Shocked by Isaiah

A big amen to Clifford Goldstein for finding justification by faith in the Old Testament (see “Shocked by Isaiah 53,” May NAD Edition). I have often wondered why we didn’t study more theological issues in the Old Testament.

At an early age, in a one-room church school, I was taught the plan of salvation as illustrated by the sanctuary service given to the newly freed slaves of Israel. It seemed fairly straightforward to me as a kid, and still does.

It is true that Paul’s writings are probably more inclusive of all the nuances of the Christian’s life. But for a simple illustration of the plan of salvation and the roles that we and Christ have in our salvation, you can’t beat the sanctuary service.

—R. Kent Lopez
Ooltewah, Tennessee

Goldstein claims that “what’s fascinating about Isaiah 53’s gospel theology is its one-sided obsession with justification only.”

Yet how can sanctification possibly be excluded from the words “with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:5)? Where does Isaiah—or any other Bible writer—restrict the healing offered by Jesus’ sacrifice to justification only?

While Goldstein is clear that the work of Christ for us is inseparable

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from His work in us, we cannot ignore that both are part of the means (not the result) of salvation. (See 2 Thess. 2:13 and Titus 3:5—as well as Steps to Christ, p. 63.)

—Kevin D. Paulson
Redlands, California

Goldstein reinforces a point I have long tried to make—the way we interpret Scripture from the ancient languages is very much determined by our biases.

According to Young’s Analytical Concordance, naso (one of the Hebrew words Goldstein uses to make his point) is translated 45 different ways before you get into the conjugations, which add another 13 ways. Of those 58 ways, who is to say that Goldstein’s is the right way? Goldstein, of course.

I happen to hold a different view. However, using Hebraic logic rather than Greek logic, I am willing to concede that we both may be right and can each enjoy our own way of looking at the text without diminishing the other’s way. Thank you!

—Dave Reynolds
Canby, Oregon

Look for more letters on this subject next week.—Editors.

Kit Watts Leaves Review

Kit Watts was one of the most stimulating writers the Review had (see Kit Watts’s “Goodbye—And Thanks,” May NAD Edition).

Her articles displayed humor, fluency, and innovation, and were skillfully forthright in dealing with past, present, and future theological and social issues that impact the church. Her articles were tasteful and diplomatic, but were perhaps to some too upsetting to traditional position and authority.

In the conflict between East and West, it appears to me that the West hit a home run, while the East struck out. I congratulate La Sierra University and the Southeastern California Conference for their vision.

—W. S. Banfield
Los Angeles, California

Bad Marriage

The statement “The Ontario government finances Branson operations” clearly shows why Canada’s only Adventist hospital will cease operation (see “Four Decades of Adventist Health Ministry End Abruptly in Canada,” May NAD Edition).

“What concord hath Christ with Belial?” (2 Cor. 6:15). I fear other Adventist institutions aligned with secular governments will go the same way.

—Lee Cherry
Hagerstown, Maryland

Mom and the Talking Bears

Reading Doris Fell’s “Mom and the Talking Bears” (May NAD Edition), I was heartened by the love and warmth pushing through the page. But I was disheartened by its view of death, and I questioned whether I was reading an Adventist magazine. Turning to the end of the article, I was comforted to know that it was a reprint from a non-Adventist magazine.

Stories of love are wonderful, but when the theological undercurrent opposes our doctrines, they have no business being in our official church magazine.

—Karen Wickliff
Via E-mail

Letters Policy

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"Behold, I come quickly ..."

Our mission is to uplift Jesus Christ through stories of His matchless love, news of His present workings, help for knowing Him better, and hope in His soon return.

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Vol. 174, No. 27
Here's one from the 1760s,” my aunt called out as we ambled through the headstones.

My parents, a favorite aunt, and I were out walking one hot Sabbath afternoon last August when we happened on an old graveyard that straddles the Vermont/Massachusetts line in a grove of pines and maples. Like curious people everywhere, we were soon fascinated by the strange lettering and curious messages of the old memorials.

Here were obelisks of rough white marble from the 1830s and crumbling slate and granite stones from the Revolutionary War era. On a leaf-strewn knoll we even found a polished memorial for a Vietnam veteran, attended by a tiny Stars and Stripes.

“You've got to see this,” my dad called out, and one by one we left our own meanderings to gather around a chipped slate marker. In the late afternoon sunlight the carved message was sharp and clear:

“Captain John Parker, 43, July 25, 1786. Accidentally shot by one of his own men.”

We stood there—a teacher, a secretary, a homemaker, and a pastor—musing on the brevity and uncertainty of life. How could all the joys and sorrows, the relationships, the accomplishments, and the disappointments of 43 years of living be summarized in 12 words and a few numbers? And why, when a stone was put up for John Parker, did it seem most important to remember that he had been shot by someone he trusted?

Perhaps there was a warning here for passersby: “Never leave your back unguarded”; or even some tentative Colonial call for greater gun control. Yankee that I am, it seemed altogether probable that someone wanted to shame permanently the one who had done the shooting.

But for pastors, life is just one grand metaphor, awaiting application to the world of people and relationships. As I strolled back down the overgrown path that led away from the cemetery, I found myself ruminating on those last seven words—“shot by one of his own men.” Shot, even if accidentally, by someone he trusted.

Pastors know such stories all too well, not because we are frequently the victims of vilification or attack (most of us are treated better than we deserve), but because our daily work involves caring for people who have been shot at and wounded by those they trusted.

It’s the woman who weeps in the foyer because of the anger of the man she lives with. It’s the teenager whose world is crumbling while Mom and Dad wrangle in the courts over custody and visitation. It’s the first grader who scrawls across the bottom of his stick-figure picture of heaven: “There won’t be any fighting.”

But most of all, it’s the men and women—hundreds, even thousands—who no longer come to church because they feel they’ve been “shot” there by someone they once trusted. Someone has acidly remarked, “The church is the only army in the world that shoots its own wounded.” And even when we’ve understood the self-flagellation that makes us want to repeat a line like that, there’s a truth there that we dare not deny.

Too many broken, hurting men and women have found church a dangerous place to be, a place where reputations get shredded and mistakes get carved in granite. It’s infinitely easier to sit at home, nursing a wound, than to risk the “accidents” that happen in the foyer or at the potluck.

It’s time all of us pledged allegiance to a creed of kinder words and gentler attitudes in the name of the One who still makes the invitation—“Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28, NKJV). The places where we worship Him ought first of all to be places of safety and sanctuary in which we “bind up the brokenhearted, . . . proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound” (Isa. 61:1).

Here’s a call to make our churches “cities of refuge” for tired, wounded men and women—places where no one gets shot at, where mistakes are never written in stone, and where the dignity of each person is respected. As one of my favorite readings asks God: “Help us to be gentle with each other, lest we should cause to fall one needless tear. . . . Help us to live together as people who have been forgiven a great debt.”

Then we will truly be followers of the Lord, whose death was no accident and whose greatest memorial on this earth will be that we learn to love each other with a love beyond ourselves.
Charles Swindoll tells a wonderful story in his book *Rise and Shine*. He describes one of his early jobs, working in a machinists’ shop. He describes the heat of the shop, the satisfaction employees had in doing a good job, the camaraderie with other employees, and the “quitting time” mentality.

According to Swindoll, the employees would begin packing up tools and supplies just before quitting time. Swindoll himself sometimes worked right up until quitting time, then had to clean up on his own time. Some of the employees chided him for not getting ready for quitting time, and he soon learned how to anticipate the clock and to start cleaning up before quitting time, to get ready for quitting time.

One day after Swindoll had mastered the art of getting ready for quitting time, he commented to one of the veteran workers, “About time to get ready for quitting time, don’t you think?”

The older worker shook his head no. Swindoll asked why he wasn’t going to get ready for quitting time. The older worker said, “Son, I don’t have to get ready for quitting time. I stay ready.”

There’s a lot of truth in that machinist’s words, especially as we might apply them to Jesus’ return: I don’t want to get ready. I want to stay ready.

Getting ready is a common practice in North America. We get ready for Christmas. We get ready for company. We pack before a trip. We plan a budget for the purchase of a new car or a new house. We get ready.

The Sabbath is a “getting ready” reminder for Seventh-day Adventists each week. Before the day arrives, we do what’s necessary to enjoy the day. Adventists clean the house, cook the food, trim the lawn, do the shopping. We get ready for Sabbath.

But the Second Coming? No. Jesus does not say we should get ready. Instead, He says we should stay ready. Matthew 24 records Jesus’ admonition to us.

The disciples’ ask Him, “What will be the sign of your coming and of the end of the age?” (verse 3, NIV). After a list of signs, Jesus tells the disciples, “You also must be ready, because the Son of Man will come at an hour when you do not expect him” (verse 44, NIV). Be ready! Not get ready. Be ready!

Jesus illustrates this point with the parable of the 10 young wedding attendants. The wise ones stay ready, with plenty of oil for their lamps. The foolish ones need just a little extra time to get ready, hurrying away to get oil for their lamps and being locked out of the joyful celebration as a result.

The point is clear. We are not to get ready. We are to stay ready.

I talked with some folks who had been trying to sell their home for some time. The woman said one of the most difficult things was having to keep the house clean all the time. “I clean every morning when I leave,” she said, “because I never know if someone will come to look at the house during the day.”

She sighed. I could tell the effort was new to her. Suddenly she brightened. “You know, it’s not so bad. It’s nice to have the house picked up all the time.”

Her insight tells us why Jesus is so kind, so loving, in telling us to be ready, not to get ready. There’s great assurance in being ready. I know I am ready to meet Jesus. I know He loves me. I know my relationship with Him is secure.

This isn’t bragging. It’s being ready, submitting my will to His every morning. It’s trusting completely in His grace to save me. It’s yielding completely to His will to guide my life. It’s believing solely in His death to give me eternal life.

Quitting time for this world is coming soon. I don’t know when, but I know that I’m going to be ready, because I intend to stay ready.

Alfred C. McClure is president of the 850,000-member Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America.
ADVENTIST QUOTES

“We’ve been promoting nuts for years.”
—A Loma Linda University faculty member explaining how nuts reduce the risk of coronary heart disease

“All church committees will conduct business in duly called meetings.”
—an ad hoc committee report distributed at a Cloverdale church board meeting, Boise, Idaho; submitted by Allan M. Sather, who notes: “Most of us knew this recommendation was already in place!”

“An ounce of mother to a child is worth more than a ton of preachers when the child is grown.”
—Pastor Lloyd Herr, in a Mother’s Day sermon, Monitor, Oregon

“Why am I speaking into a flower?”
—Pastor Martin Weber, to the New Hope church, Laurel, Maryland, on Mother’s Day after confusing his microphone with a carnation

ADVENTIST LIFE

One afternoon my 3-year-old grandson, Joshua, and I went for a walk. At a nearby playground Joshua entered a large red plastic tube. As he did, I stepped up to the tube and began beating out a thundering drum roll.

Immediately Joshua came bounding out of the tube and said, “Grandpa! What was that?”

To amuse myself, I raised both hands and said, “Joshua, maybe that was thunder?”

“Grandpa,” he said, taking my hand, “we need to pray.”

“Dear Jesus,” he said, “maybe that was thunder, and maybe it wasn’t. Maybe that was Grandpa, and maybe it wasn’t. But please don’t let it happen again. Amen.”

As we rose from our knees, I was a different man. And needless to say, his prayer was answered.
—Milton Perkins, Oshawa, Ontario

One Sabbath morning as we were getting ready for church, our 4-year-old, Jennifer, came into our room and announced that she was going to “read” from her Bible and that we should all be quiet so she could concentrate.

A few seconds passed before she exclaimed, “It says in here that you should get your little girl a puppy!”
—Keith and Sheri Knepel, Bismarck, North Dakota

JOTS & TITLES

In this new feature, readers share church-related advice. (Send submissions to the Give & Take address below.)

✓ In Alvarado, Texas, our church board had this rule: “If we can’t come to a vote within two minutes, the item is tabled until the next meeting.” Because of this, no one refused a church office just because it demanded board attendance.
—Ellen Klinke, Dallas, Texas.

✓ To learn what visitors liked about your church service, leave blank thank-you cards in the hymnal rack and invite visitors to fill out cards and place them in an offering plate or a decorated container in the foyer.—Sharon Butler, Chippewa Falls, Wisconsin.

✓ I wish our Sabbath school quarterlies and other study materials had a blank page at the end of each lesson for taking notes before and during class. It would really help our study.—Evelyn A. Peck, Fortuna, Missouri.

✓ Once when inclement weather interrupted an overnight camping trip, my family and I simply moved our adventure indoors. We unplugged the telephone, cooked meals on a trash burner (the “campfire”), and slept in sleeping bags. The sink was our “creek,” and we used only flashlights after dark. We have pictures of our “trip,” and our family still talks fondly of our adventure.—Donita Culbertson, Baker City, Oregon.

WE NEED YOU

Give & Take is your page. Send your “Adventist Quotes,” top-quality photos, “Adventist Life” vignettes, “Readers’ Exchange” items, and other short contributions to: Give & Take, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Fax: 301-680-6638; CompuServe: 74532,2564.
Can Christians and Christianity make a great country greater?

BY DAVID B. SMITH

I LOVE LANDING AT LOS ANGELES International Airport. To me, the white domes and Interstate 405 indicate “home.” It’s been that way ever since my days as a missionary kid in Thailand. Los Angeles International Airport is one freeway exit away from heaven; even more than the amber waves of grain, it is, for me, the very epitome of America the Beautiful.

The sensation is especially acute whenever I’ve been out of the country on July 4. Recently, after a flagless, paradeless Fourth of July in downtown Moscow, where the most American thing I managed was a hot fudge sundae at McDonald’s (“McLenin’s,” they call it), even the LA smog was beautiful.

This Fourth of July, those of us in the 50 United States of America will have a holiday, eat big meals, and enjoy get-togethers with our friends and relatives (just three days after our cousins to the north celebrate Canada Day). We’ll sit in the church parking lot in the festive darkness of early evening and watch the fireworks from the Oaks Mall. So much about this country will seem beautiful: freedom and friendships, flags and free elections, and a hopefully bright future. And for the 103rd year in a row we’ll sing that classic, “America the Beautiful.”

But what do Christians do about the plain, stark, unbeautiful images that face us? On the way home from the airport is the same huge orange sign that’s been there on Century Boulevard for years. “NUDES!” it screams out at those who drive by. “Open all day and all night!” And for decades that...
seedy little place has been there, just a
mile from the airport, reminding us
that America—like every other
country on earth—is infected with sin.
Lust and destructive sexual impulses
are given full rein here. Television
airwaves are jammed 24 hours a day
with scenes of sin and selfishness.

The Christian Response
So what do we do? How do God’s
people respond to the reality of
citizenship in an imperfect world, a
flawed nation? What should be our
modus operandi? Do we turn a blind eye
to the problems and shoot off some
sparklers anyway? Do we opt out of the
system and defect to an island paradise
or an armed ranch in Montana or Texas?
Maybe tearing up our 1040 forms
and retreating to Waco is the way to
face life in the twenty-first century.
Let’s just hide out from society and
watch the skies for Jesus to come and
take us out of here.

On the other hand, should we
protest evil by organizing a picket line
around that topless joint on Century
Boulevard? Should we band together
with other like-minded believers, form
a political action committee (PAC),
and try to take over? Can the religious
community finally win the White
House in the year 2000?

The Bible has advice on this very
point, but at first glance it’s hard to tell
what side of the freeway it comes down
on. “Do not love the world or anything
in the world. If anyone loves the world,
the love of the Father is not in him”
(1 John 2:15, NIV).

Does this mean what it sounds like?
“Don’t love the world or any part of
the world”? You and I look on an
atlas, and even the shape of the U.S.
(or your homeland) looks good. These
are our countries. Are we not to love
them?

The scholars who wrote the study
notes to the New International
Version add a helpful comment about
who or what we are not to love. “Not
the world of people . . . or the created
world . . . but the world, or realm, of
sin, which is controlled by Satan and
organized against God and
righteousness” (italics supplied).

That’s a compelling point, well
corroborated by other Bible verses.
Even God Himself loves this world, if
you’re talking about its population, as
the Bible explicitly states in John 3:16:
“For God so loved the world”—that is,
the lost people in it—“that he gave his
only begotten Son.”

And it’s good to love this created
world as well—the world God
fashioned and seven times declared
“good.” The things He made—the
surging oceans, the dry lands, the lush
vegetation, and the incredible variety
of living creatures—are all good.

But let me go a step further. We
don’t just love the beauty and grandeur
of a homeland. We don’t draw the line
at loving the spacious skies, the
amber waves of grain,
the purple mountains’ majesties,
above the fruited
plain. No, we actually
can and must love the
country itself. Unbeautiful though it
may be, the Bible teaches us to love
our country.

This Is Our Father’s World
July 1, in addition to being Canada
Day, is also Independence Day for
Burundi and Rwanda. And it may be
hard for citizens in places like those to
survey the scarred landscape and the
mass graves of their homeland and still
love their country.

I’ve attended General Conference
sessions for my Adventist denomination
where Russian delegations were
present—back when it was the
U.S.S.R., the stronghold of atheism and
Communism, President Reagan’s “evil
empire.” These Christians lived there.
Their passports said CCCP on them;
their street addresses were in Moscow
and Leningrad. “Love your country”?
That’s what most Christians do.

“Love not the world,” the Bible
says. “Don’t love the sin and the
suffering and the evil and the
tribal tumult and the bloodshed.
Don’t love the crime and the
materialism and the X-rated
cable channels. But love
your country.”

In his book The Four
Loves, C. S. Lewis
describes...
a person’s love of country as a natural love of the place where he or she grew up, “love of old acquaintances, of familiar sights, sounds, and smells.” But then he soberly adds that in love of country, as in love of family, we don’t love our spouses only when they are good. A patriot, especially a Christian patriot, sees the flaws of his country, acknowledges them, weeps for them, but remains faithful in love.

**Love in Action**

Then how does that love get expressed? From a good, long, safe distance? Is our only thought to be rescued out of this wretched place? Or are the citizens of God’s kingdom also the most active in this one?

On our Voice of Prophecy radio-broadcasts, we often try to find meaningful anniversary tidbits. July is filled with them. It was on a July 2, 1881, that a man decided that his government was corrupt, evil, and unbeautiful. How could he strike a blow for freedom and protest all the wrongs of society? Charles J. Guiteau picked up a gun and shot and killed President James Garfield.

Thankfully, others have been wiser. Richard Neuhaus, in his classic book *Naked Public Square*, quotes Martin Luther King, Jr.: “Whom you would change, you must first love.” King said this about his country, the country he loved, the United States of America, even while battling to change its laws.

So many things about the United States had to be unbeautiful to King. The overbearing, incredible meanness, the cruelty, the system that kept so many of its citizens locked in poverty and crime. And in many ways, the acts of persecution were officially sanctioned by the government. “Jim Crow” was the law of the land; troopers with legally engraved badges on their shirts, receiving paychecks signed by a state treasurer, were beating on his friends with nightsticks, crushing them with hoses, and even shooting at them. But King loved his country.

It was also on a July 2, in the year 1964, that President Lyndon Johnson finally signed the long-awaited Civil Rights Act. At least on the law books, something that was wrong with the country was turned around. Racial discrimination was prohibited in public accommodations, in publicly owned or operated facilities, in employment and union membership, and in the registration of voters. Title VI was part of this Voting Rights Act, which allowed for the cutoff of federal funding in areas where discrimination persisted. Without a doubt, a blow had been struck for freedom. And Christians were part of the fist that struck that blow.

It’s a tough balancing act. When do we fight? When do we give up? What causes do we march in?

**In, but Not Of**

In the Gospel of John we read this about Jesus: “He was in the world” (John 1:10, NIV). But a few chapters later He says of Himself: “I am not of this world” (John 8:23, NIV). And He says often to His disciples: “You aren’t of this world either. You’re citizens of another place.”

Notice this prayer in John 17:15: “My prayer is not that you [God] take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one.”

You’re going to be here awhile, Christ tells us. Main Street, U.S.A. But what does He call us to do?

Our Lord’s own ministry is a telling example. For three and a half years He lived in a world that was very wicked. The government was corrupt, beyond anything we can imagine. The iron empire of Rome ruled over the Jewish nation, and even the Jewish hierarchy—the nation within a nation—was riddled with evil. Jesus lived in that system; in fact, He willingly submitted to it. And He told others to do the same. He was sentenced and executed by the cooperative efforts of both Judea and Rome.

And yet Christ did not make political reform His main work. We have many transcripts of what He actually says during His brief ministry,
but they really aren't about what a terrible place this is and how we can fix it. No, He focuses on the things of eternity first and foremost: “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36, NIV).

We cannot extrapolate from this and say that no Christian today should ever involve himself or herself in the political or social issues of 1997. The body of Christ is a huge, vast mosaic of people, talents, gifts, and priorities—and clearly there are those who have been given the mandate of championing certain causes. But Jesus’ example demonstrates that the gospel message is to have primacy.

If you want to work for welfare reform, you must first know and preach the gospel of Jesus, and then you work on welfare reform. If abortion is your cause, you must first cast yourself at the foot of the cross and humbly accept salvation. Then you must pray, “Now, Lord, please direct me in this other issue if that’s where You want me to be.”

**The Main Thing**

Edward Dobson, pastor of Calvary church in Grand Rapids, Michigan, writes in an editorial, “Taking Politics Out of the Sanctuary,” in the May 20, 1996, issue of Christianity Today: “I will make it my first priority to share the good news. My consuming commitment is to the gospel. I fear that overt political involvement will lead to polarization and alienation from people who need to hear the gospel.”

God led Martin Luther King, Jr., in his struggle for civil rights, but King was a Christian first. The great champion for rights William Wilberforce struggled for 46 years in the British Parliament to abolish slavery. That was a passionate, driving issue for him, but he was a Christian first. He writes in his journal at the start of the crusade in 1787: “God has set before me this great objective.” (He passed to his rest just three days after God provided the ultimate victory.)

In a chapter entitled “Hope,” C. S. Lewis writes: “If you read history you will find that the Christians who did most for the present world were just those who thought most of the next.

The apostles themselves, who set on foot the conversion of the Roman Empire, the great men who built up the Middle Ages, the English Evangelicals who abolished the slave trade, all left their mark on earth, precisely because their minds were occupied with heaven” (Mere Christianity, p. 118).

That’s an amazing concept: that the Christians who really and truly think most about heaven—and about how the second coming of Jesus provides an escape from this wrecked planet—are still doing the most here. Not because they think they can save the planet or bring lasting peace to the Middle East or eradicate hunger and poverty. No, but because as citizens of heaven they follow the marching orders of heaven.

And what of political involvement itself—voting, marching, picketing, and attending precinct meetings? As Dobson says in his editorial, we are Christians first. We “keep the main thing the main thing,” as he colorfully puts it. And the main thing is pleasing God. He then wisely observes: “We should not expect people and the political systems they create to reflect our [Christian] values where they do not reflect our Christ.”

Romans 13 instructs Christians to obey laws, to do what’s right, to submit to lawful authorities, and to pay taxes. First Peter 2 also teaches that we’re to obey and show respect to kings and governors and presidents. And Dobson adds that we must even pray for these leaders and lead “peaceful and quiet lives.”

**One Voice, One Vote**

Here in 1997 many disillusioned Christians are weary of opting out of the political process. “Nobody I support ever wins [or loses] by just my one vote,” they sigh. And they adopt as their philosophy that old gospel song “this world is not my home; I’m just a-passin’ through.”

But heaven’s citizens can make a difference. You get exactly one vote, just as President Clinton does . . . and it counts. Your small acts of goodness, of positive citizenship, make a difference. Your neighborhood involvement—the “little platoons” the “little platoons”

Prison Fellowship director Chuck Colson writes about—is part of the Christian’s mandate while we occupy a sometimes unbeautiful world.

I heard a story about a kid on the beach after the tide had gone out. There were literally hundreds of stranded starfish on the sand, helpless to move themselves into the water. They were all going to die. But this boy was walking down the beach, picking them up one at a time and tossing them back into the waves.

An older man watched for a minute with a look of bemusement. Then he said, “Hey, kid! Why bother? There are hundreds of ‘em out there. You can’t save them all. Why don’t you give up? What difference does it make?”

The young boy thought for just a moment and then reached down and picked up another starfish. He looked at it briefly before sailing it through the air and back into the ocean water. Then he turned to his critic and said, “It makes a difference to that one.”

In Matthew 25 Jesus talks about our small acts, the cups of cold water we give out, the prison visits, maybe even that kid’s “starfish enterprise.” And He tells us they count. “Whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me” (Matt. 25:40, NIV).

How, then, do we treat this beautiful/unbeautiful, messed-up country? We love it . . . just as Jesus loves us.

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David B. Smith is writer/producer of the daily broadcasts of the Voice of Prophecy radio program.
WEIGHED

Fighting the good

BY MICHAEL WILSON

FIGHTING THE BATTLE WITH overweight is tough enough. Add to this print and film media that picture overweight men and women as lazy losers who sit around all day watching soap operas and talk shows, eating ice cream, Oreo cookies, and potato chips, as well as guzzling Coca-Cola around the clock. Now you have a stereotype firmly entrenched in our culture of those who fight the battle with weight.

That may be the case with some people; certainly, this world, and particularly America, has more than its share of couch potatoes. And most of us (both slender and overweight) find ourselves making mistakes in eating and drinking—either occasionally or quite often. However, there are many overweight people, including me, who lead active, energetic, productive lives.
P
ractically everyone would like to be the ideal weight; many, many overweight people are striving very hard to achieve this. I am trying harder now to lose weight than I ever have before in my life. Otherwise, I wouldn’t be out there pounding the pavement with my cocker spaniel by my side at 11:00 at night! It is a day-by-day struggle. It isn’t easy. (However, if I really stay with this exercise program, I just might lose 15 pounds by the time this article gets published!)

We need to take into consideration that many people have a very sluggish metabolism, which makes the battle with weight perhaps the biggest battle they will ever face. In order for them to make any progress in this area of their lives, they have to put forth an intense, arduous effort. They must try much harder in the areas of eating, drinking, and exercise than their more slender friends. (An excellent article about this struggle with metabolism is “Weight-Loss Answers From the Calorie Lab,” Reader’s Digest, August 1995.)

Medical science has shown that better overall health comes when we reach our ideal weight. The risk of diabetes, high blood pressure, stroke, heart disease, and cancer is greatly reduced when we lose those extra pounds. Reality is not what is in question; however, we must live with those facts of medical science.

But overweight people must also live with the unkind, judgmental, and empty-headed remarks made by family, friends, church members, and total strangers. Despite their best efforts to control their weight, they hear cutting, cruel remarks. Often those remarks are made behind their backs.
McCalls conducted an investigative report several years ago. A slender woman put on a “fat suit” for two weeks that made her appear to weigh 250 pounds. She then reported on the different interactions she had with other people. This woman was shocked and amazed. One day she and her boyfriend went out to eat in a nice restaurant. She left for a few minutes to go to the restroom. Two women approached her boyfriend and inquired rudely, “Why are you going out with that fat pig?” When she got rid of her “disguise” at the end of the two-week period, the stares, finger-pointing, and rude comments ceased completely.

A network news magazine program recently conducted another investigative report. An undercover video camera was placed in the office of an interviewer in a large employment agency. Women of different sizes (sent by the news magazine program) were interviewed for various jobs. Without fail, the slender women were treated with respect and given preferential treatment. The interviewer gave these women the best jobs, usually without even looking at their qualifications. The overweight women either were told that “no jobs are now available” or were given less-than-desirable jobs at a much lower salary.

We can learn a lot about the mass psychology of our society from such reports. Thinness for many people is the highest virtue of all to be attained in life, even if anorexia and other eating disorders come as a result of this quest. Overweight people often are not treated seriously in their professional and social world. They get pushed aside when seeking a job position, even though they may be very qualified for it. Thin people sometimes have an attitude of superiority in their dealings with the overweight people around them.

This societal attitude is reflected in the entertainment we watch. Overweight people in television and films are often cast as fools and buffoons, or they portray incompetent, less-than-credible people. Look for this stereotype next time you watch a television program or film.

Unfortunately, some Adventists also can be very judgmental when it comes to other people’s weight. The overweight person is accused sometimes of “not living up to the light of the health message.” (Have you ever heard that before?) I have witnessed some cutting and unfair remarks about overweight people made from the pulpit and by health lecturers at camp meetings. Usually these speakers were able to elicit laughter from their remarks.

However, these speakers should carefully consider whether such remarks create more harm than positive results. The great health benefits of weight loss need to be presented convincingly, but overweight people should never be ridiculed in the process.

Many Adventists would not discriminate against a person because of their race, skin color, or gender; they realize that such behavior is not politically correct or morally justified. However, these same people are not afraid to put down or subtly discriminate against an overweight friend or fellow church member. It would seem that the power of the gospel would keep us from doing this. We should remember that our Christianity is most clearly revealed by the way we treat each other.

Recently an author wrote, “A year later she dropped by for the promised visit—in a size 10 dress and with flowers in her hair. We hardly recognized her. She was absolutely beautiful!”

Wouldn’t it be wonderful if we could begin to see the beauty and value in every person no matter their size or the color of their skin? Every child of God deserves dignity and respect. “For the Lord does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart” (1 Sam. 16:7, NKJV).

Michael Wilson is a pseudonym.
BY JAN CHARLES HALUSKA

This article challenges what has come to be a generally accepted view that Christians at times are forced to choose between two evils. We invite readers to carefully weigh the author’s views and share their convictions with us.—Editors.

THE YOUNG MAN STOPPED AT THE EDGE OF THE FROZEN LAKE. His footprints led back through the snow for several miles to the prison from which he had just escaped. An Anabaptist in sixteenth-century Holland, Dirk Willem had been sentenced to burn at the stake. Now he ran for his life, with one guard in pursuit.

The ice at the shoreline was thick and white, but near the center it shaded down to a thinner sheet. A slight man like Dirk would have a good chance of reaching the other side safely, but his heavier pursuer would need to go around or take a terrible risk.

Carefully, gingerly, Dirk made his way to the opposite bank. Just as he arrived, the guard burst out of the woods and began lumbering across the ice as the fugitive sprinted away. But then—a crack, a shriek. Dirk whirled to see a jagged black hole with his pursuer’s head and flailing arms at its center. Dirk was safe. Free.

But he also faced a question. Was it Christlike to leave a man to die? How could a Christian live with that cry ringing in his ears? On the other hand, how many people could he reach with his ministry
Some things aren’t negotiable.

after he’d been burned at the stake? Didn’t he have an obligation to stay alive for the sake of their future?

Here, it seems, was moral dilemma enough. “Well,” one might say, “that’s why God gave us brains. Grown-up Christians do not pretend that moral dilemmas are nonexistent, but wrestle honestly with them.”

A few years ago I might have agreed. Then I heard a sermon from Ron DuPreez, of Southern Adventist University’s School of Religion, that convinced me that for a Christian moral dilemmas do not exist.1 Such a statement will seem hopelessly shallow and simplistic to many. But there is enough evidence to the contrary.

Damned Either Way?

Let’s begin by establishing the meaning of the term itself. A moral dilemma is a problem whose every solution involves inescapable evil.

The slang expression is “damned if you do and damned if you don’t.” Moral dilemmas are a basic feature of Western secular thought. The greatest tragedies of ancient Greece, for instance, involve characters who must decide between twin evils. In Aeschylus’ celebrated play Agamemnon, the hero agonizes over whether to sacrifice his daughter or cancel a god-ordered expedition against Troy. He cries:

“Obey, obey or a heavy doom will crush me
Oh, but

Illustrations by Terry Cren

doom will crush me
once I rend my child,
the glory of my house”
(11. 206-209).
He finally sacrifices her in
obedience to the god, but his reaction
sets into motion an old curse that
destroys him and his generation of the
family. It is a tragedy indeed.

But the great controversy is no
tragedy, though Satan would like to
have made it so. The enemy’s attack
on humanity was nothing less than an
attempt to impose a moral dilemma on
God Himself. Affirm the law and
destroy humanity. Or save humanity
by admitting that the law is unjust. It
seemed that either way God would be
forced to buy good at the impossible
price of evil. Instead, God cut a
straight path through the seeming
dilemma. Christ’s sacrifice on Calvary
was not an evil; rather it was an act of
good so unthinkable that we tremble
before it, like Isaiah looking into the
furnace of God’s righteousness (see Isa.
6:5). But it is good nevertheless. The
marks on Christ’s hands are a physical
record of suffering that demonstrates
God’s character as it saved us. They
are not a curse. Any claim that Go d
does evil, even under duress, is a
deadly blow aimed against Him.2

Someone might object that these
theological ideas fall flat in the real
world, asking, “What if you were
hiding Jews in your basement when
the gestapo came? Wouldn’t you go
ahead and bear false witness in order
to save those innocent people? Or
would you be pharisaical enough to
tell a truth that would kill them?”

But such “What if” questions set up
a false choice crafted by somebody’s
imagination. In the real world more
possibilities exist. One could reply to
the gestapo, “That is not the kind of
question I will answer.” Then what?
The homeowner might be spared or
shot, either one. The Jews might be
found or not, either one. One or more
gestapo men might wind up converted,
or none might be. Lots of outcomes
could follow, including miraculous
ones. We cannot know what will
happen in a given case.

That is the key. The essential illusion
in a supposed moral dilemma is that we
are obligated to decide when to break a
commandment based on weighing future
results of that decision. We aren’t. We
couldn’t be. Roll a billiard ball against
two cushions of a pool table—no
amount of mathematical calculation can
tell exactly where it will come to rest.
Likewise, the final outcome of any
decision is always unknowable by us
beforehand. There’s even a name for this
principle in general human experience:
the law of unintended consequences.

Thus the belief that people are
responsible for choosing whether to obey
a commandment or not by appraising
the future is nothing more than a trick of
Satan. God does not give us work we
are incapable of. If the promise of
1 Corinthians 10:13—that God “will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye are able”—means what it says, we cannot be coerced into such bondage. Instead, we should exercise our freedom by acknowledging God’s exclusive right to the future. That includes His freedom to act in miraculous ways.

A recent report from a country in Asia illustrates this. A church’s clandestine evangelistic campaign resulted in two truck-loads of people ready for baptism. Because conducting a baptismal service was strictly illegal, the group was driving to a distant lake—but they got lost. Stopping at a building to ask directions, they found themselves walking directly into the offices of the security forces. The officials told them the way to the lake, then asked the obvious question: “What are all you people planning to do there?”

Now what? Should they tell a “white lie,” claiming that they were having a swimming party or a workers’ outing to clean the environment? Those might have seemed like responsible answers, especially since third parties were also at risk. But the leaders chose to bear true witness anyhow.

“We are members of a Seventh-day Adventist church,” they declared, “and these are people we are going to baptize.”

“Do you know that you will be breaking the law?” asked the startled official. “If you do, you will be sent to jail.” And that is what would have happened in the standard “what if” world. But in real life things went very differently.

When the trucks started up again, several police motorcycles swung in after them to make arrests when the time came. However, a sudden rainstorm turned the roads muddy just behind the trucks. The police slid off into the ditches, while the still-dry church members drove several miles farther to the lake, baptized their new members, and went home without further incident.

### Letting God Be God

We should rejoice in our blood-bought freedom from misconception that we are morally obligated to predict the future. Let us respond like the three Hebrew boys, who assured Nebuchadnezzar that even though they did not know whether God would save them from the furnace, they would never bow to that idol (Dan. 3:17). This realization can be wonderfully liberating. In my office some months ago a student shared what he thought was a good answer to a moral dilemma. “This university,” he said, “is so expensive that I’m having to work downtown as a bartender—but it’s really OK. I can give my customers Christian counsel after all, and I really couldn’t stay in school otherwise.”

Thus he felt that serving liquor was less of an evil than quitting Southern—and an acceptable answer to a moral dilemma.

“Have you thought much about the power of grace?” I asked.

“Sure,” he answered, settling comfortably into the chair. “I know that God loves me and forgives me no matter what.”

“No, I mean the other kind of power,” I said. “The power to do God’s will His way.”

“What do you mean?” he asked, sitting up again. For the next few minutes we looked at Bible texts, beginning with Revelation 3:18. Then we prayed.

The next day he told me with a radiant face that he was quitting the job, and asked for prayer. Thereafter he got clean employment that paid equally well and found himself witnessing God’s power as never before. Denying the illusion of a moral dilemma gave him the freedom that Christ promises to all who follow Him.

And what of Dirk?

He went back onto the ice and rescued the guard—who promptly arrested him. Instead of being miraculously delivered, Dirk returned to jail and not long afterward was burned at the stake, as any cynic might have predicted.

It did not end there, though. The story swept through Holland, and in shame for the killing of that righteous man, the Dutch passed a law that no person should ever again be put to death for his or her religious beliefs. It was the first such law in Europe. Holland became a haven for all kinds of Christian fugitives, including the Puritans, who fled there before taking ship for the New World. Dirk’s death enabled a more bountiful outpouring of grace than his living ministry could ever have done. And once again the blood of a martyr watered the church.

This is not to say that the Christian is exempt from practical questions such as whether to budget for fixing the roof or repairing the car this month—though the wisdom promised in James 1:5 is available for those decisions too.

But if the great controversy means anything, we should refuse to be enslaved by any suggestion that commandment-breaking is ever morally required. The way of the cross, our narrow and true path toward a glorious future, guarantees that freedom.

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1 While the sermon was DuPree’s, he is not accountable for the examples or train of thought in this article.
2 A close reading of the first chapter of the book of Job supports this interpretation. As Creator, God is responsible for the existence of all things, including Satan’s attack. But He does not cause that attack.

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Jan Charles Haluska, Ph.D., is a professor of English at Southern Adventist University, Collegedale, Tennessee.
The Seventh-day Adventist Church in North America plans to provide at least 10,000 “at-risk” children with an “ongoing relationship with a caring adult: a mentor or tutor” by the year 2000.

This commitment was made by José Rojas, director of youth ministries for North America and the Adventist Youth Service Network (YouthNet), and Monte Sahlin, executive director of Adventist Community Services (ACS) at the Presidents’ Summit for America’s Future, held in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, April 27-29.

The three-day summit, organized by retired United States general Colin Powell, involved President and Mrs. Bill Clinton and three of the former living U.S. presidents.

Some 1,700 invitees gathered to discuss effective ways to meet the needs of America’s 15 million at-risk children and youth. They pledged to reach 2 million young people by the year 2000 and give them access to five fundamental resources needed for a bright future.

“If we can give practical assistance by helping children learn to read and share our Adventist values at a key point in their growth, we can make a difference in the lives of thousands of children and demonstrate the compassion of Christ in our communities,” Rojas told the gathering.

Rojas is now working to recruit thousands of Adventist young adult volunteers to provide one-on-one tutoring and personal help to these children.

Monte Sahlin, executive director of Adventist Community Services (ACS), a nonprofit social services agency, told the summit of a plan to organize 100 community-based tutoring sites and mobilize at least 3,000 volunteers to staff these programs.

Sahlin said the church received “strong affirmation at the highest levels” for their volunteering proposal, which was presented in the form of a book entitled The Philadelphia Promise Book.

“We found partners who are excited about our goals and want to help Adventists accomplish significant good in cities across the U.S.,” Sahlin said.

Philadelphia mayor Edward Rendell invited delegates back to a reconvening of the volunteer summit in the year 2000, to examine progress made on goals set at the inaugural summit. He told participants, “Our commitment to volunteerism has to be more than three days and more than three years; it has to be for the rest of our lives.”

Noting that the Seventh-day Adventist Church has been involved in community service since 1934, Rojas and Sahlin said the meetings provided an opportunity for meeting with a number of religious leaders of other denominations, government officials, authors, and leaders of major social service agencies, including AmeriCorps, the Salvation Army, and World Vision.

Our years of volunteer work were also highlighted on several radio stations and in an interview with the
Cable TV affiliate in the nation’s capital.

It was exciting to be a part of the summit, Rojas said, because leadership at all levels—from government to corporations, churches to charity organizations—came together to acknowledge that America had legitimate humanitarian needs and vowed to do something about them.

Adventist members are also excited about the new opportunities for service. A recent telephone survey of a random sample of local church board members across the division revealed that 68 percent want their local church to sponsor one of the sites.

Eighty-seven percent said they would vote in favor of financial assistance to any college-age member who wanted to work for a year as a student missionary at one of the tutoring sites.

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José Rojas chose to attend the special meeting for “Faith Groups.”

The panel of presenters and discussants included notables such as Governor Don Sundquist of Tennessee; Jim Wallis, editor of Sojourners magazine; Eugene Rivers; Father Alex Karloutsos of the Greek Orthodox Church; and Joan Brown Campbell, president of the National Council of Churches. Moderator for the panel was noted author Stephen Covey.

From the first moment the room was electric with hope and involvement. Panel members spoke passionately about the claims of the gospel and the demands of faith. But again and again panelists called for an end of talk and a “rolling up of our sleeves.”

“Our commitments to our God must be seen in our actions of love,” one panelist said. Others followed with illustrations of ways the “how” is happening across the nation. City tutoring programs, gang refocusing activities, nutrition clinics, and more. All were described with lists of their successes. We were then challenged with the fact that “we have not yet begun to touch the deepest hurts and greatest needs.”

José spoke during the discussion time and was applauded for his call to personal action. And me? I listened to Jim Wallis, Stephen Covey, and the others. And yes, I took several rolls of pictures. Being a Seventh-day Adventist Christian requires that I actually go beyond my job and my church to “reach out and touch” someone in need—regularly! For me, that now includes committing time each week to help kids in a public elementary school.

And you?

CBS TV affiliate in the nation’s capital.

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Serious, but Not Weird

BY RAY DABROWSKI, General Conference communication director

Takoma Park, Maryland, and Seventh-day Adventists seem synonymous. Years of institutional history and operation make up a respectable presence in the community. But even in Takoma Park things can sour.

This spring the Washington Post reported that a scheduled Friday evening performance of the respected Takoma Park Symphony Orchestra at Sligo (Adventist) Elementary School was halted an hour before the concert because someone at school didn’t like the group’s repertoire.*

Bowing to pressure from a few upset school employees because the performance was to include a jazz concerto for alto saxophone and piano, the building manager locked the door, refusing to allow the orchestra entrance. The music was felt to be inappropriate for a church school and was to be played too close to the Sabbath hours.

But the Post also reported that according to the Columbia Union’s communication director, the church “does not have a doctrine of music,” and that if the school’s principal had been in town, the concert would have gone on. “We made it clear that any secular music should be before sundown, and the orchestra respected that,” said the principal, adding that since the school was doing the orchestra “a favor,” the orchestra would not be compensated for their losses.

Later the school’s “damage control” produced another Post report with a list of kiss-and-make-up items (including compensation) so long that readers might have wondered if the issue really demanded an apology overkill.

From a public relations perspective, we got what we deserved. Bad or reckless decisions often result in bad publicity.

Any lessons here? Three or four. First, legalism is always an undesirable bedfellow. Second, when mistakes are made, they need to be corrected, and restoration must follow. Three, perhaps we should develop a “doctrine of music.” Fourth, the church always communicates—for the good or for the bad. Surely the community can appreciate its religious members who are serious, even radical. But it scoffs at the weird.

For Your Good Health

The Shadow Knows
This summer, if your shadow is shorter than your height, it’s sunburn time. In most parts of North America this test will show that it’s still possible to suffer sunburn from 3:00 p.m. to 4:00 p.m.—UC Berkeley Wellness Letter.

Wash Out Your Own Mouth
If you can’t brush your teeth after eating, at least rinse your mouth with water. The Academy of General Dentistry reports that this practice neutralizes acids left behind after eating and can reduce bacteria by 30 percent.—Johns Hopkins Medical Letter.

Don’t Believe the Myth
Think heart disease no longer represents a serious threat to the population? The fact is that at least 250,000 people a year die of a heart attack within one hour of the onset of symptoms and before they reach a hospital. And about 45 percent of all heart attacks happen to people under age 65. Of those who die suddenly of heart disease, 48 percent of men and 63 percent of women had displayed no previous symptoms.—American Heart Association.

—Compiled by Larry Becker, editor of Vibrant Life, the church’s health outreach journal. To subscribe, contact your ABC or call 1-800-765-6955.

NET ’95 Converts

Here are the percentages of North Americans baptized during NET ’95, compared to the general population:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>NET ’95 Converts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ages 18 and Under</td>
<td>28</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Generation X (19-30)</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Baby Boomers (31-50)</td>
<td>30</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Silent Generation (51-66)</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>GI Generation (67 and up)</td>
<td>14</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
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—Kermit Netteburg, assistant to the NAD president for communications

Expatriate Workers Evacuated From Sierra Leone

Three Adventist expatriate families serving the church in Sierra Leone have been evacuated on the heels of a political coup that took place May 25.

Since the coup, widespread looting has occurred and key buildings have been burned. Two homes of the evacuees were looted and their vehicles taken by soldiers supporting the coup. “Because of the political unrest, our employees have been evacuated for their own safety. We are very appreciative of the foreign governments and nongovernmental organizations for their coordination of evacuation efforts. We pray that peace will quickly return to this country,” says Lowell Cooper, associate secretary of the General Conference.

The workers assisted in a large United Nations-operated refugee camp located outside Freetown. They began their service at the refugee camp following the closure of Masanga Lepr osy Hospital, which is owned and operated by the Adventist Church. These three families are being evacuated to Guinea.

The Adventist Church entered the country in 1905 and was officially organized in 1913, at which time Sierra Leone became a major geographical center of Adventism in West Africa. In 1995 the Adventist membership was estimated at 11,130 members.—Adventist News Network.

Armed Robbery at Pacific Adventist University

Armed robbers made off with K11,500 (about US$8,500) from the business office of Pacific Adventist University (PAU) near Port Moresby, Papua New Guinea, on May 29.

Office staff were forced to provide access to the cashier’s office containing income from the university’s farm sales and shop. Although the staff and student body were shaken by these events, they are thankful that no one was injured. Police are continuing investigations.

With an enrollment of 250 undergraduate diploma and degree students, PAU is the major tertiary institution for the Pacific islands of the South Pacific Division. It is situated on a campus of farmland and lakes approximately 12 miles from Port Moresby.—Adventist News Network.

ASI Turns 50

The Adventist Laymen’s Services and Industries (ASI) convention in Albuquerque, New Mexico, August 6-9, will mark the organization’s fiftieth anniversary.

In 1947, 25 leaders of supporting ministries formed ASI in a meeting in Cincinnati, Ohio. From that small beginning ASI has grown to approximately 1,000 members representing supporting ministries and business owners.
Have you ever seen a thunderstorm? Perhaps the best way to watch a thunderstorm is at night, when you turn off all the lights and open the curtains on your biggest window and the whole family snuggles together and watches the lightning flash and listens to the thunder crash.

However, it is not fun to be outdoors in a storm. Lightning is very dangerous. Lightning is electricity. As a storm grows, the clouds get bigger. Inside the storm clouds, charges of electricity build up. Lightning is the flash we see when giant electric sparks jump from one cloud to another or to earth.

Do you remember the story of Jesus and His disciples when they were in a boat in the middle of a lake and a terrible storm came up? The Bible says, “The boat began to fill with water, and they were in danger.” The disciples became scared. And what was Jesus doing? He was sleeping. The disciples started yelling, “Master! Master! We will drown!”

“Jesus got up and gave a command to the wind and the waves. The wind stopped, and the lake became calm. . . . [The disciples] said to each other, ‘What kind of man is this? He commands the wind and the water, and they obey him!’” (Luke 8:23-25, ICB).

Jesus is in charge. He knows about storms.

Sometime in your life bad things will happen. It is as if you are sailing along when boom, a storm hits. What should you do? You need help.

Remember, Jesus is there. He is in the boat with you. He knows about storms. Ask Him for help.

That makes a lot of sense right now while you are sitting here calm and safe, reading this story. But when you are in the middle of something terrible, it is easy to panic. You can get so busy trying to keep the boat from filling up with water that you forget Jesus is there.

So don’t wait until you are in trouble. Become good friends with Jesus now.
GINA SPIVEY BROWN and
LORETTA PARKER SPIVEY

Meating Needs

GINA: Let’s be realistic.
Adventists have a long history of health reform. Unfortunately, we can be so narrow in our views that we become unrealistic about the needs of those around us. We often find ourselves saying “Go and be filled” without giving those in need the items they need to be filled. I’m talking about not serving meat to the hungry just because we encourage our members to adopt a vegetarian diet.

Jesus met people where they were. He didn’t say “Take up thy bed and walk” until He gave them what they needed to put those words into action. He knew that once people experienced heart conversion, their lives would take new, exciting directions.

So it is with serving meat. We can be too legalistic when it comes to issues that have nothing to do with salvation. Now, 'Retta, I can hear you saying “We teach the health message” and “Ellen White says,” but which is healthier? To eat meat? Or to eat nothing?

Let’s consider these facts:

1. Jesus ate fish, period. Even after His resurrection, He not only ate it, He served it to others (see John 21:9).

2. Jesus served food that those who were hungry were accustomed to (see Matt. 15:36, 37). Often the federal government has “clean” meat and meat products that our soup kitchens and outreach programs could use for those not yet accustomed to the vegetarian lifestyle. Yet we often don’t serve it because it’s “unhealthy.”

3. Not everyone is ready to appreciate vegetarian meats. The high sodium content and other ingredients in some meat analogs will not allow people to acquire a taste for it.

Now, don’t get me wrong. I don’t believe that everyone should eat meat. But if I did, I don’t think I would lose my salvation. We’re here to serve humanity (meat, if necessary), and to allow others to “grow in grace.”

LORETTA: What’s the principle behind the point?
So why is it that when we want to serve meat, we always say that Jesus ate fish? Well, Jesus also walked just about everywhere He went. He had no place to call “home” during most of His adult life. He fasted in the wilderness for 40 days. But I don’t hear you (or anyone else) saying, “Well, Jesus lived a life of self-denial, so let’s make everyone do that too.”

We need to get back to the original diet outlined in Genesis 1 and 2. And what better place to model that diet than in our outreach activities?

As usual, my point is the principle behind the issue. And the principle here is health reform and reaching toward a heavenly goal. Ellen White and modern science agree (although it took science quite a while to catch up with her) that today’s meats are so badly contaminated that the healthful choice is to eliminate them from the diet.

There’s a text that says, “Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God” (1 Cor. 10:31). Somehow I believe that if Jesus were to help out at one of our soup kitchens, He would serve that which is the most healthful—not that which is the most convenient.

People should be made aware of the overall goal of healthful living and be encouraged to eat food that supports that goal. I think the only finger lickin’ in heaven will have to do with juicy oranges, luscious grapes, and big ol’ mangoes.

“Whether therefore ye eat, or drink, or whatsoever ye do, do all to the glory of God.”

Gina and Loretta challenge you to read your Bible, live your convictions, and take a stand . . . for Jesus.
**Tell Me Straight**
“When you can put your church on the back of a camel, then I will believe Christianity is for us.”
—A Somali camel herder.

**Dave Talks to Himself**

*How long have you been an Adventist, Dave?*
All my life—I was born one.
I didn’t know it was genetic.
What was that?
Oh, nothing. *You like being an Adventist?*
Sure. It’s good to have the truth.
*You go to Sabbath school?*
Not a lot. Pretty tired Saturday mornings. But I often make it to church.
*Small group Bible study?*
Well, no. I’d like to, but I’ve got basketball. Hey, what is this? The Inquisition?
*No, that was for committed Christians.*
Sorry.
*Are you? What book of the Bible are you reading at the moment?*
Well, to be honest, I don’t read a lot. You know how it is.
I’m a practical sort of person. I like to do things with my hands.
*Except turn the pages of the Bible. Do you get much chance to witness at work, Dave?*
You must be kidding! I work with a bunch of pagans.
I see—hardly candidates for witnessing.
Well, I don’t believe in bashing them. I let God do His thing, and I . . . Look, I’m not planning to leave the church or anything.
*Please don’t. But will you do something? Tonight, stop everything for 30 minutes. Think about your life. Think about God and the most powerful love in all the universe. Then talk to Him for a few minutes. He wants your love, Dave. And He’s counting on you to share His love.*

**Matthieu’s Miracle**

Formerly a snake worshiper, Matthieu and his wife and baby boy took their new Christian faith to Yako, an area of Burkina Faso with no Seventh-day Adventists. Within months, however, . . .

. . . 30 people were taking Bible studies and four were ready for baptism. “It makes me a very joyful Christian,” says Matthieu, one of 17,000 Global Mission pioneers.

**Stereotyped Working?**

 “[God’s workmen] are not to be one-idea men, stereotyped in their manner of working, unable to see that their advocacy of truth must vary with the class of people among whom they work and the circumstances they have to meet” (Gospel Workers, p. 119).

**Global Mission Action**

Global Mission is currently funding projects to take the good news to unentered areas in Mauritania, Macedonia, Albania, Yugoslavia, Poland, Lebanon, Cyprus, Hungary, Bosnia, Australia, Russia, Japan, Burkina Faso, Mali, Equatorial Guinea, North America, Côte d’Ivoire, Bulgaria, Belgium, Germany, Malta, Italy, Portugal, Tunisia, Turkey, Bangladesh, Vanuatu, Malaysia, Cambodia, and many more countries.
I think it’s OK to wear jewelry. What do you think?”

I looked up from my Time magazine into the eyes of a college student. “So wear jewelry!” I said.

“You can’t say that! You’re the General Conference president. I really think it’s OK to wear jewelry, and I want to know what you think.”

I shrugged. “Go ahead and wear it.”

She shook her head impatiently. “Why do you say that?”

I laid my magazine down. “Your problem has nothing to do with jewelry—and everything to do with your understanding of the gospel.”

We talked about a definition of sin, beginning with Lucifer. Until he decided that his personal conclusions were as valid as God’s sovereign rule, heaven had been so united around God’s character of love that to the heavenly hosts discord was incomprehensible.

In Eden Satan directly contradicted God further when, appealing to no authority other than his own, he told Eve, “You will not die” (Gen. 3:4, RSV). It was not in eating the fruit that Eve sinned—it was in looking at the tree and deciding that she too could be a god. That’s why God’s first words engraved in stone said, “Thou shalt have no other gods before me” (Ex. 20:3).

Christianity is in deep trouble. An exodus of huge proportions—especially of youth and especially in developed countries—has cut membership in mainline denominations almost in half. Attendance figures are even more somber. Although some former members have switched to theologically conservative churches, the majority have disappeared into the ranks of the unchurched, for whom secular interests simply replace religion.

Secularity is entirely missing from the Bible. All matters are either sacred (dedicated to God) or profane (disrespectful or in conflict with God)—but never secular (excluding God). For millions in the West, God has largely vanished from the menu of public concern.

Rejecting ideas of divine origin, human fallenness, absolutes in morality, and a final judgment, this culture has been formulated by a relatively small number of intellectual theorists: Marx, Darwin, Skinner, Dewey, Freud, and similar thinkers. Secular theory has been planted firmly in philosophy, law, music, architecture, religion, art, science, anthropology, psychology, literature, education, government, and entertainment. Our surroundings are saturated with an antibiblical worldview far distant from the biblical cosmic perspective that God is Creator of all and Rescuer of fallen humanity.

Secularism’s doctrine of developmental evolution transforms humans from creatures made in God’s image to advanced animals with no significant past or future. Can there be, then, a significant present? Only on a fleeting basis. Reasons for living a “moral life” may rise to humanitarian concerns at best.

But the person who substitutes “social misbehavior” for sin against God has little interest in a Saviour’s death to free us from sin’s grasp. As a result, most Christians today operate from a mixed blend of biblical truth and secular values, unaware of secular society’s powerful influence. For many, professional sports scores receive more attention than does God. The church seems to be a rather remote traditional institution. Guilt becomes maladjustment, and the gospel loses relevance before redefined and softened ideas of sin. It all seems so theoretical that many adopt a cafeteria approach to what they believe (“I’ll take some of this, some of that”).

In medicine, diagnosis precedes therapy. In spiritual matters, we must begin by acknowledging the cosmic forces at work in the struggle for our loyalty. The Bible portrays the Creator of the universe as doing whatever He can to save His children. Calvary proves the lengths to which He will go.

The alternative is the very core of secular thinking, the package sold to Eve in Eden: human choices apart from God. Until we become alert to this contest, we are vulnerable. Because ultimately the outcomes are only two—eternal life or eternal death.

“Your question today is about jewelry,” I told my young college friend. “Others may have questions about the Sabbath, tithing, alcohol, smoking, or unclean foods. But the question really is Will you let God be God, or are you bound to worship your own opinion?”

Next time we’ll broaden our horizon on this important topic.

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference.
You'll know if I'm facing a deadline on the church newsletter just by looking around our house. Our dinner table bears the first telltale sign: a choice between the weekend's leftovers or a bowl of Ramen noodles (although the latter dish is not unusual fare when you-know-who does the cooking!). Or step into our den and stumble upon a confetti of "pick-me-upies" on the floor. Box after box of previously tucked-away toys now lay open, their contents scattered all over—my frantic attempt to keep the kids happily engrossed as they rediscover their treasures. Sheets of paper are strewn about, each showing off smiley faces, alphabet strings, crooked houses, or mock EKG tracings. And if you look closely enough, you'll find traces of Play-Doh in the carpet—my last-ditch effort to gain at least an hour of uninterrupted work.

And Now, Company's Coming

Today is one of those newsletter days, except that I'm taking an early break. We have company coming, and I need to get the house into a semblance of order. I rally my work force into action: "Pick up your toys." "Throw this in the waste basket." "Please put the books back." My allies are in a cooperative mood, and I'm able to tick off each finished job from my to-do list quicker than I expect.

With things put away, I put the vacuum cleaner to task, taking pleasure in each phhsk and krgh that announces that globs of dirt have been sucked into the machine.

In full swing, I tackle the next challenge: reclaiming the bits and pieces of toys and what-nots gathering dust under our bed. Only the children know how they ended up there. They surely have a way of testing my procrastinating nature.

With a 3-foot dowel, I try to redeem each item from dusty hibernation. A slug here, a poke there... a little contortion of the wrist and voilà! Another crayon sees the light of day! After a few more attempts, the last of the forgotten stuff is plucked out and the children rejoice at our fruitful harvest: crayon stubs, a miniature cup, a ball, a Noah puppet, pennies and dimes, pens, and scraps of paper and tissue.

Something yellow catches my eye and tells me that the reclamation project is not yet over. I move closer to one of our mini-component speakers, kneel down for a better view, and peer into the hole, where more toys await rescue. The dowel won't work this time, and more ingenious strategies are employed. My hand is too big to go inside the small opening, but by stretching two fingers just so, I am able to pull out a cookie cutter. I shake the speaker box. Clink-clank! More toys come into view—plastic letters with magnets at the back and a broken piece of a Slinky. More ingenuity is needed, so I force open a safety pin and stick its sharp point onto the tip of my dry marker. Out come the magnet letters, one at a time, sticking to the safety pin. A few more maneuverings, and a dozen "Don't-stick-things-in-here!" later, all the trinkets are out.

I breathe a sigh of relief. As I watch the kids enjoy their reunion with their long-lost toys, my thoughts turn to Somebody who engages all of heaven in celebration for each successful rescue effort by His Son.

I'm glad God didn't procrastinate in retrieving us from our sinful traps—no matter what the price. It meant more than just the use of dowels and safety pins. It took the life of His only Son to bring us back to the light.

But then, isn't that how God's love is?

"How great is the love the Father has lavished on us, that we should be called children of God!" (1 John 3:1, NIV).
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