Jesus in spite of her father's opposition and learn what happened to her family as a result of her stubbornness.

**THE THIRTEENTH SABBATH OFFERING:**

Part of the Thirteenth Sabbath Offering will be used to build new chapel and expand educational facilities in the Northern Brazil Union.