In this age of shallowness...

Time to Go Deeper

God invites us to live and abide in Him, to make Jesus first and last and best in everything, to grow into the image of our Saviour and Lord.

BY WILLIAM G. JOHNSSON
I confess: the world is too much with me. I find myself busier and busier and accomplishing less and less that really matters. I am inundated with information, but most of it is chaff. I am tempted to skim, to think in sound bites, to do instant analysis, to find quick solutions.

But the Almighty does not come at my summons. “Be still, and know that I am God,” He reminds me (Ps. 46:10).* “You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart” (Jer. 29:13).

Each of us desperately needs a closer walk with God. There are no exceptions—certainly not the clergy. Charles R. Swindoll tells of an encounter with a minister who, following Swindoll’s meeting with pastors, whispered to him, “Nobody around me knows this, but I’m operating on fumes. I am lonely, hollow, shallow, enslaved to a schedule that never lets up.” Swindoll embraced him and prayed with him as the minister wept with deep, heaving sobs. That encounter eventually led Swindoll to write his recent book, *Intimacy With the Almighty* (Dallas: Word Publishing, Inc., 1996).

It is time to seek the Lord. It is time to get our priorities in order. It is time to go deeper.

Jesus is coming soon! We do not know how soon, but the gathering intensity all around us suggests that the glad day of His appearing cannot be far off. When He appears in the clouds and all our systems crash—when the computers fry and the vast world network devoted to getting and spending, buying and selling, and amusing and being amused goes up in smoke—what then? “Since everything will be destroyed in this way, what kind of people ought you to be?” (2 Peter 3:11).

Whether our Lord appears this year or whether He tarries a little longer, our personal day in the sun will soon run its course. When my heartbeat stops—which is the effective day of the Second Coming for me—what then? With my last breath, will I be able to affirm, like Paul: “I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day—and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing” (2 Tim. 4:7, 8)?

I will be glad at last just to be safe in my Father’s home. Simply to make it into His presence and to be with Jesus forever will be enough—that will be glory for me. I will be a brand plucked from the burning, a Saviour’s grace trophy, as will be every other redeemed person.

Yes, there is a heaven to win, a hell to shun. But God offers us much more. He invites us even now to know “joy unspeakable and full of glory” (1 Peter 1:8, 9, KJV), “eternal pleasures at [His] right hand” (Ps. 16:11). We don’t have to wait until Jesus comes back to enter into the “heavenly realm.” Right now we may sit with Christ right there (see Eph. 2:6); right now we may know His love that surpasses knowledge and be filled to the brim with the “fullness of God” (Eph. 3:19).

It is time to go deeper.

Going deeper starts with a passion to know God better, a passion to go deeper.

Listen to Paul’s hunger for God: “Whatever was to my profit I now consider loss for the sake of Christ. What is more, I consider everything a loss compared to the surpassing
greatness of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord, for whose sake I have lost all things” (Phil. 3:7, 8).

God’s searchlight rakes my heart, and I have to ask: Do I have my priorities in order? Do I count knowing Christ the supreme goal of my life? Am I prepared to lose position, reputation, possessions, whatever—anything and everything, if God so wills—in order that Christ may be all in all?

And Paul goes on: “I want to know Christ and the power of his resurrection and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death, and so, somehow, to attain to the resurrection from the dead” (verses 10, 11). To know Christ better and better, to walk with Him in joy and in suffering, to be so closely bound in fellowship with Him that the masks fall off and the shallowness disappears and Christ lives in me—this is what it means to go deeper.

You may wonder, dear friend, if this spiritual quest can be realized only by shutting ourselves away from the world and devoting ourselves to lives of contemplation. Not at all! Paul, who so hungered and thirsted to know Christ better—this Paul was no monk. He lived a busy, active life, working with his hands making tents to support himself as he went from city to city preaching the good news about Jesus.

Jesus showed us the pattern for life in this world. Our Lord’s days were packed with helping others—healing, feeding, teaching, blessing, preaching. We cry out, “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God” (Ps. 42:1), but we find God as we give ourselves to others. We best follow Jesus as we seek to serve as He served.

This special issue of the Adventist Review is for people of all ages who want intimacy with God, who want to go deeper. Some of you who read these pages are new Christians: maybe you found Jesus as your “forever friend” through Pastor Dwight Nelson’s meetings last year. Others of you will be longtime followers of Jesus. Whatever your past, the way of intimacy with God is the same for all of us, and it is simple:

1. Take time to commune with God. Talk to Him and wait long enough to allow Him to talk to you.
2. Take time to feed on His messages—the Bible primarily, but also His counsels in the Spirit of Prophecy (I especially commend the book *Steps to Christ* to you for further reading).
3. Abide in Him by living for others as you share the good news and give yourself in loving service.

All the articles and testimonies that follow fall under these three categories: prayer, study, and service. All the writers share from the heart as they tell of their walk with Jesus.

Assistant editor Steve Chavez worked hard to gather the materials for this issue, and I am grateful to him. But most of all I thank our wonderful Lord, whose invitation still bids you and me: “If any one thirst, let him come to me and drink. He who believes in me, as the scripture has said, ‘Out of his heart shall flow rivers of living water’” (John 7:37, 38, RSV).

* Unless otherwise indicated, Bible texts are from the New International Version.

William G. Johnsson is executive publisher and editor of the Adventist Review.
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Showers of Blessing
Why be satisfied with a few sprinkles?

BY RANDY MAXWELL

WHAT COULD GOD DO WITH PEOPLE committed to prayer? What scenes of salvation and power would we witness if we were to humble ourselves, seek God, turn from our wicked ways, and pray?

I believe that praying people will witness divine activity “immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine” (Eph. 3:20, NIV), because I witnessed one such move of God at a conference-sponsored prayer rally in London, England. What transpired that night in October of 1997 will forever stand out in my mind as an early shower preceding the pouring out of God’s Spirit in end-time power.

The setting was the Advent Centre Seventh-day Adventist Church in central London. I had come at the invitation of Pastor Hamilton Williams, expecting a fairly typical prayer conference schedule of events. But God had other plans for us. He wanted to give us a glimpse of what happens when His people pray.

After leading the congregation in several seasons of prayer, Pastor Williams unexpectedly called for 40 “brave volunteers” to go out into the streets surrounding the church, give away Focus magazines (the British equivalent to Signs of the Times), and invite whomever they encountered to come inside the church to have their needs prayed for. Those remaining in the church were instructed to pray for the teams going out and to be ready to pray for those who would be coming in from the streets. The Holy Spirit had impressed Pastor Williams with this impromptu plan, and I had learned of it only a few hours earlier on the ride from the airport. Only a handful of people knew what Pastor Williams intended to do. The choir and congregation were taken by complete surprise.

A feeling of expectancy filled the air as we watched the 40 volunteers, arms burdened with Focus magazines, leave the sanctuary and disperse into the night. The sound of our prayers on behalf of the volunteers and those they would encounter mingled with the sound of praises being sung from the choir just outside the front door. What would God do?

Within minutes the doors at the rear of the sanctuary opened, and people began coming in. The numbers were small at first, but slowly more and more people came, until we could barely keep pace with the prayer needs.

People responded readily to a simple invitation to come and be prayed for. “Prayer scouts” would bring the persons seeking prayer into the sanctuary and introduce them to the members standing by to pray. Someone from the prayer group would then ask the persons what they wanted prayer for, then prayer team members would surround the seekers, lay hands on them, and pray for their need. Afterward the seekers were invited to stay for the rest of the meeting or leave if they so desired; there was no pressure. As Pastor Williams said: “Our purpose is to present these people to God, seek His favor and blessing on their behalf, and in so doing, introduce them to Jesus Christ, the lover of their souls.”
A young man concerned about his grades in college, a father worried about his 18-month-old daughter's recovery from eye surgery, two business partners wanting to close a deal successfully, a weeping grandmother who couldn't find words to express her deep need, a young woman looking for happiness and peace, a couple requesting prayer for their infant son—these are a sampling of the souls who crossed over the invisible but often formidable barrier that so often shuts off the church from the world around it, and received a touch from God.

Later when the choir and prayer scouts finished their ministry and returned inside, the prayer conference resumed, but it certainly wasn't “business as usual.” Once again the Holy Spirit preempted the planned program. I took the platform to speak, but instead felt impressed that God wanted an appeal for salvation made right then—before I spoke.

Several “street people” had remained, and Pastor Williams invited those who wanted to acknowledge their need of God and receive His gift of salvation to come to the altar. While the congregation sang, six or seven responded.

Some came sobbing, as did a young man with long blond hair, smelling of alcohol, sitting with head buried in his lap as he sat on the altar steps, crying out for God to come into his life. God granted me the privilege and honor of praying with this young man and his brother. In their brokenness I was given a glimpse of God’s glory, and as I led these young men to Jesus, I realized that I was standing, with them and everyone else in that building, on holy ground.

The conference continued until nearly 11:00 that evening, yet no one seemed to mind. God’s hand had been seen in the events of the evening. Jesus had been exalted and had placed His seal of approval on the prayer gathering by bringing the attendees into close personal contact with people who had real needs. Dozens of people who had no prior contact with the church came in and opened their hearts to God and to His praying people. That night God showed me once again that He is real and that He stands ready to respond to the prayers of His people.

Can we expect to experience revival in our lifetime? Yes. But God’s revival power is not limited to corporate prayer gatherings. God is in the micro as well as in the macro aspects of life. True revival begins one person at a time—you and me on our knees before God, seeking more grace, more awareness of need, and more faith to believe that with Him all things are possible.

Now is the time to get closer to God by establishing a consistent prayer life. Write your prayers to God in a journal, sing praises to Him in your car, worship Him in silence, and experiment with the countless forms of prayer that will add freshness and vitality to your relationship with God.

Can it happen? Ask yourself: Why not here? Why not me? Why not now?

The place of prayer is where the action is. Get involved. It’s beginning to “rain.”

Randy Maxwell is director of creative advertising at Pacific Press Publishing Association in Nampa, Idaho.
My most vivid memory of prayer is from a Sabbath afternoon in March 1982. I was almost 13 years old, begging God to spare my father’s life. I promised to be a better daughter, Christian—whatever—in order to strike a deal that would enable my father to be with us once again. When I had no more tears to cry, I got up feeling certain that my father would be fine.

When we went back to the intensive-care unit, I learned that my father had passed away the very moment I felt my prayers were being answered. I was heartbroken.

Over the next 10 years my prayer life reflected my feelings of disappointment and abandonment, with a few scattered moments of closeness and sincerity.

At the seminary I realized how angry and hurt I was: angry at God for having allowed my father to die, and hurt because I had lost all confidence in His ability to give me what I needed in life.

In a class on spiritual formation I learned to truly listen to God, to be comfortable being alone with Him. Previously I was so mad that I didn’t want to talk to God. I had nothing to say to Him. But I finally allowed myself to express my feelings openly. I told Him exactly how I felt; I held nothing back. And I finally got to hear what God had to say for Himself for having hurt me so deeply.

When I finished, my instructor, Delcy Kuhlman, asked me to do something very strange. She asked me to visualize myself in the hospital the day my father died, and in my imagination picture Jesus there also. It was difficult, but I began to see, hear, and feel Jesus’ presence on that terrible day.

I imagined that His arms had been around me. “I’m so sorry” was all He could say. I realized how much I meant to Him, how He had been trying to reach me, but I had not been listening. My faith in God was restored, and I felt embraced and loved. My prayer life, my spiritual life, was changed forever.

I now listen to what God is trying to tell me. I try to see how He has been working in and around me. I’m able to feel His love for me even when I think I’m unworthy. My life is a constant prayer. I talk to Him everywhere I go, and I listen to what He says.

I’m an open book with God, and this includes my many faults, weaknesses, and failures. Yet in spite of all the negatives in my life, He still loves me, and this knowledge frees me to have an open and honest prayer life with my wonderful God.

I’ve learned to allow time for silence (see Ps. 46:10) so that God can share Himself with me. My happiest and most peaceful times are when I’m spending time alone with God. My journey has not been a perfect one, but it’s been a rewarding one. And I thank God for it.

By M. Carmen Ibañez, an associate pastor of the Spanish Seventh-day Adventist Church in Loma Linda, California.
“When thou prayest, rather let thy heart be without words than thy words without heart.”
—John Bunyan
Eight years of prayer preparation, eight months of weekly prayer agendas, divine worship prayer services on four different dates, 24-hour prayer vigils, and 12 to 25 pray-ers pleading with God each night even as Pastor Dwight Nelson preached to the world—this is the news behind the news of NET '98.

The Pioneer Memorial church prayer circle swelled around the world to some 7,600 sites by faithful prayer warriors who believed that nothing is more beneficial than the “effectual fervent prayer” of the righteous (James 5:16). Here are a few highlights.

We were serving the postmeeting meal to the 40 translators, whose languages ranged from Afrikaans to Zulu, when the report came in that the signal wasn’t going out for the whole Central time zone of the United States and Canada; hundreds of sites had blank screens. Immediately several prayer warriors dropped everything and went into the Adventist Communication Network (ACN) command center and prayed. Troubleshooters worked deftly, telephone operators answered frantic calls, and prayer warriors interceded for divine intervention. Scarcely had we finished praying when the good news echoed, “We’re back on line!” Then, “Praise God!”

In Papua New Guinea crowds surged to more than 100,000 as prayer power obtained promises, filled stadiums, and controlled weather for the honor and glory of God. Elsewhere attendees were counted by dozens instead of tens of thousands, but still God was there.

Miracles of faith are still being written. By faith lightning felled a mighty oak in Goettingen, Germany, clearing the way to bring the satellite signal without interference.

When lightning knocked out the electricity for the city of Bloemfontein, capital of Orange Free State, Republic of South Africa, the lights remained on in only one place—the crowded Seventh-day Adventist church that was airing NET ’98.

A woman in Romania, disabled with a nerve and muscle disorder, was brought to the NET ’98 meeting. She responded to the invitation to accept Jesus as her personal Saviour and returned home without assistance, rejoicing in her spiritual and physical healing.

When the local organizers in a U.S. city had difficulty tuning in to the satellite, they heard a voice say, “Your system needs to be recalibrated.” Sure enough, it did. When the technician called to report this to Coral Jannsen of ACN, she responded, “There’s nothing in your system that would audibly tell you that your system would need to be recalibrated.” Then she added, “It must’ve been an angel.”

Hanging high over the front left entrance to the sanctuary of the Pioneer Memorial church is a beautiful banner. In the background is a picture of Jesus. Written in large golden letters is the congregation’s motto: “Forward on Our Knees.” It’s a reminder not only to ask God for His mercies, but to praise Him for the miracles that He has, and is, accomplishing around the world. As the curtain is drawn on the final drama on Planet Earth, by faith we go “forward on our knees.”

By John and Millie Youngberg, prayer coordinators at the Pioneer Memorial church on the campus of Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.
What If . . .

It had been a rough evening in my college class. My coteacher, a first-time college instructor, had thoroughly frustrated the class by giving an assignment so vague that none of us could figure it out, including me. Feeling the rising tension in the room, I heard some rude muttering going on behind me that was calculated to reach the contract teacher's ears in tone if not words.

After class the students left with “little black clouds over their heads.” A few stopped by to talk to my coteacher. Suddenly there was a thundering roar from the hallway outside: Stomp, stomp, stomp! and then a wordless roar of frustration. I couldn’t investigate at the moment, but I knew it had to be the three malcontents who had been sitting behind me.

I tried to maintain perspective as I talked over the assignment with the contract teacher and gave her some pointers about clarifying her expectations, but as time wore on, I got angrier and angrier at the rudeness demonstrated by my students. Soon they would be student teaching and then dealing with superiors in their first jobs; as professionals they would not be able to stomp around and yell when they got mad. Before leaving my office for home at 10:00, I sent a terse e-mail to the three, asking that they stay to meet after their next class with me. Then I went home and grumped.

The next morning I realized during my worship time that I was still angry at the students. “Lord,” I prayed, “this anger makes me an ugly person, and I don’t like how I feel. I’m sorry. I need wisdom to talk to those three students with kindness.”

How do you know it was those students? The impression hit me like a brick.

Who else? I wondered.

But the question persisted. I had opened up my life to God for this new day, handed over my anger, and now I needed to follow His leading. My mind’s eye ranged across the faces of our class and suddenly stopped on a student who never caused problems. I’ll call her, I thought, and see if she can confirm the identity of the stompers and yellers.

And so it was that I was humbled yet again. I called my model student, asked if she’d seen the students who acted so rudely, and heard her say in deep embarrassment, “It was Jenny and me.” It had not been my three “grumblers” at all!

What if I hadn’t kept my daily appointment with God? What if I had not confessed my anger and asked God for wisdom that morning? What if I had told off the “grumblers” for something they didn’t do? I shudder to think of the damage I could have caused. My deepest longing is that God will fill me anew each day, forgive my faults, and overrule my petty human nature to accomplish His work through me.

By Ginger Ketting, an associate professor in the Education Department at Pacific Union College, Angwin, California.
Modern-day miracles—what are they? Why can’t I ever remember seeing one? It’s always been hard for me to carry on a conversation with God. I’m a social person; to have a relationship with someone I can’t see takes more than a little faith.

In September 1997 God revealed Himself to me in a way that I never expected, revitalizing my walk with Him, enhancing it in a beautiful way. That’s when I left the safety of a small town in Michigan to attend school in Spain. At the airport my family sent me off with tears in their eyes, but more important, with prayers in their hearts. As I sat in the plane, I felt an unexplainable calm wash over me. God seemed to say, “Don’t worry, Katie. Everything will be all right. Just rely on Me.”

The next morning we arrived in Madrid an hour late. My flight to Valencia was scheduled to take off in only 50 minutes. How long can it take to get my passport stamped and find the right gate? I wondered. As I got off the plane, I whispered a short prayer that everything would be OK, mentally reciting Psalm 23—my prayer for protection—in an effort to reassure myself.

Following the crowd to a small booth, I asked where the flights to Valencia were departing from. The man behind the counter pointed downstairs with annoyance. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want . . . I kept repeating inside my head. The girl in the next line was also trying to find the flights to Valencia, and we started off in the same direction.

“What are you doing in Valencia?” I asked the mystery girl.

“I’m going to study in a little town called Sagunto,” she replied.

“Really!” I exclaimed with excitement. “That’s where I’m going! Isn’t God good?”

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want . . .

I never actually said “Lord, help me!” but He knew. Krista, my God-sent companion, and I still recall that day with awe. After we went downstairs to the real passport line, we offered up a small prayer for guidance and protection.

The Lord has promised: “Where two or three are gathered in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20, RSV).

He not only kept us safe in the airport and made sure we had no more setbacks, but when we arrived in Valencia, we discovered that our luggage had beaten us, with some very important medical equipment I was concerned about. God took care of everything.

Modern-day miracles? I now know exactly what they are. They aren’t necessarily flashes of lightning across the sky; they’re things that seem small in hindsight, but in fact have God’s fingerprints all over them.

I still get frustrated with my prayer life sometimes, but I have evidence that God hears me and knows when I am in need. The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want . . .

By Katie Widner, a junior English major at Andrews University in Berrien Springs, Michigan.

“Prayer does not demand that we interrupt our work, but that we continue working as if it were a prayer.”—Mother Teresa
Safe Passages

As the plane lifted into the sky, I leaned my head against the window and reflected on the past two weeks. Unexpected out-of-town company over the holiday weekend led into three full days of meetings at work that increased my working hours, all in the absence of my husband, who was away at a conference. Now this unanticipated trip was proving the proverbial straw weighing heavily on my back.

We banked to the left, and the sun shimmered off the Pacific Ocean. “Lord,” I prayed, “please send Your angels to bear this airplane safely to our destination. And please make this a smooth flight, one without turbulence.”

The words caught in my mind. That seemed to have been my prayer for months. Circumstances had caused my normally peaceful existence to be extremely turbulent over the past few months. “Lord, deliver me from these circumstances. Let me just be happy. Give me smooth sailing. Bring peace.” But nothing seemed to transform me or the situations.

Maybe I’m praying the wrong prayer, I thought. Instead of praying for peace, perhaps I should be praying for strength to sustain me. Maybe instead of praying for a smooth ride, I should be praying for shock absorbers necessary to travel the road. Maybe instead of deliverance, I should be praying for understanding and growth. Maybe my prayers should have been “Thy will be done, Lord, not mine.”

As we neared cruising altitude, I felt my body relax. My eyes closed, and I realized for the first time in a while that God had been carrying me all along. With that assurance I dozed in a peaceful sleep, confident that He would carry me into the future, whatever came my way.

By Becki Patten, a freelance writer and marketing specialist who lives in Chula Vista, California.
For the Thirsty Soul

A personal retreat may be just the ticket.

BY ELLA M. RYDZEWKSK

“O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you” (Ps. 63:1, NIV).

I REMEMBER THE FALL DAY I ATTENDED MY first spiritual retreat. I don’t mean the social time-outs by church organizations, I mean planned time to drink deeply from God’s refreshing springs—to escape the “dry and weary land where there is no water” (Ps. 63:1, NIV) and seek a place of beholding His power and glory (verse 2).

Pastor Steve preached about times he spent alone with God—of how God gave him new insights or pointed out unnoticed sins. Even though I often felt God’s presence, I thirsted for more of that kind of spirituality. I attended the first retreat that Pastor Steve held for members. Like Sabbaths, retreats are a sanctuary in time. But unlike Sabbaths, we leave the fellowship of family and friends to be alone with God.

Ever since then I’ve taken periodic personal retreats. Some have been spiritual highs and others flat. That doesn’t matter. I don’t take retreats to obtain good feelings. Not only would this be self-serving, but God often comes closer to us when we faithfully seek Him despite our feelings.

Spending time in this kind of intimacy with God precedes effective service and a victorious life. A personal retreat with our wonderful Saviour can change you and those you pray for.

Preparation

Pray for this retreat when it is just a seed in your mind. Recognize that God is inviting you to meet with Him. Put your retreat day on the calendar. Notify your employer of this “vacation day,” arrange baby-sitting, plan supper (or eat out) so that you needn’t hurry home. This appointment shouldn’t be canceled for minor reasons.

Place

No matter where you live, get out of your house, with its distractions. A natural or park setting is best. You’ll need a place for sitting, walking, and eating. (For those who are able, fasting is suggested, but not for your first retreat.) Many churches have camps or retreat centers that cater to those seeking solace and intentional communion with God.

Things to Take

I take my Bible. I also
like to have two or three favorite devotional books, pen and paper, and plenty of drinking water. If you’re not fasting, take your lunch (don’t eat out).

**Structure**

Time can be structured or unstructured. Personally, I need structure. I’ve been enriched by trying different retreat formats, but I find Jesus’ answer to His disciples when they asked Him how to pray to be the most helpful. So I spend the day meditating on the Lord’s Prayer recorded in Matthew 6:9-13.

> “Our Father which art in heaven.” Begin by addressing God, acknowledging His existence and your relationship to Him.

> “Hallowed be thy name.” Recognize His character, righteousness, and love. Turn to the Psalms and read them aloud. Sing psalms or favorite hymns. Praise God until you’re ready to go to the next step. (You may need to set time limits on the various phases of your retreat.)

> “Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done.” Here we not only welcome God’s kingdom into our hearts; we acknowledge the Second Coming. In asking that God’s will be done, we choose to trust Him with everything. List the things you need to trust God with.

> “In earth, as it is in heaven.” God’s will is always good. His will is not the sorrow, death, and pain that we know on the earth now; none of these things exist in heaven. We trust His will to be done in a new earth that is just like heaven. Think of how heaven might look and the people we will meet there.

> “Give us this day our daily bread.” We need food to function, as do our families and friends. We bring to God the loved ones we want Him to bless. Intercessory prayer can be difficult, for how do we know what to pray for when it comes to those God has put in our lives? But we’ve been told to pray for one another, to ask God to meet needs that are physical, mental, spiritual, and emotional. If you know of a specific problem, turn it over to God.

> “Forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.” Next we admit to God our selfish mistakes. And then comes the hard part—“as we forgive.” We go over our days to see if we find debts we haven’t forgiven. Do we have grudges, resentments? Is there someone we think we can’t forgive because the wound is too deep? Even if they’ve never asked, can we forgive these debts?

> “Lead us not into temptation.” Giving in to temptation feels good momentarily, but the results can last a lifetime. Temptation includes addictions to a host of things—all bad habits.

> “Deliver us from evil.” Many of us tend to gloss over the evils that haunt us (or dwell too much on them). Maybe it’s worry, depression, a child’s drug habit, a dreaded illness (real or imagined). What is the greatest evil in our lives? Only God can deliver. We ask Him to protect us and lift our worries.

> “For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever.” We acknowledge His mighty power. We think of how God has worked in our lives. This is the time for big dreams—of what we could do with and for God.

After the prayer I often read more of the Bible and/or a devotional book. You can read a book of the Bible, making notes as you go. You might paraphrase the book of John, as I did one day.

You can also visualize a Bible story, picturing scenes, sounds, smells, and textures. In *The Desire of Ages* Ellen White urged us to spend a “thoughtful hour each day” on the scenes of Christ’s life, especially His trial and crucifixion.¹

The late Roger Morneau was the ultimate Adventist prayer warrior. He had a prayer tower of requests from all over the world. He read the Crucifixion story in Matthew 27 every day before praying, asking that Christ’s blood cover the sins of those for whom he prayed.² To see “Christ, and Him crucified,” as well as His resurrection has a place in every personal retreat.

These ideas are presented as springboards to plan a personal retreat. Retreats enrich and renew the spiritual life. Depending on how God works with you, the results may be immediate or gradual. The trust you have in Him will see you through good times and sad times.

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¹ Ellen G. White, *The Desire of Ages*, p. 83. (She encourages imaginative meditation here as well as in other places.)


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*Ella Rydzewski is editorial assistant for the Adventist Review.*
His Life, His Book

I was dissatisfied and adrift, but the Bible brought stability to my life and changed me forever.

DEEPER THROUGH STUDY

BY JACK J. BLANCO


Then down and out. Jesus! And oh, yes, the Book. His Book. There I sat holding it in my hand, reading its precious pages.

What did the Book do for me? That’s really the wrong question, because it all began with a Man called Jesus. Then came the Book.

Dissatisfied with my life and with no sense of direction, I sat on the edge of my barracks bunk looking for something to fill my inner void. Where were the men of loyalty, honesty, and trustworthiness after whom I could emulate and model my life? Somehow I felt so all alone, adrift on a sea of meaninglessness.

Suddenly, out of nowhere, came what seemed an audible voice: “There is Someone like that. His name is Jesus.” My response—prompted by the Holy Spirit—was immediate: “Why didn’t I think of that? Yes! That’s right! He’s the one to follow!” And instantly peace flooded my soul.

How I longed to follow Him. If only I had lived 2,000 years ago. To walk with Him and talk with Him—what joy! As I mused about this instant insight, I thought dejectedly:

But that was then. Yet that same voice seemed to say to me: “He’s not dead! He’s alive! You can follow Him now.”

I again responded: “That’s right! He’s here! Yes, I will follow Him! I will!”

From this personal encounter Jesus led me to His Book. He wanted me to have something objective to hold on to, something solid, guidelines and rules on which to build our relationship. For I knew that there could be no meaningful relationship without some kind of rules.

It began in the military library. I was searching for a Bible, a book I had never seen. But there was Bible Readings. What I read made sense. I thought I was reading the Bible, but soon I found out that it had only been cataloged and labeled “the Bible.” Shipped to the Pacific, I was introduced to the Bible by a fellow soldier. It was in this Book that I found the story of Jesus and the rules a follower of His should live by.

What has this precious Book done for me? How has it changed my life? Completely. In Jesus’ presence smoking, drinking, partying, and use of foul language seemed incongruent with what I read about Him in His Book. Honesty, loyalty, obedience, and service for Him took priority.

From His Book I learned that He was the one who created all things, set apart the Sabbath, and gave us the Ten Commandments. I also learned from His Book the importance of diet, cleanliness, and modesty. My body was now His temple and was to be kept free from everything that would not bring praise to Him.
What else did His Book do for me? It increased my thirst for more. Total immersion—from Genesis to Revelation—became the driving force. Through His Book He led me to His church, followed by an overwhelming conviction of a call to ministry to share with others the good news of salvation. The Book propelled me forward. It was Jesus, I read, who had said, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God” (Luke 9:62, NIV).

Now His Book is my life, my foundation, and my “friend” because it is His Book and it always tells me about Him. Through it He talks to me and tells me what happened in the past—because He was there. What happened to Him while He was here. What happened in Gethsemane and Calvary. He tells me that He loves me. That I have been forgiven and I belong to Him. That salvation is a free gift from God to me and that I don’t have to earn it, just not lose it. The conditions, He tells me, are simple: love Him and obey Him (John 14:15; 15:14).

He also tells me about the future, what will happen in the time of the end. And I believe every word He says. Sometimes our conversation is long, sometimes short. His Book is the satellite dish through which we communicate. To talk with Him is to know Him, and to know Him is life eternal (John 17:3).

Without His Book I would once again be adrift, not this time on a sea of meaninglessness, but on a sea of relativity and relational religiosity. His Book has been a “lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path” (Ps. 119:105). In matters of morality it gives me more “understanding than all my teachers” (verse 99) and leads me in all the “right paths” (Prov. 4:11). In one sense my continuous walk with Him is no different from our initial meeting—from Him to His Book and back again. That’s how it was and continues to be.

Easy? No! Delightful at times but not always? True. Important? Yes! But how do you put into words an intimate relationship with someone and what it is doing for you? Multiply adjectives? Add superlatives? Yes, you could, but such a relationship grows as silently and mysteriously as the trees in the forest. Yet they are there, and they do grow. How do they grow? By taking in the moisture and the sunshine that God provides.

To seek Him and find Him in His Book has anchored our relationship and created in me a desire, an intense longing, to personally meet the One who loved me and gave His life for me before I ever knew Him. I love Him more than anything. Yes, more than anyone or anything else. I want to continue to do so, because someday I will see Him face-to-face, and what an awesome moment that will be. And my heart will sing forever.

Jack J. Blanco is dean of the School of Religion at Southern Adventist University in Collegedale, Tennessee.
It Grows on You

All my life I’ve struggled with spiritual exercises. Having grown up in an Adventist home, I don’t have one of those amazing “I found God” stories. Whenever someone tells that kind of story, they’re always so passionate. I always wanted the passion they had.

To find that passion, one has to grow closer to God. And to get closer to Him, I needed to spend time with Him, reading the Bible and praying. Yet even though I knew it, I couldn’t stick with it. I’d decide to read a chapter of the Bible every morning, but it never lasted. I’d just lose interest.

My life began to change when I came to Walla Walla College. A month into the school year I met Daniel, a friend of a friend. We started spending time together, and our friendship eventually developed into a romantic relationship.

Though our relationship progressed emotionally and mentally, we found our spiritual development lacking. We wanted to do something about it, but we didn’t know what to do. We tried to read the Bible together a few times, but the awkwardness of sudden spiritual intimacy left us feeling anything but refreshed.

During summer vacation we e-mailed each other almost every night. Being separated allowed us to gain a better perspective of each other. We decided that we wanted to meet daily and spend time with God. When we saw each other at the end of the summer, we made a point to get up early and read the Bible together. At first it was still awkward, especially praying. But as time went on, we became more comfortable.

We now meet faithfully every morning before 8:00 classes. It’s important to us. Why? We’re looking forward to a happy future together, and we don’t want to do it without God.

I’ll tell you something you already know: find someone to study with or be accountable to. I’d heard it too, but I always felt too embarrassed to reveal that part of me to another person—perhaps because I felt deficient. Until I realized just how important God is in my life, I wasn’t willing to share. I felt like hiding.

But Daniel and I committed ourselves to being passionate about God anyway, and it’s been worth it. Our relationships with God and each other have improved. We now seek God’s will for our lives every day. We’ve found a key to happiness, just as God intended.

By Sarah Kramer, a sophomore studying graphic design at Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington.
Falling in Love Again

Ezekiel did it. As I read his thundering curses on nations, with God—his cosmic Mr. Clean—wiping inhabitants off the geographical tabletop, I slammed the book shut in a rage. “What’s the point?” I fumed. “Who will know what You did when You’re done?” The latter was aimed at God.

I angrily tapped the back of the Bible with my forefinger, glaring at the troublesome Book. This latest intrusion on the canvas of my God portrait was most uncomfortable. I have puzzled over many hard-to-explain acts of God. At times I’m confused, fascinated, skeptical, or angry. Why give life to a corpse dropped on Elisha’s bones? Or use a witch to render sentence on a wayward king? Or close up the wombs of a nation’s women to get a liar out of trouble? I felt like arguing with God.

Yet a Bible mite is voracious. Examine one, and dozens begin to crawl about. They are tiresome yet compelling, so I continue to look, but to no useful end. Mites are far removed from real living. I’ve worn myself out trying to beat them out of my life.

Until today.

A close friend stopped by. He needed to talk. We sat on the porch, each holding a cold soda. Married less than a year, he lamented the end of his honeymoon. His case was well prepared: he listed her faults, venting about all those petty annoying things she did, flinging his glass back and forth vigorously, spilling soda as he drained his emotions. A dirty sock had grown into a reason for divorce, or, as he saw it, virtual annulment.

The catharsis ended, and he was exhausted. I began talking about things we’d done a year ago, places we went, things we did. Slowly I included his then-fiancée. He responded with a chuckle at first, then a laugh; soon he was reliving his own tales. Then he mused quietly, “Those were fun days, weren’t they? What’s happened to me?”

“Less than a year ago she was the most wonderful and gorgeous woman you’d ever seen,” I replied. “You couldn’t imagine life without her. You just forgot.”

“You’re right, I did. She is. Wow! Hey, later, man.”

“Later.”

I waved him off, realizing that I too needed to refocus. Overwhelmed with prattle, piffle, and polemics, involved in controversies in which I have no business, I’d forgotten—that in spite of Bible mites, Jesus is.

I’ve determined to look away from the mites and behold the Lamb. Jesus was right: “On that day you will realize that I am in my Father, and you are in me, and I am in you” (John 14:20, NIV). And it is here, all spiritually entangled, that I’ve fallen in love again.

By Mike Peterson, a freelance writer who lives in Citrus Heights, California.

“The words of inspiration, pondered in the heart, will be as streams flowing from the fountain of life.”
—Ellen G. White
Making the Most of It

So much of life is about attitude. It’s true that “life is what you make it.” That applies to our spiritual lives as well. Think about the words “Bible” and “study” for a moment. For some those words conjure up feelings of joy and comfort; for others, thoughts of dryness, boredom, and obligation.

So how can we overcome those barriers to Bible study? Well, it all comes down to attitude, and that’s really what God looks for anyway. In God’s eyes, why you do something is probably more important than what you do.

Sure, it’s good that you read your Bible for 30 or 60 minutes, but more important is to ask: What happens during that time? Are you just reading and taking in information? Or are you spending time with the One who inspired those words? Dwight Moody is credited with saying, “The Bible was not given to increase our knowledge, but to change our lives.”

Let me share some ways I’ve found to get myself in the right attitude to get the most I can from reading God’s Word:

1. Expectancy. One of the first things I try to do is begin with some anticipation. If God wants to communicate with me and the primary way He does it is through His Word, then by being eager I’m putting myself in the best position for Him to speak to me.

   We normally get what we expect. If you go to a social gathering expecting to have a good time, you probably will. If you don’t think you will, you probably won’t. David had an attitude of expectancy when he wrote: “O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you” (Ps. 63:1, NIV).

2. Reverence. In our fast-food, fast-paced lives, sometimes we aren’t very reverent. One of the best ways I’ve found to adjust into the right attitude is to not rush into God’s presence.

   I stop, take a deep breath, and let a quiet, restful moment clear away all of the thoughts racing around in my mind. The prophet Habakkuk touched on this attitude when he wrote: “The Lord is in his holy temple; let all the earth be silent before him” (Hab. 2:20, NIV).

3. Alertness. Here’s a handy tip: if your study time is first thing in the morning, don’t be “quiet” too long. Get wide awake first. Remember that you’re meeting with God, the Creator, the maker of heaven and earth. He deserves your full attention.

4. Willingness to obey. This attitude is crucial. Don’t come to your study time with an attitude that you’ll choose what you will or won’t do. Rather come with the purpose of doing anything and everything God wants you to do. Jesus said, “If anyone chooses to do God’s will, he will find out whether my teaching comes from God or whether I speak on my own” (John 7:17, NIV). Meet the Lord with the attitude of having already chosen to do His will—no matter what.

By Michael Speegle, senior pastor of the Central Seventh-day Adventist Church in Colorado Springs, Colorado.
Fifteen Minutes With God

A Plan to Get You Started

1. Relax. (one minute)
   Be still and quiet. Slow down and prepare your heart. Take a few deep breaths and wait on God. If it’s the first thing in the morning, don’t relax too long.

2. Read. (four minutes)
   Read a section systematically, aloud, in a modern translation with no notes (yours or anyone else’s). Begin by reading where you left off the day before. Read until you feel that God has told or taught you something; it might be a chapter or only a few verses. The point is not how much you read (coverage), but what you hear God saying (application).

3. Reflect. (four minutes)
   Think about what the passage means to your life. Write down your thoughts. Part of reflecting includes memorizing verses that speak to you in a special way. A number of handy methods for reflecting can be found in books on applying the Bible to life.

4. Record. (two minutes)
   Write out a personal application statement that is practical, possible, and measurable. If you can’t say it or write it, you haven’t thought about it enough. If you can write down an answer to the question “What am I going to do?” then you’re a step closer to being a doer, and not just a hearer of the word (James 1:22).

5. Request. (four minutes)
   Conclude your time in study by talking to God about what He has shown you and asking Him to help you put it into practice.
She Keeps Me Reading

If you’ve read the Bible, the Voice you hear when you read Ellen White’s books may be familiar.

BY ESTHER F. RAMHARACKSINGH KNOTT

Most of the books had a maroon cover, some were black, but all had gold lettering. Each of us high school students was handed one of these books as we walked in the door of Brian Townsend’s apartment. He was our physical education teacher, and his love for teaching and for his students even extended to Sabbath afternoons.

So here we were, seated in whatever space was available, all with a different book written by the same woman, Ellen White. Our first meeting with these books began when we wanted to understand better what Communion was all about, particularly the foot-washing service.

Then week after week the routine was simple: we’d all agree on a topic, look it up in the index of the book we had on our lap, and take turns sharing with the group the wisdom found in our particular volume.

As you might guess, our early interests included such topics as recreation and dress. We were thrilled to find “ammunition” to share with our parents. I’m sure they were amused when we came home quoting Ellen White to support our side of an argument.

I found Ellen White to be so balanced; just when my independent nature wanted to challenge some of her counsel, I’d read something else with which I totally agreed. I’d be forced to think through my motives and find that God’s servant did have a message to guide me. Thus began a devotional journey that has continued into my adult life.

As a freshman at Andrews University I remember sitting on the steps of Smith Hall. There a friend asked me what I had learned about God that day. The implication was that I would share something from my morning worship. In fact, I was struggling to make my devotional life a priority, but I found something to share after all: God was an important part of my life.

But as I made plans for the summer I realized that if my relationship with God was really to be a priority, I had to read His messages to me. My conversation with God went something like this: “God, I love You. I know I should spend time reading Your Word, but I find it difficult. I’m going to give You 30 minutes each day and ask You to work a miracle in my life. Please help me want to read Your Word. Let it make a difference in my life.”

I fully expected God to answer instantly. For a week I struggled. I read my Bible, but in my youthful impatience and lack of contemplative and reflective skills I often missed the application. Then one morning I picked up
a book that my Smith Hall friend had given me. It had a black cover with gold letters, *The Great Controversy*. I decided to give it a try. As I read each chapter, I faithfully looked up all the texts that were referenced. Over the next few weeks I found my devotional time sometimes stretching to two hours. As I looked up the texts, I found myself reading longer portions of Scripture. With that came the disciplines of reflection, meditation, and listening for God’s voice and His message for me.

Later that summer came the gift of *The Desire of Ages*. It seemed that God had shown Ellen White the original videos of the familiar Bible stories, and now she was sharing with me the behind-the-scenes subtleties, the hidden motives, and the ever-present hand of God moving on behalf of those He loves. I wanted more.

Fifteen years ago my spiritual journey took me to Washington, D.C., where I worked as the director for a special project in the Education Department of the North American Division called Catch the Vision. The goal was to educate K-12 students about our movement’s early pioneers and how our church got started. Not having a natural interest in history, I had a lot of catching up to do. Paul Gordon, who at that time served in the White Estate, gave me lots of material to read. My first few months were spent absorbing information. But I soon found that my reading was not about information, but about transformation.

A pivotal moment came when I was reading about one of Ellen White’s visions. It had come while she was traveling without her husband, James. Because he was very ill at home, Ellen was distressed about his condition. Then God gave her a vision in which she saw that James was all right. As I sat at my desk, tears welled up in my eyes. For months I had been reading about many of Ellen White’s visions—visions that have greatly impacted the church for decades. But here was a vision that affected one woman for a brief moment of time. God cared about her anxiety, her distress. He loved her. That translated immediately into “He loves me.” I felt an overwhelming sense of how special we are to God. This was the message that was being revealed in the pages of Mrs. White’s book. I had to keep reading.

A few years ago a friend made the comment “Wouldn’t you hate to be stuck in an elevator with Ellen White?” Somewhat puzzled, I asked her to explain. She felt that if she had some one-on-one time with God’s prophet, God would take the opportunity to deliver a personal message to her, revealing all her sins.

The more my friend talked, the more excited I got about how great it would be to be stuck in an elevator with someone so close to God, and that perhaps God would have a special message for me, because He loves me so much and cares most about me being with Him forever. I longed for such an encounter.

As I read the inspired messages of Ellen White, I see that God does have a personal message for me. There’s always something I can apply to my life, maybe not at that very moment, but there, stored in memory, waiting to be retrieved when I need it the most.

The greatest gift has been how Ellen White keeps me reading God’s Word. The way I would sum up my devotional journey with Ellen White’s writings is to borrow a quote from William Miller. When he reviewed his life and his journey from being a deist to a Christian he said: “The Scriptures became my delight, and in Jesus I found a friend.”

Esther F. Ramharacksingh Knott is an associate pastor at Pioneer Memorial church, on the campus of Andrews University.
I’m overwhelmed by God’s love. Jesus’ words, “For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him [including me] shall not perish but have eternal life” (John 3:16, NIV) fill me with joy. But this knowledge becomes even more precious when I read these words from God’s messenger, Ellen White: “The relations between God and each soul are as distinct and full as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare, not another soul for whom He gave His beloved Son” (Steps to Christ, p. 100).

That’s mind-boggling—almost inconceivable. How can God, with a complex universe to care for, be concerned with me and my relatively insignificant needs? Yet I know He is. The full force of these words was made very plain to me one Friday night in June 1939.

My brothers and sisters and I grew up in New York City’s concrete jungle. Thoughts of open fields to run in or horses and cows to care for and feed were only imaginary. Family finances on the heels of the Great Depression didn’t provide for trips to the country. Still, I decided to ask God to make it possible for me to attend camp in the Southern New England Conference (the Greater New York Conference didn’t yet have a camp).

I might as well have asked for the moon. The camp was being held in Massachusetts—two whole states away from Brooklyn, New York. Still, propelled by the assurance I had received from reading that God cared for me “as though there were not another soul upon the earth to share His watchcare,” I knelt by my bed and asked God to make it possible, if it would be in harmony with His will for me.

As I prayed, a knock sounded on our apartment door. My mother...

“God gives us just enough light so that we can see to take the next step; that’s all He gives, and in reality, that’s all we need.” —Charles R. Swindoll
answered and was met by one of the young adults from the Washington Avenue church, who announced, “Our young people’s society has just voted to use some of our funds to send Alice to junior camp in the Southern New England Conference.”

From my bedroom I overheard the entire conversation. As my mother thanked the young man and closed the door, I ended my prayer with a big “thank You” to the God who had said, “Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear” (Isa. 65:24, NIV).

Jesus told His disciples that He wanted their joy to be full (John 15:11). Although the great controversy between Christ and Satan still rages, God’s people can rejoice and be joyful. Notice these encouraging words from Ellen White: “Keep your wants, your joys, your sorrows, your cares, and your fears before God. You cannot burden Him; you cannot weary Him. . . . Nothing that in any way concerns our peace [our joy, our happiness] is too small for Him to notice” (ibid.).

As I reflect over six and a half decades of reading the Bible along with Ellen White’s books and articles, I can think of many decisions and actions that were directed by what I read. Those decisions have directed my life to this point and enable me to continue living for Jesus each day.

By Alice R. Voorheis, retired director of education for the Gulf States Conference, who lives in Collegedale, Tennessee. She serves as volunteer president for Adventist Heritage Ministry.
Doing Windows

Letting your light shine: as simple as becoming transparent.

BY RON E. M. CLOUZET

SOME PEOPLE DON’T DO WITNESSING, just as some housecleaning services “don’t do windows.” It’s just outside their job description.

Early in my professional life I decided that my pastoral call was to keep the flock. Buzzwords like nurture and inreach resonated with me. Being a pastor-evangelist was for people who were “gifted accordingly.”

But then came the conversion of 1984. During the last stretch of our seminary experience my partner and I were given some 37 Bible study requests to follow up in the city of Joliet, Illinois. There was no comfort zone to run to. Talking with strangers, visiting neighborhoods I never would have chosen on my own, answering Bible questions I myself was unsure about—sharing my faith took on new significance.

For starters, it sent me to my knees: “Lord, please help Debbie get somewhere with her difficult husband . . . and Lord, please, help me know what to say to these people—they’re so hungry for the Word, and I feel so empty.” That fall 11 of the more than 30 individuals accepted Christ and became a part of His last-day church. And one Adventist preacher was converted.

The greatest little book I have read says that if we set out to win souls for Christ, we “will feel the need of a deeper experience and a greater knowledge in divine things,” and that as a result of engaging in this work we will “plead with God” and our souls will “drink deeper drafts at the well of salvation.” How true those words have become in my experience.

In a legal sense, a witness gives a firsthand report of the facts—what he or she has seen or heard. In English the word refers both to the content as well as the person; the witness bears witness. The ambiguity is helpful because it’s impossible to separate the witness as a person from the content of his or her witness.

In the New Testament the word for witness, martus, is where we get our word “martyr.” The martyrs were martyred because they knew the facts of the love of God and the Lordship of Jesus firsthand, facts so real that they couldn’t deny them—even in the face of death. Witnessing, then, is not the privilege of the uniquely gifted, but the outcome of a converted life, one that has seen and heard firsthand the overwhelming love of God at work in one’s life (see 1 John 1:1-4). Witnessing has more to do with being than with doing. It has to do with becoming rather than with technique or personality.

We’ve all seen certain individuals who are able to glibly strike up a conversation with a total stranger. Their success inhibits those of us who have a shade of shyness in our personalities. But in fact, practically everyone finds an excuse to share great news with others.
Early one evening I was the last teacher left in our building, working to finish an urgent project. Although I didn’t notice at first, one of our readers came and eagerly started sharing something, to which I gave a mindless “uh-huh,” without looking up from my computer monitor. My body language cried silently, “Not now, please; I’m busy!”

But she would not be deterred. She had just become engaged, and she just had to share the marvelous attributes of her promised beau with somebody, even an uninterested professor. I gave up trying to ignore her, not in defeat, but in wonder. She was so clearly excited about what she shared that it truly became contagious. I pushed away from my desk, leaned back in my chair, and listened with rapt attention. How could I do otherwise? This was as real as it gets. It became interesting to me because it was so obviously real to her.

Witnessing is a “within thing.” A pregnant woman is said to have a healthy “glow” about her because she has a healthy life growing within her. In the same way, my witnessing is noticed by those outside when Christ is in control of my life, when I allow Him to live within me (see Gal. 2:20). His character simply oozes out. The genuine experience of truly good news cannot be contained (see John 14:16-20).

I once sat next to a literature professor from the University of Southern California on a flight to Los Angeles. She was bright, private, an ex-Christian very much turned off to organized religion—afraid of a God who would burn souls forever.

I had seen, heard, and tasted of the goodness of the Lord that very morning. With unusual sensitivity and insight the Spirit used me as a conduit to lead her to accept the possibility that the Bible just might be the story of One who loves us above all. As we parted she said, “Thank you for sharing what you did with me. I look forward to reading the Bible, I guess, for the first time.”

I had no fear of witnessing. My reluctance to be bothered with other people did not exist that day.

Everything within me longed to see her—a total stranger—happy and saved.

What makes this work? Experience in soul winning and even proper training will not hurt; they usually help. Truth is, however, nobody can really witness effectively. Only God can. But He looks to find those through whom He can spread His gracious love (see 2 Chron. 16:9).

That’s why I let Him witness to me first thing each morning, for I need to hear Him before I can speak of Him. I have found consistently that no matter whom I meet on a given day—whether planned or unplanned—the word received from the Lord that morning is often the very word they need me to share with them. The very insights received in a divine-human engagement at dawn apply to the human-to-human encounter at dusk.

Some call this the law of the second witness. You are never the first one approaching somebody for Christ; you are always the second one, for the Spirit was there first. He was first with them in that God led them to meet with you. He was first with you before you were with them.

I don’t try to do windows anymore. By God’s grace I’m becoming one.

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2 Dennis F. Kinlaw, Preaching in the Spirit (Grand Rapids: Francis Asbury Press, 1985), pp. 81, 82.

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Witnessing. Such a scary word. A group activity? A way to gain salvation? Something to keep retirees busy?

Young people often take classes designed to help take the fear out of meeting strangers and sharing Christ. Others find opportunities in clown ministry, hospital and nursing home visitation and singing, mission trips, or even Christian drama groups.

Yet seldom do these exciting ministries prepare participants for that agonizing day when suddenly you know that witnessing wasn’t meant as an occasional trip or group activity—that it must become a way of life.

For me that knowledge hit full force when I was in my mid-20s. That’s when I realized that keeping my love of God to myself hindered my Christian growth and kept me from blessing others. Yet serious questions flooded my mind: How do I share Christ without being obnoxious? Whom do I tell? Where do I get the courage to talk to complete strangers?

Then Mary, a Christian neighbor, became ill. Would she want me to visit? What would I say? Despite my feeling awkward, Sabbath afternoon found me in the hospital. Tucked safely out of sight in my purse were three small books—stories of miracles and God’s leading.

The visit went as well as could be expected. She lay dreadfully sick in that sterile room. But as we visited, my hand . . . it just wouldn’t unzip my purse. Why share? my mind demanded. After all, she’s already a Christian. A battle raged inside my head. Minutes dragged by.

I prayed with Mary and left the room. Guilt washed over me. How could I? An about-face found me back in Mary’s room. “I forgot to leave you these,” I stammered.

She closed her tired eyes and graciously accepted the books.

Three days passed. Again I found myself seated in Mary’s room. She’d had a close brush with death. “The books you left”—Mary gestured to the small stack—“you won’t believe what happened. I felt too sick even to pick them up. That night around midnight a nurse entered my room. She walked directly to my tray and in a shaky voice said, ‘I need your books.’

“I nodded and she disappeared. Around 6:00 the next morning she returned the books and thanked me profusely.” Mary recalled that the nurse’s next words shocked her. “I’m from another building,” she said, ‘and I don’t know how I found my way to your room. The books on your tray gave me the courage to keep living. They saved my life. Thank you.’

Through the years I’ve come to realize how often God searches for lights to shine in a dark world. With this realization the words “Lord, use me” come more easily each day.

By Ginger Church, director of periodical sales and women’s outreach at the Review and Herald Publishing Association in Hagerstown, Maryland.

“When you can do the common things of life in an uncommon way, you will command the attention of the world.” —George Washington Carver
Witnessing is a natural experience that flows from an intimate relationship with the Saviour. It’s a personal experience as normal as breathing, following the directive of Jesus in Mark 5:19: “Go home to your friends, and tell them what great things the Lord has done for you, and how He has had compassion on you” (NKJV).

This truth first dawned on me while Audrey and I were pastoring a district that included the Bethel church in Lansing, Michigan, in the late 1970s. Prior to our coming, several members of the Johnson family had been baptized into the church by Pastor Leslie O. Anderson. One of them was Earvin “Magic” Johnson, Jr., the former superstar of the National Basketball Association.

Before he signed his $25 million contract with the Los Angeles Lakers, members of the church asked me to visit him and try to persuade him not to sign. Feeling quite apprehensive, and despite my better judgment, I went to the Johnsons’ home. Magic had four sisters who regularly attended church with their mother, Mrs. Christine Johnson. Two of his sisters had attended Oakwood College—Pearl and Kim. When I arrived, I met Magic’s father and two of his brothers, who were deeply engrossed in a sporting event on television at the time. Magic wasn’t home.

While I sat and waited for his return, I scanned through a college yearbook that one of his sisters had brought home from Oakwood.

While doing so, I shared with her the joy I experienced at Oakwood—how my conversion was facilitated and how I never regretted giving my life in service to the Lord and His church. I shared how happy I was to be a Christian. When I glanced up from the yearbook, I noticed all three men staring at me. They were listening to my “witness” about what God had done in my life.

I never did meet Magic, but I believe my witness to the goodness of God stayed with his family members. I didn’t share anything spectacular or sensational; I only shared that joy was a component of my life since I met and surrendered control to Jesus.

People may debate our logic and argue doctrine, but I’ve never had anyone deny my witness—not even friends who claim to be agnostic. As I’ve shared my unique experience with God, no one has refused to listen, and some have responded positively. One day the Lord may touch that memory and use my witness—and that of others—to His glory.

In the meantime I’ve been blessed to recount the adventures God and I have shared thus far in my life. Repeating events to friends—believers and nonbelievers alike—has strengthened me. My commitment has been invigorated, my joy has been refreshed, and my zeal for the Lord renewed by telling others of our compassionate and great God.

Witnessing is simply saying to others, “Taste and see that the Lord is good” (Ps. 34:8, NIV).

By Ricardo Graham, secretary of the Northern California Conference in Pleasant Hill, California.
It was early morning in the hospital, and as the shifts were changing, nurses were busy taking reports from one another and assessing the needs of each patient in the critical-care unit. Coming on for the day shift, I noticed another nurse preparing to leave after a long and weary night. “What are you reading?” I asked.


My curiosity was piqued; after all, I was a third-generation, Choplet-eating, no-jewelry-wearing, Story of Redemption-reading Adventist. I knew everything about Adam and Eve (or so I thought).

“Can I see your book?” I asked eagerly.

“Sure,” she said.

As I flipped through the book, nothing looked familiar. As the days and weeks passed, we discussed her book. I started to pray for my newfound friend, with whom I spent about 15 minutes a day.

One morning, after several conversations about the book and other spiritual things, I asked her, “How would you like to come over to my house and spend some time reading the Bible and discussing your book?”

“I’d love to,” she said. And with that we began a beautiful friendship.

Week after week we compared her book against the Bible. She was sharp; after all, she was working nights as a nurse only to finish her law degree. My husband and I soon found that we had “our hands full.” After several months she was convinced. God’s Word reigned supreme, and she found the truth. She was baptized, and she and her daughter became a part of God’s church.

She who was taking care of patients was spiritually healed herself. The one who gave water to critically ill patients found the One who is the Water of Life through a daily 15-minute witness of a coworker.

By Gina Spivey Brown, a freelance writer in Mitchellville, Maryland, who is currently completing a doctoral degree in nursing.
A Nudge in the Right Direction

Her name was Liz. She was a member of our adult Sabbath school class—a typical group that met weekly for fellowship, Bible study, and prayer in the balcony of our local church.

One morning Liz came to us with an idea. There was going to be a vacancy soon, on the third Sunday of each month, for a group to volunteer at the soup kitchen in a neighboring town. She suggested that we needed to do more than discuss our faith each week—we needed to do something to share our convictions in a practical way. Volunteering at the soup kitchen was one way to do it.

After a lively discussion we decided to accept the invitation. Our responsibilities at the soup kitchen included purchasing the food, transporting it to the site, preparing the meal, serving 100-200 hungry people, washing the dishes, cleaning the kitchen, and finally, locking the doors. We volunteered, with breaks for summer vacations, for almost four years.

Our efforts at the soup kitchen inspired us to try other projects. We have organized car clinics for single parents, sponsored a community beautification project, and helped with various other initiatives in our town.

Liz moved west several years ago. Since that time the class has grown and divided to form two classes. Other members have come and gone, but our interest in volunteer service has been an enduring theme that has enriched our fellowship, intensified our prayer agenda, and enhanced our understanding of God’s will for community ministry as an integral and legitimate part of Global Mission.

From a personal perspective, God used Liz and our class’s journey into community outreach to reshape my thinking, redirect my life’s purpose by discovering a new profession in church-based community development and service, and experience often the joy of Christian service.

It’s been almost 10 years, Liz, since you nudged our Sabbath school class into doing something tangible to demonstrate God’s love, but you remain in my heart as one person whom God used to change my life forever. Wherever you are—thanks.

By Jim Hopkins, a professor at Andrews University and director and coordinator of the Community Partnership Initiative.
The Lord Said, “Baltimore”

Many wouldn’t choose this type of service. Maybe they should.

BY MYRNA TETZ

Of course I’ve done the Ingathering thing. You know, asked total strangers for money for the poor and needy. I’ve donated clothes I no longer could wear or wanted to wear, prayed for the less fortunate, given money when inspired, sympathized (some) for those whose food came from the garbage bins, and applauded the saints who did the soup kitchen thing. Sometimes there was personal involvement. But not very often. It didn’t seem to be my thing.

I guess I assumed that the way I lived my life was pretty much acceptable to the Lord. But times, places, and people change, and upon reflection, I understand better what I didn’t understand before.

My husband and I moved to Silver Spring, Maryland, a couple years ago. I had a job. He did not. Because he couldn’t come when I did, he said he’d wait to look for work. But not much developed in the way of permanent employment for a couple months after he arrived.

We had time to evaluate area churches, deciding which one we’d like to join and why. For the music? the preaching? the friendliness? On Sabbath afternoons we’d eat, have a nap, read some, take a walk, relax. We religiously obeyed the command “Come apart and rest awhile.” It was ideal.

Just when it seemed that denominational employment was not an option, my husband received an invitation to pastor a congregation in Baltimore, Maryland, and direct the city’s Adventist Community Services Center. Members of this downtown church had left other churches in the area several years ago for one reason—they were determined to serve.

Jungle is probably the best existing descriptor for certain areas of the largest cities of the world. Just traveling through these concrete mazes en route to some other destination makes me covet the tranquillity that comes when we are safely past.

But jungle did not seem a strong enough word to describe portions of Baltimore. Miles of row housing. People walking aimlessly in one direction and then another. Coarse laughter. Harsh yelling. Individuals who could care less about the nutritive value of whole-wheat bread or the spiritual reason, never mind the physical reasons, for not smoking, drinking, or doing drugs; those who’ve never experienced a home with a father, mother, and legitimate children; those who don’t know that bringing babies into the world through sexual conquest may be for the babies a fate even worse than death before their birth.

However, the Lord had said “Baltimore,” and one Sabbath morning, with nothing to explain my presence other than the fact...
that my husband was the pastor, and with more than a little trepidation, I entered the front door. The building houses both the church and the center, and is located in an appropriate, if not-so-nice, neighborhood.

Initiation came quickly. Learn the sandwich-making routine. Assist where needed in the food van, from which sandwiches, soup, and baked goods (donated by a couple bakeries) are distributed two Sabbath afternoons a month. Observe the members’ involvement and commitment, and attempt to emulate it. Then wonder why, in the grand scheme of things, I’m in the van and not on the street.

On another Sabbath afternoon we worship with several dozen Spirit-filled prison inmates. Their singing is so energetic, they look so happy, their testimonies are so touching, that at times I’m moved to tears.

“I’m so glad I’m here,” volunteers the man who plays his guitar and smiles as he sings, “for otherwise I’d be dead and would never have known the Lord.”

Another refers to seven years on death row. Another sings praises to God after he tells of the depths of despair he experienced when at two court hearings his parole was denied. I leave wondering just who is captive and who is free.

Our jungles need more forests” was the caption above a pen drawing of a horde of houses on a hill in a Canada Tree Foundation advertisement. However grand this foundation’s goals, I believe our city-jungles need more than trees. They need me, but more important, I need them. It’s not enough to give my money (even large amounts, if I’m rich), to give my old clothes, to pray for the poor, to hurt because some are hungry, to stir the soup; no, a thousand times no. My hands must be the hands of Jesus. I must be there. With Him. Personally.

Because our Baltimore members disregard the “Sabbath rest idea,” I’ve had to eliminate my Sabbath afternoon naps, quiet dinners at home with special friends, jaunts to the mountains. Instead, I join others and take trips to the city’s lowlands with food and clothing, encouragement and love. I have learned about the fast the Lord has chosen: to share my food, clothe the naked, provide shelter for the homeless (see Isa. 58:6, 7). I’ve asked “Just what does the Lord require of me?” and I’ve heard His response: “To do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God” (Micah 6:8).

Often new meanings are discovered through circumstances and people we did not seek. Thankfully the Lord knew my needs. And as I’ve had the privilege of attempting to make my hands His, I have been blessed far more than anything I have done to bless others. My prayers have changed from a sometimes rote “Now I lay me down to sleep” to conscious gratitude for my personal comforts. My focus has changed from disappointment that I cannot accomplish what I want for myself and my family to an “others need me too” kind of spirit. My confidence in His presence has given me assurance. I wouldn’t exchange any of this for anything less.

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