This special issue was to have been about money. We designated it as such many months ago, advertised it, and were well into our planning when we felt impressed to make a radical change.

It is time to seek the Lord. It is time to pray as we have never prayed before—not just on one day set aside by church leaders, or in connection with
Jesus is coming soon.
Time to get our priorities in order. Time to put first things first. Time to turn from our worldliness and turn to God.

The special issue on money can wait. It’s an important topic—Jesus devoted much of His teaching to it—but even more important is the keynote Jesus sounded and which must be ours: “Repent: for the kingdom of heaven is at hand” (Matt. 4:17).

Our salvation is all of grace, through faith alone, but we have a part to play. The Christian life is a battle and a march: we are in a war, and the stakes are high, even eternal life or eternal death.

The ancient promise to Israel is for us today: “If my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land” (2 Chron. 7:14, NIV).

“You will seek me and find me when you seek me with all your heart. I will be found by you,” declares the Lord, “and will bring you back from captivity” (Jer. 29:13, 14, NIV). Again He invites: “Return, O Israel, to the Lord your God. Your sins have been your downfall! Take words with you and return to the Lord. Say to him: ‘Forgive all our sins and receive us graciously, that we may offer the fruit of our lips. Assyria cannot save us; we will not mount war-horses. We will never again say ‘Our gods’ to what our own hands have made, for in you
the fatherless find compassion’” (Hosea 14:1-3, NIV).

In The Acts of the Apostles, Ellen White describes how the disciples of Jesus earnestly sought His presence and blessing in the days prior to Pentecost. They meditated and prayed; they confessed and repented; they put aside differences and made matters right; they looked not only inward but were fired with a passion for people. And the Spirit came upon them with power.

We live in the time of the “latter rain”—the power of Pentecost again will come upon God’s people. We should not put off the promised blessing, waiting for some dramatic, mass demonstration of the Holy Spirit from heaven. No; it is our privilege to receive the gift individually, personally, now.

The articles and testimonies that make up this special issue cluster around the elements identified by Ellen White in her account of the pre-Pentecost experience, to which we have added the spiritual discipline of fasting, which Ellen White frequently encouraged. In these articles you will hear Adventists sharing deeply personal stories of personal renewal and revival and the hope they have that the church they love will find new life in Christ as well. We have intentionally included a wide variety of Adventist voices. Often, it seems, we Adventists spend so much time arguing, talking past one another, and failing to listen that we fracture the body instead of building it up.

It is time to come together. It is time to seek the Lord.

Among the various aspects that belong in seeking the Lord—repentance, confession, fasting, setting matters right, a love for the unsaved—ones stands out as preeminent: prayer. Every other element depends on personal, honest communion with God.

True prayer arises from a heart that feels its need. Prayer is our entire being longing for God, loving God, adoring God. “As the deer pants for streams of water, so my soul pants for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?” (Ps. 42:1, 2, NIV).

Nothing distinguishes the child of God from the child of the world as does prayer. That was never more true than in this secular age that prides itself on its self-sufficiency, that thumbs its nose at a Higher Power, that tells you prayer is for weak, dependent people who have to have a crutch.

If we cease to pray—not formally or out of rote habit but one-on-one with God—we inevitably become secularized. The world squeezes us into its mold, even while we still take the name of Christ and maybe even preach or teach in His name.

Conversely, the child of the world cannot begin to pray and remain a secular person. The very act of reaching out for God, be it ever so feeble or uncertain, brings down His life into our being.

The idea that we can know God—know Him as our best friend, as our companion by the way, as our guide for every decision, as our strength in every trial and our comforter for every heartache—seems preposterous to the world. It invites mocking and derision, but we who know our God know that it is true.

Last April, Reggie White, a 12-time Pro Bowl selection in the National Football League, declared his decision to retire. A couple days later he announced that he had changed his mind: the Lord had told him to return for one more year as a defensive lineman for the Green Bay Packers.

“God spoke to me and said, ‘You made a promise,’” said White, who is an ordained minister. “‘You promised you would play two years, and I want you to fulfill your commitment.’”

White’s reversal and public affirmation of divine guidance brought hoots of scorn from the media. “It’s a rare man who is treated to divine intervention even once in a lifetime,” wrote Jim Litke in an Associated Press commentary. “Reggie White, apparently, is that rarer man still. He gets messages from above all the time.”

You don’t have to be a fan of Reggie White’s or even accept that God told him to play football for another year to see the yawning chasm of two thought worlds, the biblical and the secular. In the biblical portrayal of reality, God exists, God is personal, and God intervenes in the affairs of this world; further, we can know God one-on-one.

A story way back in Genesis highlights the biblical worldview. Here is Abraham, now old and anxious that his beloved son Isaac will find a good wife. Abraham summons his faithful servant and gives him an onerous task: Go back to my relatives in northwest Mesopotamia and find a life companion for my son.

The servant must have trembled at the job assignment, but he determines to do his best. He loads up 10 camels with presents and heads for the road. At last he reaches his destination, the town of Nahor. As he comes to the town well, an idea is forming. It’s evening—the time when the women come out to draw water.

He makes a simple but—to a secular person—preposterous petition to the God of heaven: “O Lord, God of my master Abraham, give me success today, and show kindness to my master Abraham. See, I am standing beside this spring, and the daughters of the townspeople are coming out to draw water. May it be that when I say to a girl, ‘Please let down your jar that I may have a drink,’ and she says, ‘Drink,
and I’ll water your camels too’—let her be the one you have chosen for your servant Isaac. By this I will know that you have shown kindness to my master” (Gen. 24:12-14, NIV).

What happens? Before he finishes praying, the beautiful Rebekah walks up with a jar on her shoulder and fills it from the spring. Tingling with excitement, the servant hurries to meet her and requests a drink. She lowers the jar to her hands, gives him a drink, and then says, “I’ll draw water for your camels too, until they have finished drinking” (verse 19, NIV).

The story is old, but new every morning. The God of Abraham still visits His people, still condescends to listen to our faltering words. Nothing—no thing—is too small or too big for His gracious help.

O that we Seventh-day Adventists might live as people of God and not people of the world. O that we might depend on Him, might trust Him more, might love Him more. O that we might be men and women, and boys and girls, who pant for Him as the deer pants for the streams of water.

It is time.
Every day.
Now.
Time to seek the Lord.
Preparing for Pentecost

Spiritual disciplines for an expectant people

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

IN OBEDIENCE TO CHRIST’S COMMAND, they [the disciples] waited in Jerusalem for the promise of the Father—the outpouring of the Spirit. They did not wait in idleness. The record says that they were “continually in the temple, praising and blessing God” (Luke 24:53). They also met together to present their requests to the Father in the name of Jesus. They knew that they had a Representative in heaven, an Advocate at the throne of God. In solemn awe they bowed in prayer, repeating the assurance, “Whatsoever ye shall ask the father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto have ye asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive, that your joy may be full” (John 16:23, 24). Higher and still higher they extended the hand of faith, with the mighty argument, “It is Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us” (Rom. 8:34).

As the disciples waited for the fulfillment of the promise, they humbled their hearts in true repentance and confessed their unbelief. As they called to remembrance the words that Christ had spoken to them before His death they understood more fully their meaning. Truths which had passed from their memory were again brought to their minds, and these they repeated to one another. They reproached themselves for their misapprehension of the Saviour. Like a procession, scene after scene of His wonderful life passed before them. As they meditated upon His pure, holy life they felt that no toil would be too hard, no sacrifice too great, if only they could bear witness in their lives to the loveliness of Christ’s character. Oh, if they could but have the past three years to live over, they thought, how differently they would act! If they could only see the Master again, how earnestly they would strive to show Him how deeply they loved Him, and how sincerely they sorrowed for having ever grieved Him by a word or an act of unbelief! But they were comforted by the thought that they were forgiven. And they determined that, so far as possible, they would atone for their unbelief by bravely confessing Him before the world.

The disciples prayed with intense earnestness for a fitness to meet men and in their daily intercourse to speak words that would lead sinners to Christ. Putting away all differences, all desire for the supremacy, they came close together in Christian fellowship. They drew nearer and nearer to God, and as they did this...
they realized what a privilege had been theirs in being permitted to associate so closely with Christ. Sadness filled their hearts as they thought of how many times they had grieved Him by their slowness of comprehension, their failure to understand the lessons that, for their good, He was trying to teach them.

These days of preparation were days of deep heart searching. The disciples felt their spiritual need and cried to the Lord for the holy unction that was to fit them for the work of soul saving. They did not ask for a blessing for themselves merely. They were weighted with the burden of the salvation of souls. They realized that the gospel was to be carried to the world, and they claimed the power that Christ had promised.

During the patriarchal age the influence of the Holy Spirit had often been revealed in a marked manner, but never in its fullness. Now, in obedience to the word of the Saviour, the disciples offered their supplications for this gift, and in heaven Christ added His intercession. He claimed the gift of the Spirit, that He might pour it upon His people.

“And when the Day of Pentecost was fully come, they were all with one accord in one place. And suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting.”
The Spirit came upon the waiting, praying disciples with a fullness that reached every heart. The Infinite One revealed Himself in power to His church. It was as if for ages this influence had been held in restraint, and now Heaven rejoiced in being able to pour out upon the church the riches of the Spirit’s grace. And under the influence of the Spirit, words of penitence and confession mingled with songs of praise for sins forgiven. Words of thanksgiving and of prophecy were heard. All heaven bent low to behold and to adore the wisdom of matchless, incomprehensible love. Lost in wonder, the apostles exclaimed, “Herein is love.” They grasped the imparted gift. And what followed? The sword of the Spirit, newly edged with power and bathed in the lightnings of heaven, cut its way through unbelief. Thousands were converted in a day.

The lapse of time has wrought no change in Christ’s parting promise to send the Holy Spirit as His representative. It is not because of any restriction on the part of God that the riches of His grace do not flow earthward to men. If the fulfillment of the promise is not seen as it might be, it is because the promise is not appreciated as it should be. If all were willing, all would be filled with the Spirit. Wherever the need of the Holy Spirit is a matter little thought of, there is seen spiritual drought, spiritual darkness, spiritual declension and death. Whenever minor matters occupy the attention, the divine power which is necessary for the growth and prosperity of the church, and which would bring all other blessings in its train, is lacking, though offered in infinite plenitude.

Since this is the means by which we are to receive power, why do we not hunger and thirst for the gift of the Spirit? Why do we not talk of it, pray for it, and preach concerning it? The Lord is more willing to give the Holy Spirit to those who serve Him than parents are to give good gifts to their children. For the daily baptism of the Spirit every worker should offer his petition to God. Companies of Christian workers should gather to ask for special help, for heavenly wisdom, that they may know how to plan and execute wisely. Especially should they pray that God will baptize His chosen ambassadors in mission fields with a rich measure of His Spirit. The presence of the Spirit with God’s workers will give the proclamation of truth a power that not all the honor or glory of the world could give.

With the consecrated worker for God, in whatever place he may be, the Holy Spirit abides. The words spoken to the disciples are spoken also to us. The Comforter is ours as well as theirs. The Spirit furnishes the strength that sustains striving, wrestling souls in every emergency, amidst the hatred of the world, and the realization of their own failures and mistakes. In sorrow and affliction, when the outlook seems dark and the future perplexing, and we feel helpless and alone—these are the times when, in answer to the prayer of faith, the Holy Spirit brings comfort to the heart.

This article by Ellen G. White is excerpted from *The Acts of the Apostles*, pages 35-38, 50, 51. Seventh-day Adventists believe that Ellen G. White exercised the biblical gift of prophecy during more than 70 years of public ministry.
And it came to pass, as He was praying in a certain place, when He ceased, that one of His disciples said to Him, ‘Lord, teach us to pray’” (Luke 11:1, NKJV).

When I was 18 years old and still a baby Christian, someone at a church picnic asked me to offer the blessing for the meal. I said something frivolous, like “Thanks for the food, God. Amen.” Without reproving me, an elderly saint simply bowed his head and proceeded to present a warm, heartfelt, intense prayer of thanks and gratitude, born from one who had experienced hunger. With a mixture of wonder and shame I realized I knew very little about prayer.

The disciples thought they knew how to pray until they saw Jesus pray. They were awed when they heard Him speak with His Father. One morning as they saw Him rise from an episode of prayer charged with power and painted with peace, with longing they begged, “Lord, teach us to pray!”

In the Scriptures I hear Jacob’s bold supplication, full of tenacity and faith: “I will not let You go unless You bless me!” (Gen. 32:26, NKJV).

I see Elijah pray, and fire flashes from the heavens. Then later he prays until the dry sky turns black and the heavens explode with water. Fire and rain all in one day, and James has the audacity to tell me Elijah was a man just like me (James 5:17). And all I can say is “Lord, teach me to pray!”

Few mortals have experienced such apparently hopeless circumstances as Jonah. All Jonah had to look forward to was death from digestion in perfect darkness, compounded by knowing this was the result of rebellion against the Almighty. Yet he dared to pray, trusting in a merciful God. From that slimy situation, Jonah launched a prayer that penetrated the thick skin of a sea monster. And from the bottom of the mountains he catapulted his dire need before the glory of God’s throne and moved the hand of Omnipotence. And I say, “Lord, teach me to pray.”

The Bible says “pray always,” “pray without ceasing,” “continuing instant in prayer.” Yet I sing “Sweet Hour of Prayer” feeling like a hypocrite. I know my prayers are too shallow, too predictable. I want to descend from the mountain like Moses with my face glowing, and I echo, “Lord, teach me to pray!”

The good news is that when the disciples asked Jesus to teach them this mountain-moving, soul-saving prayer, He did. I’m learning that great prayer is born from a sense of great need, a great cause, and great love. So, Lord, give me great love; help me sense my great need and Your great cause. And teach me to pray!

Doug Batchelor is director/speaker of Amazing Facts Ministries in Roseville, California.
Orville Parchment: Living in the Presence of Jesus

PRACTICING THE PRESENCE OF CHRIST HAS been a challenge for me as a pastor. In my early ministry I spent a lot of time involved in busyness, concerned about pleasing the conference officials and making sure that my baptismal numbers were up. Hospital visits, Bible studies, sermon preparation, counseling members, and the administrative needs of the church consumed my time. Through it all I was working like the devil for the Lord.

But those early years didn’t provide the satisfaction and fulfillment that I expected. Many times I questioned my call to the gospel ministry and whether I should enter a different line of work. An emptiness haunted me persistently.

As Jesus once counseled Martha, one thing was lacking in my life. I didn’t recognize it until one day my wife, Jean, who has always been my spiritual inspiration, said to me, “Orville, I have noticed that you spend a lot of time working for the church, but little time in personal devotions.” Those words struck deep; I knew she was right. My best friend—the person who knew me best—helped me to identify the flaw in my ministry. I wasn’t spending enough time sitting at the feet of Jesus.

A few days later an elder in my church said to me, “I have just listened to a series of messages by Morris Venden on tape; I am sure you would appreciate listening to them.” Not willing to brush him off, I accepted his offer. To my amazement, Morris Venden focused on the very thing that Jean had pointed out—“a personal relationship with Christ.” Was this kind brother trying to tell me something indirectly? Could it be that he too saw that there was a void in my life and in my sermons?

I’m convinced today that the Holy Spirit spoke through my wife and the church elder to convict me of my mediocre spiritual walk with Christ. I immediately covenanted with God that I was going to change my focus, and I cried out in desperation to Him for help. I started spending more time in prayer and in studying His Word. I began finding joy in meditating on the life of Christ and what He did for me on the cross.

A dramatic change took place in my life. Since I found the secret of living in the presence of Jesus, my life has been more fulfilling and my ministry most rewarding. I only regret that I didn’t start this intimate walk with my Saviour years before.

My spiritual experience has had its hills and valleys. But I praise God that through the work of His Spirit, I have renewed confidence in His re-creating and revitalizing power.

Orville Parchment is president of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Canada.
Our Eyes Are Upon You
A passionate call to prayer from the speaker for NET ’98

BY DWIGHT K. NELSON

The following is adapted from a devotional message given at the General Conference on March 19, 1998. Elements of the oral delivery style have been retained.—Editors.

Good morning, everyone. I got to bed very late last night because of the weather patterns that held aircraft in Chicago. When I awoke early this morning, I decided that I needed to move straight to the point in this worship talk. In a time when words seem to multiply, I want to be brief, direct, and unmistakably clear.

Here's the point: I am under a deepening conviction that this world is about to end and that Jesus Christ is just about to return. Perhaps there was a time when it was heroic to make a confession like that, but I don't believe that time is with us anymore. You don't have to be a rocket scientist to figure it out. You don't even have to be Pat Robertson to figure it out. The celebrated television evangelist and host of the 700 Club launched a fast 19 days ago—40 days of fasting and prayer. He summoned followers on his national satellite network to join him in a time of intense praying. He has said that if this fast does not work, America is morally doomed. If prayer and fasting cannot turn this nation around, the country is lost.

I happen to believe he might be right on that point. Don't you? There is no question that we are counting down in every region of earth to the most stupendous global crisis in the history of the human race. Economically, environmentally, politically, sociologically, and most of all morally, we are in an era of unprecedented chaos and disruption.

What will be the response of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, this tiny community of faith that you and I love and embrace? They say there are 10 million of us now. What will be the response of our church, of our media? And because I am talking to leaders this morning who are gathered for worship in the world headquarters of our church, what will be the response of Seventh-day Adventist leadership to a world that is falling apart?

In your Bible there is an ancient tale that bears retelling. In light of the soon coming of Jesus, this story offers the only plausible—the only possible—strategy for a church that says it loves His appearing.

Second Chronicles 20:1 tells us: “After this the Moabites and Ammonites, and with them some of the Meunites, came against Jehoshaphat for battle.”

You remember who Jehoshaphat was. He was the leader of a little religious community called Judah. The enemy came against Jehoshaphat, and verse 2 tells us messengers came and told the king, “A great multitude is coming against you from Edom, from beyond the sea; already they are at Hazazon-tamar (that is, En-gedi). Jehoshaphat was afraid.”

I want to affirm that it is all right for leadership to be afraid. In fact, I suppose we ought to be afraid if leadership is not afraid. We're in a war; we have an enemy. And the message has gone forth: “A great multitude has come against you”—a giant, massive force.

Ladies and gentlemen, there should be no question in any of our minds this morning that the numbers are against us. Look, for instance, at the crisis affecting youth and young adults in America, the very group we like to say represents the future of the Adventist Church in this division.

Every 24 hours in the United States, three children die
from abuse or neglect.” The numbers ascend. Every 24 hours, six children commit suicide. If you extend the age parameters to age 24, which is the heart of the Gen X generation, every 24 hours, 13 American young commit suicide.

Every 24 hours, 16 youth and young adults are killed by firearms. Every 24 hours, 316 are arrested for violent crime. Every 24 hours, 403 children are arrested for drug use in America. Every 24 hours, 1,420 children are born to teen mothers. Every 24 hours, 3,356 of our children drop out of high school. Every 24 hours, 5,702 are arrested, and 8,523 are reported abused and neglected. Every 24 hours, 100,000 are homeless. Every 24 hours, 14.7 million live in poverty.

My friends, the numbers are against us. And I know we’re tempted to think, “Well, those are isolated statistics from society at large. Sure, we may have trouble finding leaders for the next generation in North American Adventism, but aren’t we doing better elsewhere in the world?”

And at first glance, the numbers look encouraging. According to Elder McClure, our division president, 1,977 men, women, and children join the Seventh-day Adventist Church somewhere in the world every 24 hours. That’s a number we like. One thousand nine hundred and seventy-seven people join this remnant, this fledgling community of faith.

But before we put our elbows out of joint from patting ourselves on the back, let me cite another reliable source, who happens to be sitting on the platform this morning. Elder Folkenberg, our world president, puts out a little sheet each week called “From the President.” Elder Folkenberg, do you remember these numbers? Every second on this planet, four human beings are born—on average, perhaps one in the Americas, one in Africa, and two in Asia. Every single second.

While the human race is enlarging, it is also decreasing, and according to your statistics, Elder, two people die every second. We don’t have to have doctorates in mathematics to calculate the net growth. Every second, two persons are added to the net growth of the human race. And you reminded us, Elder Folkenberg, that that equals 200,000 people added to the human race every 24 hours. Two hundred thousand persons. And the Seventh-day Adventist Church grows by 1,977, or maybe even 2,000?

While we cry “Hallelujah” that 2,000 people join the Seventh-day Adventist Church every day, the sad and tragic reality is that the human race in that same 24-hour period has grown by 200,000. Every 24 hours we fall behind 198,023. In less than six days, we fall behind 1 million human beings. That doesn’t account for the 6.2 billion who are already here. We fall behind another million every six days.

By now it must be apparent that the numbers are against us. Do you know what that means? That means it is humanly, strategically, logically impossible for this headquarters and the church it represents to finish the task Jesus has asked us to do, even in a thousand generations. It’s impossible: it simply cannot be done. Two thousand a day versus 200,000 added to the human family? Why, even if you could raise our number to 100,000 a day, we’d still be falling behind.

The issue is not how many more satellites can we put into our brazen skies. We could put up a billion satellites—one for every six people on earth—and we’d still be falling behind.

But this is really an old story. According to 2 Chronicles, messengers came and told Jehoshaphat, “A great multitude is coming against you.” The numbers were against them then, my friends, and the numbers are against us now. From a human point of view, our situation is impossible, which means there is only one possible strategy left for this world headquarters, for its leaders, and for this church.

What did the king do when he realized that numbers were against him and his people? You know the story. Jehoshaphat was afraid. There’s nothing wrong with fear when it drives us to a sense of helplessness and when that helplessness drives us to ask for help.

According to the Word, “he set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah” [2 Chron. 20:3]. This shouldn’t suggest that he wasn’t already seeking God. He
was a man of God. But when the numbers are against you, you set yourself—in your division, in your office, in your congregation—to seek the Lord.

“He set himself to seek the Lord, and proclaimed a fast throughout all Judah. Judah assembled to seek help from the Lord; from all the towns of Judea they came to seek the Lord” [verses 3, 4].

All Judah stood before the Lord with their little ones and their wives—everyone who breathed in that community of faith. Everyone was called to prayer, to a passionate, fasting prayer.

Perhaps Pat Robertson is right on this point. How tragic it would be if in our effort to distinguish ourselves from other faith groups we write off the spiritual disciplines that they have rediscovered. Fasting and prayer don’t belong to any one community of faith. These are aspects of a strategic blueprint that comes from the eternal God Himself.

In front of the entire community of faith Jehoshaphat prayed a heartrending and passionate prayer: “O Lord, God of our ancestors, are you not God in heaven? Do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? In your hand are power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you” [verse 6].

But he continues by reminding God of their crisis reality: “However, God, the numbers are against us, the enemy has come, and we are dead meat—dead meat—if you don’t do something fast.” Look at the last line in his prayer: “For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” [verse 12].

It almost sounds like a poem, doesn’t it? “We do not know what to do, but our eyes are upon You.”

Ladies and gentlemen, the time has come for the Seventh-day Adventist Church to have one passionate, solitary gaze. Perhaps Pat Robertson is right on this point. How tragic it would be if in our effort to distinguish ourselves from other faith groups we write off the spiritual disciplines that they have rediscovered. Fasting and prayer don’t belong to any one community of faith. These are aspects of a strategic blueprint that comes from the eternal God Himself.

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In front of the entire community of faith Jehoshaphat prayed a heartrending and passionate prayer: “O Lord, God of our ancestors, are you not God in heaven? Do you not rule over all the kingdoms of the nations? In your hand are power and might, so that no one is able to withstand you” [verse 6].

But he continues by reminding God of their crisis reality: “However, God, the numbers are against us, the enemy has come, and we are dead meat—dead meat—if you don’t do something fast.” Look at the last line in his prayer: “For we are powerless against this great multitude that is coming against us. We do not know what to do, but our eyes are on you” [verse 12].

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I’ve been carrying around a little red book that has a “9” on the spine. We shouldn’t call these the “red books”: they’re really the “unread” books. But that little “9” on the spine means that nothing comes after this. This was the last material Ellen White wrote.

As she neared death, she reflected deeply on her most important values. She cut to the quick, as I have tried to do this morning.

“More and more, as the days go by, it is becoming apparent that God’s judgments are in the world. In fire and flood and earthquake He is warning the inhabitants of this earth of His near approach. The time is nearing when the great crisis in the history of the world will have come, when every movement in the government of God will be watched with intense interest and inexpressible apprehension. In quick succession the judgments of God will follow one another—fire and flood and earthquake, with war and bloodshed.”

I’ve never read an author in all my life—and I’ve read Hal Lindsey, too—with a greater passion for the return of Jesus Christ. Because she was in love with Jesus Christ, Ellen White was passionate about His soon coming. Her works just glow with the blessed hope. Is there something embarrassing about that?

“Oh, that the people might know the time of their visitation!” she writes. “There are many who have not yet heard the testing truth for this time. There are many with whom the Spirit of God is striving. . . . Tenderly will the Lord look upon them. . . . His hand is still stretched out to save, while the door is closed to those who would not enter.”

“Let us begin to work for those who have not had the light. . . . We have a living Saviour, one who will go before us and who will work with us. God will do the work if we will furnish Him the instruments.”

My friends, it’s time to grow serious about our truly desperate situation. This is a time in the life of God’s people that calls for serious, sustained, supplicating prayer—not talking about prayer or thinking about prayer or even preaching about prayer, but prayer itself. When the numbers are against us, what else can we do? We have no choice now but to be driven to our knees, as Judah was.

The Bible story ends as our story must end. As they marched out early in the morning, they sang at the top of their lungs that great song, “Give thanks to the Lord, for His steadfast love endures forever” [verse 21]. As they chanted the psalm, the victory arrived. And when they rounded that final corner, they looked out on a defeated enemy. Without one sword, God had delivered His people.

The point is inescapable: God doesn’t need swords today. His great passion, His great heart’s desire, is to save an entire planet. We cannot do it. He must do the saving, and He will. Then why don’t we—in every medium and ministry of this church, in every congregation, in every office of this building—sense and see our calling to passionately sound a global call to prayer for the worldwide Seventh-day Adventist Church?

God waits for a praying people who sense their helplessness, who invite Him to do what only He can do, and who covenant to spend eternity with Him, celebrating the victory He will win.

2 Ellen White, Testimonies, vol. 9, p. 97.
3 Ibid.

* Scripture references are from the New Revised Standard Version.

Dwight Nelson is senior pastor of the Pioneer Memorial church at Andrews University, Berrien Springs, Michigan.
REMEMBER THE ROOM, THE COLORS, THE light, the phone, and finally, those fateful words: “I’m wondering how you would feel if I left your mother . . . I am involved a little with someone else, but nothing I can’t walk away from.”

“Oh, no, Daddy!” I quavered. “Not like that!”

The air was acrid, my throat dry, my mind dull. The moment melted; tears burned, then flowed into a great river of pain.

Love and logic lost; the deed was done. Thirty-four years of marriage erupted into chaos, disbelief, and grief.

It was then, driven by despair, I began an intense intercession on behalf of my father and family.

My petitions were focused on God’s miraculous intervention. Why couldn’t God send a whale, a drought, or even my life? But God was not in the wind, the earthquake, or the fire. Slow insidious sins defy simple solutions.

The Word spoke to me: “Pray without ceasing” (1 Thess. 5:17).

Time is a great healer—and teacher. God’s search for His children is never-ending; it is impossible to circumvent His love. As I’ve prayed for my father through the years, God’s voice has become clearer and more reassuring in my life.

Through the discipline of interceding I have come to know God through His “still small voice” (1 Kings 19:12). It is that voice that prompts to prayer, calls to repentance, and begs to forgive. I covet that “gentle whisper” (NIV), for it fills me with an intense desire to reach out, restore, and heal.

I wish I could tell you that after 30 years my father is safely back in the fold of the Adventist Church, but I cannot. While there have been significant events and rising hopes, the climax is not yet. But soon and very soon, I believe this intercessory journey will end in a great denouement of surrender and saving faith.

Through it all, I have learned to pray with an earnestness motivated by the love I have for my father and others not yet walking with God. You too must have unresolved longings and grief—fathers, mothers, children, friends. Join me in a covenant of prayer—over the sink, in the car, during the night season—for those we love. As we pray, hope will triumph over despair; faith will prevail over doubt; and love will conquer all.

Juanita Neal is vice president for education of the British Columbia Conference.
Prayer: “Not for Publication”?

BY ALDEN THOMPSON

AS THE DEADLINE FOR THIS ARTICLE crept up and then slipped by, an uneasy verse came and perched on my word processor—Jesus’ warning about the hypocrites who pray in public places “so that they may be seen by others.” “Whenever you pray,” He said, “go into your room and shut the door and pray to your Father who is in secret” (Matt. 6:5, 6, NRSV).

Maybe articles on prayer should be anonymous. If prayer works because it is done in secret, going public could destroy it.

Other biblical passages also suggest sending the Adventist Review a blank page. “Teach us to pray,” the disciples said to Jesus. Luke recorded Jesus’ response in 38 words (Luke 11:2-4, NRSV). Just 38. That’s all. And the parallel Lord’s Prayer in the Sermon on the Mount Jesus prefaced with the warning not to “heap up empty phrases” (Matt. 6:7, NRSV). If the Master offered only 38 words, why should a disciple risk a thousand?

Finally, in Luke 18, Jesus condemned the Pharisee’s street-corner piety, but blessed what the publican privately murmured: “God, be merciful to me a sinner” (Luke 18:13, NRSV). In short, an article on prayer could be a dangerous and foolhardy thing.

But desperation flings caution aside—and one side of me feels almost that desperate. It’s hard to put into words, but I’m going to try. My first reason is corporate: I’m concerned for the prayer life of my church. Adventists are a driven, task-oriented crowd, paying good lip service to prayer, but doing just about anything to avoid it. Prayer is an Adventist black hole. We’re not good at it. And one day the Lord will ask us why.

My second reason is personal: I simply crave fellowship with believers eager to talk to the Lord. I am a pietist—a “naturally devotional” person, to borrow a phrase from Ellen White—someone drawn to the more personal and emotional side of religion. And that side of me often feels lonely and isolated in Adventism.

I’m tempted to use strong words to express my needs: craving and starving; aching and longing. Doesn’t anyone understand my hunger and thirst?

Yet such emotional intensity will surely unsettle some of my brothers and sisters in Christ. Again strong words come to mind: alarm, terror, horror. If you are a devout nonpietist, you know those words aren’t too strong. I doubt if many
would begrudge me my passion, but what if I should expect it of them? It’s one thing to tell the extrovert to “shut up” or “pipe down” (and it might work for a while). But to ask the quiet to turn noisy, the private to go public, is quite another matter. Horror is not too strong a word.

Inevitably, then, personal needs flow into the corporate. I suspect that even private people secretly want a community where private people can be at peace with God. No one wants to be totally alone. So we worry that the church won’t meet our needs and too easily seek to make it over in our image rather than mold it into a place for all God’s children.

In my case, I don’t want to impose my temperament on others (yes, I believe a genetic component shapes our spiritual lives), but I do crave a more “felt” presence of God in my church. And given the secularizing impulses in our world, I believe the church must be more persistent, more visible, in practicing the spiritual discipline of prayer. It may be the crucial element for preserving a sense of God’s presence in our world.

Making the discipline of prayer more visible will be easiest for the Pietists, the “naturally devotional.” But a touch of realism is needed as well. I remember the caution from Gordon Balharrie, dean of the School of Theology when I was a student at Walla Walla College. “Young preachers are too eager to preach about prayer,” he said. “They should wait until they know something about it.”

All right. But all of us know a fair bit, and what we know is embarrassing. We’re slow to start and quick to finish; any doorbell or fly is a welcome distraction. “Prayer is irksome,” said C. S. Lewis. And we are relieved that someone of stature admitted it.

Interestingly enough, Lewis holds his discussion of the “irksomeness” of prayer until the next-to-last chapter of his Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer. Malcolm’s wife raises the question: “All this about prayer and never a word on the practical problem: its irksomeness,” she says. “Anyone might think it was a correspondence between two saints!” Lewis then discusses our problems with prayer, the busyness that pushes it to the margins, the boredom, the distractions, the tedium, the guilt when prayer is a burden instead of a joy.

Maybe we too easily internalize Jesus’ rebuke of the disciples in the garden: “Couldn’t you watch with Me for an hour?” A fear of being labeled uncommitted or unconverted has sometimes made it hard for me to be honest about my struggles with prayer, even to myself. Where do I turn if “nothing happens” when I pray? Maybe a guilty conscience is what drives young preachers to preach on prayer!

But we must find ways to talk about such things. And to pray about them. Scripture reveals that answers won’t always be easy or clear. Nothing happened when Job prayed—at least not for a long time. Acts 12:2 notes that Herod killed James; yet the same chapter links the prayers of the church with Peter’s rescue from prison (verse 5). Did the church forget to pray for James? Or not pray hard enough?

Or are there mysteries in prayer that we can never fully grasp, mysteries best discovered behind the closed door of Matthew 6:6? Maybe the best prayers are those without apparent answers, the ones rewarded in secret and never reported in the Adventist Review.

Imagine the power in the church if each of us could cherish secrets like that.


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IT WAS JUST AFTER RETURNING TO Massachusetts from a five-year missionary stint in Puerto Rico that I got a taste of what it must have felt like to cross the Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17).

Having finished his doctoral studies at Boston University, my husband wanted to live, near New York City in order to advance his singing career. We agreed that Connecticut would be a good place to live, since we knew of several fine elementary schools there for our daughter.

But then I faced a quandary. In Connecticut I’d be too far from the nearest Adventist college, where I knew I could get a job. Looking for work in the public school sector filled me with terror: I had never worked outside the Adventist school system, and I knew absolutely nobody in Connecticut.

It became evident to me that if God didn’t intervene in some miraculous way, our family would be in deep trouble. Thus began my crossing of the Jordan. I concluded that the best way to find a job would be to send my résumé to every college and university in Connecticut, which I did. But the days and weeks and summer months passed, and still I had not heard from any of the schools to which I had written.

Not wanting to leave any stone unturned, and acting on a long-held conviction that one should aim for the best before settling for the mediocre, I called and spoke to department chairs of three or four of the best universities in the state. None of them gave me any encouragement, and I went back to my praying and packing, hoping for the best.

It was August, and Jordan’s waters were now up to my ankles. We had no choice but to move to Connecticut entirely on faith: neither my husband nor I had jobs. In a brief visit to South Windsor the month before to arrange for our daughter’s schooling, we had put down a month’s rent on an apartment five minutes from the school. Deep down, I needed to know: “How far into the water do I need to go before the waters part?”

We moved on a hot and muggy Sunday. I was in our daughter’s bedroom with a friend, trying to set up her bed, when my husband came into the room.

“There’s a Mr. Soto here who wants to speak to you.”

Mr. Soto? I didn’t know anybody by that name, and certainly not in Connecticut. I walked slowly downstairs.

“Are you Dr. Morales?” he asked.

“Yes.” I eyed him warily.

“I’m Mr. Soto from the University of Connecticut, and we are looking for a Spanish professor to teach medical Spanish at the International Language Center at the medical school in Farmington. Do you think you might be able to help us?”

The Jordan had parted, and the water wasn’t even up to my knees.

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I am a sinner.

This isn’t a statement of theology, but an undeniable fact that I live with every day of my life. There are many times I feel painfully unworthy to be a Christian leader—a pastor to many who probably expect better from the person who leads their church. Like my current cough and congestion, which remind me I have succumbed to an unexpected early summer cold, the symptoms of my spiritually diseased condition remind me of what I have now come to expect: I fall short of God’s glory and my expectations.

Moments of escape bring temporary vacation from my unpleasant reality: a moving worship service, a spiritual “ah-ha” in my weekly small group, an act of servanthood to someone in need, picking up the tab at a restaurant for a friend. These experiences tell me that goodness hasn’t all departed. But they don’t blot out the other Alex Bryan, the one people know about, though not (and perhaps never) completely.

The Achilles’ heel of my Christianity is a struggle in dealing with myself as a sinner. When my life and my church are humming along, I do very well at this relationship-and-religion thing. But in the weeks of spiritual dryness, when pride, impatience, ignorance, and cowardice seek to destroy my faith, I often find that sins and their memory lurk in my soul for too long without the decisive action that turns failure into triumph. I’m talking about repentance.

While I’m woefully slow to pull the trigger, I’ve found that repentance is the single most transforming activity in my life. When I confess my sin and guilt before the Forgiver and Forgetter, I find a unique experience of personal revival. I find peace and cleansing—a “starting over” sensation that draws me near to God and makes me see the potential for good in me. Conversely, I’ve found that a great sermon, a big spiritual “bash,” or religious success does little to revive me. I change most when I recognize my sin and confess it before God. The baggage He takes from my shoulders makes me feel light and burns in me a resolve to move ever closer to Him.

I’m not sure what slows the practice of repentance in me. Perhaps I’d rather avoid the real me in favor of the person I dream about. Maybe I don’t want to face the frustration of repenting for the same set of sins—once again. Most likely it’s because I wish I were perfect. I know for sure that I long to become a better and quicker repenter. I’ve tasted the joy of being reconciled with God, and hunger to be there again and again, even at the cost of repenting.

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RECENTLY I SPOKE ANGRILY TO MY BEST FRIEND IN PUBLIC. IT WOUNDED HIM DEEPLY.

I can’t describe the feelings of self-recrimination as I watched the hurt in his saddened eyes. Instantly overcome with guilt and remorse, I asked forgiveness, and because he loves me, in the midst of his humiliation he sacrificed his sentiments so that I could feel better.

Later, as I reflected on that incident, I was amazed at his radical action and the range of emotions it evoked in me. There was anger: “Why did he make me behave that way? How dare he make me look so juvenile in public?” There was also frustration: “Why did I let my anger get the better of me? How can I ever erase such a bad impression others now have of me?” Self-pity was not far behind as I was haunted by thoughts of not being worthy of this friendship. Fear, the enemy of faith, closed ranks and squeezed out hope as I worried whether or not our friendship would survive.

A few days later, as I struggled to let go of that unfortunate experience, my heart was heavy with unresolved emotions. The false self, which Brennan Manning describes as “the impostor” wanting to be justified,” urged me toward an external demonstration to gratify my tarnished ego. I wanted to present him with expensive gifts in a dramatic public gesture. That’s usually the way of remorse. It chooses elaborate displays (see Matt. 27:1-5). It is deceptive and full of self-justification. It never leads to transformation because it is so guilt-ridden. Unfortunately, many of us who by grace are being transported from the wild kingdom of the world into God’s kingdom often mistake remorse for repentance. What then is repentance?

The dictionary defines repentance as “a feeling of regret or contrition.” It is further described as the act or process of turning from sin to dedicate oneself to the amendment of one’s life. In biblical Hebrew, repentance is derived from the word nacham, which means sorrow and the physical display of one’s feelings. This dual connotation was well known to the Jews, especially while they were in exile. The opening words of Isaiah 40 (popularly known among Jews as the Book of Consolation) are “Nahamu Nahamu am!” translated “Comfort ye, comfort ye my people.” It is also a call to repentance.

The Greek word for repentance literally means “to perceive afterwards in the mind,” which for the Greeks was the seat of decision and reflection. It signifies an inward afterthought that causes a radical change of will or purpose in such a way as to totally reverse the effects of one’s previous state of mind.
After the ascension of Jesus (Acts 1:9-11), the disciples experienced this inward afterthought as they examined themselves through prayer and confession (see pp. 5-7). Repentance, given them as a gift by a gracious God, allowed them to see the familiar in a new light, and trace an entirely different picture of themselves than they had seen when Jesus was among them. The very attitudes and claims in which they had once gloried became the cause of their greatest sorrow, for repentance caused them to estimate the things of Jesus with a new value system. Pentecost, the great turning point of their lives, was made possible by a deeply personal and intimate turning from their own mistakes.

Repentance is a spiritual gift that empowers sinners to turn from evil and become saints of God. We often look to Luke 15 and the parable of the prodigal son as the best illustration of this ideal, but my favorite example of the sorrow that brings comfort (Matt. 5:4), which we call repentance, is the short story Jesus told in Matthew 21:28-31.

A father had two sons. The first was faultless in his manners. One day his father asked him to go work in the vineyard, to which the compliant son quickly replied, “I will go, sir.” But his was only a pious external acquiescence, caused by a desire for recognition that he could be counted on, for Jesus said, “He did not go.” When his father turned his back, he did nothing. Perhaps he really planned to obey, but the prospect of a long arduous day in the scorching heat of the vineyard influenced his decision to stay in the shade. Perhaps he never meant to go, but was only paying lip service to the appeal of his father. Perhaps he was a rule-ridden religious impostor who became distracted by other interests or legalistic logic. Whatever the reason, his apparently graceful deference to his father’s face was the sum total of his obedience.

The second son appears to have been surly and boorish. When presented with the same request, he immediately said, “I will not go.” He refused to be anything other than his true self, even if this meant that he would not acquiesce to his father’s wishes. Yet beneath the prickly, menacing, hostile exterior there was a tender heart ready to respond to the difficult circumstances his refusal imposed on his loving father. As he passed the vineyard and recognized the great loss his father would incur due to his recalcitrance, the second son repented and obeyed his father’s wishes.

The two sons reflect the attitudes of God’s sons and daughters toward His authority. The first son’s behavior reminds me of myself before I understood the gospel of grace. Although a Christian, I acted like a pious pretender whose manners—especially in worship—were always perfectly coor-
dinated with the doctrines of our church. I consistently conveyed the right words, becoming gestures, and suitable spiritual tone in relationships, but privately, I was an empty can and a clanging cymbal.

My relationship with God was a figment of my false self-imagination, so I had to work doubly hard to impress family and friends that I was indeed a righteous person. I became obsessed with rules and a rigid religious discipline born out of guilt rather than love. Privately, I felt like a trapped animal. No matter how often I considered giving in to the promptings of the Holy Spirit, I never did anything for fear others would discover I had been a spiritual impostor. Through God's grace, eventually I was made alive in Christ (Eph. 2:1-10).

As I repented for my bad behavior toward my friend, I was also overcome by the cost the cross exacted on my heavenly Father. I understood the obedience of the Son of God, who willingly went into the scorching heat of sin so that I might be saved. I'm praying that God will give others what He has given me—a personal, profound repentance that has renewed my relationship with Him and freed me to deeply affirm others. I'm praying that God will also give the wider body of our church a corporate repentance for its slowness to believe the gospel and its lethargy in communicating it. Through repentance, the church too can be revived and its witness can be revitalized.

The repentance we require is the kind that drives us to our knees with a deep confidence that Jesus Himself will lift us up to walk with Him in newness of life.


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In Search of Spiritual Strength

BY MANUEL VASQUEZ

CONNECTING WITH THE HIGHEST AND richest spiritual resource in the universe is what makes the difference between a nominal Christian and an active, dynamic believer. Scripture shows us that all of its great men and women were praying persons, and many contemporary Christian leaders are praying individuals as well. But one aspect of their prayer life is often overlooked: the habit of joining the spiritual disciplines of prayer and fasting when in special need of spiritual strength or wisdom.

The Bible abounds with stories of those who fasted for greater spiritual power. Jesus, Moses, and Elijah fasted for periods of 40 days. David fasted while interceding with God for his son’s life (2 Sam. 12:21-23), and Daniel when praying for the close of the captivity (Dan. 9:3). Ezra and the returning exiles fasted and prayed for divine protection on their journey back to Jerusalem (Ezra 8:23), and Nehemiah repeated this spiritual discipline upon hearing of the great affliction of his people in Jerusalem (Neh. 1:4). Esther joined fasting to prayer as she pled for her people (Esther 4:16), and Paul and Barnabas fasted before ordaining elders in the local churches they established (Acts 13:2, 3).

But comparatively little is said or written about fasting today, leading many to dismiss its true importance. Some may think of it as self-inflicted punishment that makes one both hungry and irritable, rendering little spiritual benefit. Still others object to fasting as an antiquated way of trying to earn merit, a legalism built on self-deprivation. But those who join fasting to prayer know what is hidden to most: just as enjoying food is a gift of a gracious God, going without food in order to more fully connect with Him is also one of His gifts.

Fasting, along with consistent prayer, often gives clarity of mind and a spiritual heart cleansing that causes the mind to become more receptive to God’s will. Ellen White reminds us that a surrendered spirit is the true goal of fasting:

“For certain things, fasting and prayer are recommended and appropriate. In the hand of God they are a means of cleansing the heart and promoting a receptive frame of mind.
We obtain answers to our prayers because we humble our souls before God.”

“The spirit of true fasting and prayer is the spirit which yields mind, heart, and will to God.”

Other reasons for fasting include overcoming temptation or a desire to understand the truth. Ellen White says:

“When Christ was the most fiercely beset by temptation, He ate nothing. He committed Himself to God, and through earnest prayer, and perfect submission to the will of His Father, came off conqueror. Those who profess the truth for these last days, above every other class of professed Christians, should imitate the great Exemplar in prayer.”

Knowing our need of greater spiritual power, Jesus described fasting as a standard component of the life of those truly seeking God, and even offered counsel on the attitudes with which it should be practiced: “When you fast, do not look sober as the hypocrites do, for they disfigure their faces to show men they are fasting. I tell you the truth, they have received their reward in full. But when you fast, put oil on your head and wash your face, so that it will not be obvious to men that you are fasting, but only to your Father, who is unseen; and your Father, who sees what is done in secret, will reward you” (Matt. 6:16-18, NIV).

Fasting for spiritual reasons is generally understood as “abstaining from food” for a chosen period of time, along with much prayer. Fasting can be done by (1) abstaining from all food; (2) drinking only juices; (3) eating sparingly of simple foods. As the stomach sends signals to the brain that it wants food, these very messages may serve as a call to renewed prayer and commitment to the cause or need that invited you to fast.

The duration of the fast is not the vital ingredient. What matters is the yielded heart that may result from an extraordinary seeking of God—a wholehearted consecration. Though Jesus, Elijah, and Moses fasted for nearly six weeks at a time, most Christians are not called to do this. In fact, we are encouraged not to. Our fasting should be of much shorter duration, perhaps as briefly as one day or up to one week. Some, for important health reasons, may be able to fast only part of the day and should counsel with a Christian physician for any necessary medical advice. All should remember to drink normal amounts of water while fasting to avoid becoming dehydrated.

Whatever day or days are chosen to fast, I suggest avoiding fasting on the Sabbath. God intended the Sabbath to be a joy and a delight (Isa. 58:13), and fasting can inhibit the full enjoyment of fellowshipping with the Lord and other believers.

On occasions my wife and I have fasted for several days at a time when we felt that we needed a clear indication of what course of action to take. Once I fasted for five days, asking...
God to give me a clear indication on a pending invitation to work in a different part of the country. At the end of this period I felt very certain about what God’s will was for me, and declined the invitation. A clear conviction of God’s will for my life was the greatest reward of my fast.

We have also fasted when concerned about the spiritual welfare of our children, and before leading out in a meeting at which decisions of far-reaching consequence would be made. I have seen a noticeable and positive difference in the outcome of those situations when I made fasting a part of my prayer experience of preparation. God tied my heart to His, and I was either able to more usefully exert my influence to accomplish His purpose or more gracefully accept His will.

The worldwide impact of NET ’98 will afford each one of us a reason and an opportunity to intercede for some friend or loved one who, we pray, will be touched by Dwight Nelson’s nightly presentations. Why not intercede for that person in a more serious way by fasting and praying at least one day a week before or during the satellite effort? As you fast, pray most earnestly that the Lord will impress that person with conviction to accept God’s truth and join His remnant church. You will have the deep satisfaction of knowing that you are demonstrating the same loving intensity for their salvation that Jesus has shown to you.

1 Ellen White, Counsels on Diets and Foods, pp. 187, 188.
2 Ibid., p. 189.
3 Ibid., p. 52.
4 Ibid., p. 189.

Manuel Vasquez is the vice president for special ministries for the North American Division.
It hurts when I fast. My stomach hurts. My mouth gets a bad taste. And I don’t feel especially friendly toward the people around me.

Why then would I fast? I can pray. I can meditate. I can intercede with God and still not have all the discomfort of fasting. Besides, it is awkward in social situations, and if I tell anyone, they’ll just think I’m trying to prove my piety.

Those are just a few of the excuses that go through my mind when the topic of fasting comes up. There are certainly more. The devil thought of all of them. The reason is that God has built so many formidable spiritual benefits into the act of fasting that I can be sure the enemy is hanging around to see that I don’t receive them. The spiritual needs of our nation and our church are enormous, and the devil fears that we will learn of God’s glorious solution and tap into it.

There is no virtue in fasting. The value is as we sense a desperate longing to draw closer to God in order to take advantage of all He has to offer. It gives us opportunity to refocus on Him and away from those things that engage our attention on such a regular basis.

At this writing, my husband and I have just completed day 21 of a 40-day juice fast, interrupted only occasionally by a little fruit or zwieback. I am hesitant even to write about it because it might seem like spiritual arrogance, but actually, the opposite is true. It is more like a confession. We both had a deep sense of need for a greater intimacy with God, to move away from the mediocre commitment with which we had become so comfortable. Fasting was presented to us as a biblical method that would help us turn boldly from our predictable daily routine and comforts to focus our eyes undistractedly on Him. We wanted to see appetite’s hold on us broken. We felt the need to cry out for an increased sense of passion for the lost.

In this process we have learned that all around us Christians are calling each other to accountability through fasting and prayer. There is a deep heart longing to call our generation back from its headlong dash into hedonism, sensuality, greed, and violence. Should Seventh-day Adventist Christians be doing any less?

This has been a new experience for us, and it may not be suitable for everyone. But we have found it to be spiritually exhilarating and not as physically painful as we imagined. God graciously granted us many of the things we sought as our hearts have come to agree with His. We’ve come to trust the “experimental religion” that God is leading us toward, and it is one of the most spiritually rewarding things we’ve ever done.

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Richard Davidson:
An Anniversary Meditation

PENTECOST 1998. TODAY I’M FULFILLING a dream I’ve had for years. I’m in Jerusalem, standing in the “Cenacle” on Mount Zion, probably located on the very site of the upper room where the disciples received the Holy Spirit at Pentecost in A.D. 31.1 A group of more than 100 Christians fills the upper room, vigorously singing praises to God.

Experiencing Pentecost in Jerusalem at the very site of Pentecost on the very day of Pentecost—I can hardly contain my enthusiasm! I think how the disciples gathered here for 10 days after Jesus’ ascension, focusing attention on their risen Saviour. The outpouring of the Holy Spirit was the tangible sign to them that Jesus had indeed been inaugurated as priest-king in the heavenly sanctuary, that they had an Advocate in heaven ministering in their behalf.

Below the upper room where I’m standing is the traditional “tomb of David,” and hundreds of my Jewish brothers and sisters are now crowded into the tomb area, poring over the Torah. All over Jerusalem and the rest of the world Jews stayed up all last night, the eve of Shavuot (Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost), studying Scripture in commemoration of the giving of the Torah on Mount Sinai, which they believe took place at this time of year. I was fascinated to walk through the streets of the Hasidic Jewish community here in central Jerusalem last night about midnight and observe groups gathered almost everywhere—homes, schools, and synagogues—young and old vigorously and vocally reading or chanting the words of Scripture.

Now here at the upper room the sounds of Jews chanting Scripture and Christians singing of Jesus blend together. Old and new—Jewish fervor for Scripture and Christian fervor for Jesus—the two images merge in my mind as I sit down on a stair step of the Cenacle to contemplate . . .

The two images also have come together in a special way in my own experience in the last few months. I have begun to realize as never before that when all is said and done, what really matters is focusing on Jesus in the Scriptures.

Communion with Jesus through His Word, intimacy with Him through meditating on His life and work and character—this is foundational for a vibrant Christian life of peace and victory. I have found that my progress in the Christian way is directly proportionate to the time I spend in intimate communion with Jesus. I find myself more and more often taking seriously the inspired challenge of Ellen White: “Walk continually in the light of God. Meditate day and night upon His character. Then you will see His beauty and rejoice in His goodness. Your heart will glow with a sense of His love. You will be uplifted as if borne by everlasting arms. With the power and light that God imparts, you can comprehend more and accomplish more than you ever before deemed possible.”2

I’ve experienced that God’s promise is true! As I sit here in the upper room in Jerusalem on the day of Pentecost, I dedicate myself to spending more quality time meditating upon Jesus as He is revealed in Scripture.

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2 Ellen White, The Ministry of Healing, p. 514.
Morning in the Valley

BY VERLIE WARD

THE FIRST LIGHT OF DAWN SNEAKS around the edges of my shades, calling me to a new day. I stretch and curl up again as I listen to the peep of California quail foraging for food in the garden and the chatter of wrens, robins, and sparrows as they joyously welcome this day.

My brain begins to ask questions: What day is it? What classes do I teach? What committees and appointments lie before me? I sense the hurry mode springing into action, followed by the calming words of the chapter I am memorizing: “O Lord, you have searched me and you know me. You know when I sit and when I rise” (Ps. 139:1, 2, NIV).

I am caught in the wonder of this first thought: the God who knows my inmost heart cares for me this very day. “You hem me in—behind and before; you have laid your hand upon me. Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain. Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast” (verses 5-10, NIV).

What reassurance I find in these words to anchor me this new day! The Eternal God is aware of my time and place in the grand scheme and has His hand upon me.

Henri Nouwen speaks of this waiting. He writes, “The mystery of God’s presence, therefore, can be touched only by a deep awareness of His absence. It is in the center of our longing for the absent God that we discover His footprints, and realize that our desire to love God is born out of the love with which He has touched us. In the patient waiting for the Loved One, we discover how much He has filled our lives already.”

I find myself being drawn to the Scriptures, reading from the book of Isaiah: “He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. . . . Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted. But he was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities: the chastisement of our peace

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was upon him; and with his stripes we are healed” (Isa. 53:3-5).

I am suddenly aware that this gift of peace, given to me today, was purchased at an infinite cost. I am drawn inexorably to the cross and picture myself with Mary and John, looking up in deep sorrow at the dying Saviour. I find myself singing the words of a familiar hymn:

“I take, O cross, thy shadow for my abiding place;
I ask no other sunshine than the sunshine of His face;
Content to let the world go by, to know no gain nor loss;
My sinful self my only shame, my glory all the cross.”
I remember standing on the beach on the Oregon coast early one misty morning some years ago. On the cliff far above me stood a rugged tree that had lost most of its foliage, torn off by onshore winds. Its naked arms reminded me of the cross. I began to sing “Beneath the Cross of Jesus” as I listened to the breakers crash through the mist and curl up at my feet. Suddenly the gray dawn was shattered by a shaft of sunlight that cut through the fog, reflected across the water to my feet, and held me riveted to the spot. The Presence! I had caught a majestic glimpse of a risen Lord who can penetrate the densest darkness. For a moment, I understood how Jacob must have felt when he awoke after his dream, how Abraham’s heart skipped when he heard the bleat of the lamb caught in the thicket. You are the God of the present; You are here today!

I recall the words of Thomas Kelly that remind me that I do not need to leave this “Presence,” but can hold on to it throughout the day. He writes, “Deep within us there is an amazing inner sanctuary of the soul, a holy place, a Divine Center, a speaking Voice, to which we may continually return.” When I return to this inner sanctuary, I am able to carry this frame of mind with me into the world and the many activities of the day. While on one level I may be listening, talking, attending to the needs of others, at a profoundly level I can hold on to the gentle invitations of the God of the universe, who bids me rest in Him. He invites me, “Come unto me, all ye that labour and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matt. 11:28). This inner life is invigorated and sustained by the One who is always accessible, always there.

When I take this presence of the risen Lord with me out into the world, I see Him in the faces of children, I hear Him speaking through my pastor on Sabbath, I discern Him in the faithful tradespersons who skillfully perform their tasks. I hear Him in the music of Mozart, Bach, and Beethoven, in the songs of praise rendered by the college choir, and even in the patter of rain on the windowpane.

Once again I am led to reflect on Him. “Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence?” The absent Lord is the ever-present one.


Verdie Ward is a professor of education at Walla Walla College in College Place, Washington.
GROWING UP SPIRITUALLY NURTURED by my preacher-father's prayers, I became a believer. Early in my ministry I attended a prayer seminar at camp meeting. I took notes and instituted a prayer discipline.

I prayed often. I prayed with people in trouble. I prayed for people who were sick. I prayed in church for just about anybody and everything you can imagine. Seldom did I pray for myself: I didn't know how, and I didn't want to be self-centered. Occasionally I recognized an uneasiness that I came to understand later.

I was busy saving the world—so busy that I had very little time for family, something I now deeply regret. It was on one of those rare Saturday night family occasions at a Washington, D.C., café-bookstore, waiting for hot chocolate and sandwiches, that I browsed in the book section and found a book that set me on a new course.

I had never heard of spiritual formation or spiritual directors and meditation—or if I had, I must have dismissed them as either heresies or wild and crazy ideas. The book on meditation absorbed me well into Sunday morning, and when I finished it, alone in my study, I prayed for myself as I had never prayed before.

Thus I embarked on a quest for personal meditation, prayer, and mysticism. There is no need to blanch at the word mysticism. It's a perfectly sound word that merely describes a way of knowing beyond your physical senses; thus it accurately describes the life of anyone who believes in God and a world of the unseen. It is not a belief system or a set of doctrines. When we talk or think about love, prayer, meditation, revelation, inspiration, perception, intuition, or imagination, we are working in the realm of the mystical.

This discipline of meditation was present truth for me. I wanted a deeper spiritual life, not just the busy rounds of a young pastor on the way up in the system. In time I turned to the writings of Ellen White (which I have always respected) with a new set of filters. Here I found a true mystic, one who explicitly declared belief in and interaction with the unseen. I had met a soulmate who spoke of meditation and contemplation and offered a most wonderful and liberating concept of imagination.* Wow!

Led, I am certain, by the Holy Spirit, I established a protocol: reading, pondering a Bible verse, then awaiting the still small voice. No, God's voice has never been audible. But fed by His Word, I began to recognize His ways in my life.

Sometimes I'll simply reflect on what the Holy Spirit has shown me in Scripture. I've sat quietly and imagined the scene pictured in the Old Testament story of Elisha and the young servant (2 Kings 6:8-17). I've seen and read names and real situations in my life at some moments as the enemy army (verse 15), and I've been shown the many resources that God can use to help me if only I ask and open my life to their help (verse 16).

For 35 years God, the Spirit, and Jesus have spoken to me through my imagination as I picture Scripture. I heartily recommend this: work quietly in the Psalms, Ecclesiastes, 1 Peter, all of the Gospels.

Does God talk back? You bet.

* See the explicit instruction to meditate, using the imagination to experience biblical scenes and themes in Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, p. 1; The Desire of Ages, p. 83; The SDA Bible Commentary, vol. 5, p. 940; The Ministry of Healing, p. 488.

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HAVE YOU EVER BEEN TO CALVARY? I'M not talking about an excursion to the Holy Land, but a journey in your imagination. Have you climbed the hill called Golgotha in your quiet time alone with God?

I had heard many times that it would be well to spend a thoughtful hour in contemplation of the life of Christ, and to let the imagination grasp each scene, especially the closing ones. And so one morning I carefully studied the relevant Scriptures, asked the Holy Spirit to sanctify my imagination, and made my own personal pilgrimage to Calvary.

I was startled by the intensity of that moment. So many sights. So many sounds. So many emotions. Angry onlookers. Weeping women. Scoffing soldiers. Mocking priests. I felt oppressed in their presence and afraid. But most of all I felt a deep sorrow. I felt ashamed. How could we crucify our Creator?

My thoughts were interrupted by a voice from the cross, “Lord, remember me when You come in Your kingdom.” It was one of the thieves. I looked at him, noticing that the ravages of a wasted life were etched deeply on his face. He had been weighed in the balances and found wanting. And yet in his dying moment he turned in childlike faith to the dying Saviour: “Lord, remember me.”

Almost in spite of myself, I was caught up in the mystery of that moment. “Yes, Lord,” I prayed. “Remember me too when You come in Your kingdom.” Tears were streaming down my cheeks as I joined the penitent thief in looking expectantly to Jesus.

In the midst of the oppressive darkness, the face of Jesus was illuminated with a heavenly light. Even before He spoke, the peace of God began to flood my soul. “I say to you today, you will be with Me in Paradise.” An unspeakable joy filled my heart! Blessed assurance: I will be with Jesus in Paradise!

The wonderful truth that I had known in theory was now unfolding in my life as reality. Contemplation of the life of Christ always leads me to prayer. When I focus upon Jesus with a sanctified imagination, I respond with prayers of repentance for my waywardness, prayers of praise for His mercy and grace, and prayers of intercession for those who have yet to learn of His saving love. I know the grace and the growth that comes from quiet time each day in contemplation of the life of Christ. I am discovering for myself what was promised: “Our confidence in Him will be more constant, our love will be quickened, and we shall be more deeply imbued with His Spirit.”

* * Ellen White, The Desire of Ages, p. 83.

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C. Mervyn Maxwell: Discovering the Power of Pentecost

I can easily remember the excitement I felt several years ago when I made what I thought was a new discovery about Pentecost. I later learned that my discovery had been taught by numerous rabbis at least 800 years before I was born! So what was my “discovery”? Namely, that the day of Pentecost fell on the anniversary of the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai.

According to Exodus 19:1, 2, the Israelites reached the foot of Mount Sinai early in the third month, the month called Sivan. Pentecost likewise fell early in the month of Sivan. Now, Pentecost could not be a precise anniversary of the giving of the Ten Commandments, for it was tied to the first weekday after the seventh Sabbath following Passover (Lev. 23:15-17). But the linkage of Pentecost to a Sabbath can easily lead us to think of the Ten Commandments, while its falling on a weekday reminds us that the commandments are to be honored every day.

But why was my discovery exciting to me? Because it led me to see that the falling of the Holy Spirit in Acts 2 was given to help people obey Christ’s commandments! It was a fulfillment of Ezekiel 36:27: “I will put my Spirit within you, and cause you to walk in my statutes.”

Only a short time before Pentecost, Jesus had given the disciples a commission (or commandment) to go into all the world and preach the gospel, teaching everyone to “observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you.” Moments before taking off for heaven, Jesus had instructed the disciples to stay in Jerusalem until they should receive “power from on high,” whereupon they were to be His “witnesses”; that is, after receiving the power, they were to begin fulfilling the commission to teach people to obey.

So, on Pentecost, an anniversary of the giving of the Ten Commandments on Mount Sinai, the power fell, and immediately the disciples and their close associates obeyed. They went out into the streets and began to witness, to teach people to do what Jesus had said they should do.

As I thought about this, I became impressed again that in Acts 2 there is no evidence of ecstasy! There certainly isn’t a shred of evidence that anyone began rolling on the floor and laughing foolishly.

I like to think that it’s high time Seventh-day Adventists took “Pentecost” away from sensationalism and restored it to its proper significance as empowerment to obey.

C. Mervyn Maxwell is professor emeritus of church history at the SDA Theological Seminary in Berrien Springs, Michigan.
The day began as any other Sabbath, an early start to prepare for worship with our church family. But it proved anything but routine.

At church, my friend Greg handed me a cassette tape from the Festival of Faith he had attended the previous weekend. It was important, he said. I should listen to it soon.

After our enjoyable Sabbath dinner at home, my wife headed off for her 3:00-11:00 shift as a nurse, leaving me with our sleepy young son. The house was very quiet as he napped, and since I couldn’t go anywhere, I decided to check out the cassette tape. In the stillness of my living room the booming voice of C. D. Brooks came through the stereo speakers.

Within moments I was engaged. As Elder Brooks powerfully described the essence of righteousness by faith, I was deeply moved. He illustrated the simplicity of the gospel by describing the sweet smile on his mother’s face as she went to sleep in Jesus. He pointed out that she had a limited education and had never taken part in any of the theological debates on the topic of salvation.

My heart began to long for the peace of the smile he described, especially as he led me to see myself at the foot of the cross. Overcome with emotion impossible to convey in these few words, I too found my arms clinging to the rough-hewn wood of that cross and my face pressed into the damp ground. I realized with clarity that my sin had put Jesus there, and that somehow (amazing grace!) His being there also cared for my sin. Tears poured down my face, and I prayed without uttering a word. When the voice on my stereo stopped, I sat in the silence and made a new commitment to my Saviour.

That moment radically altered the course of my life. I can’t count the times I’ve found my way back there in the years since then, clinging to the rough wood at the foot of that cross, knowing that I had no right to be there except for His invitation. Each time, hearing all the commotion, feeling the rough wood and the damp earth, I again sense my great need and this great opportunity; a wave of amazing grace flows over me.

That Sabbath long ago set the stage in my life for not just one renewal, but a place of spiritual refuge where I have gone to be renewed again and again.

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Renewed and Reconciled
How God rebuilds the oneness of His church

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

“Let us not be hasty in being reconciled. The peace we seek between us must last more than an hour or an afternoon. If peace is to endure, our hearts must meet on many days, renounce their differences, and covenant to spend a while together.”—Anonymous.

There are some gifts of the Spirit that only seem to follow in the train of others. If all the good things heaven wants to give us came all at once, we’d have no room to hold them and would lose most of the blessing. So the Spirit has sovereignly arranged that gifts to bless the wider church come only after those that renew us individually and privately.

As men and women called by Christ, we begin to pray because we have been commanded to pray (1 Thess. 5:17). Knowing in our hearts the deep hunger that finds its nourishment only in Him, we pray for friends and family who may have no use for prayer themselves. We pray for fellow members of the church, inviting God to give them greater grace and richer peace, little knowing how He will use us to be the answers to our prayers. We pray that hard hearts will be softened, rigid attitudes melted, and differences be put aside.

We pray for unity within God’s church, by which we often secretly intend that God will assist all others in arriving at our point of view. It is good to pray, and so we do, assured our intercessions will help change the world.

But no one ever honestly prayed who hasn’t felt the tug of conviction in the heart. The very act of praying opens up our lives to God’s faithful and unchanging scrutiny. As I pray for the cold hearts of my fellow church members, I am led to remember what responsibility I may bear for their lack of warmth and passion. Have I righteously corrected someone who might better have been quietly embraced? Have I built a barrier to trust that makes it hard for them to hear the everlasting gospel, at least from me? Have I clung tenaciously to viewpoints that the Spirit has privately been urging me to abandon? The unblinking gaze of the Spirit in my life reveals how much the unity for which I pray has been hindered and even been made impossible by the way I have lived.

This godly recognition rarely comes upon me all at once: for days, perhaps for weeks, I live with a growing sense of just how much I hold in my own hands the success of what I pray for. Because the Spirit is faithful, I begin to feel the first twinges of regret, then sorrow, for the ways in which my living has blocked answers to my prayers. I start to mourn the insensitive word, the cutting remark, the frosty silence, that reduced some other Christian to a lesser status in my eyes or in theirs. I feel the heart-
heaviness that finally understands my own sin. Driven to my knees, I now pray for myself as the great obstacle to unity. Repentance—sorrowful yet sweet, arrives—another gift of God. I plead the blood of Jesus in my place.

The grace that has come upon me now requires a wider expression. I seek out the one to whom I have been Pharisaically correct, the one I injured by my silence, and admit that I bear at least some responsibility for the gulf between us or between them and Christ’s body. These are words that wound my pride (hopefully with fatal consequences) as I confess the part I played in their coldness, their indifference, their estrangement. Because I can’t assume that the process that took days or months to mature in my life will be instantaneously complete in them, I can’t require immediate assurance of their forgiveness. They, too, may need a time with God in which they find the grace to let go of my sin. The good thing God desires to happen between us may not happen overnight.

Confessing the sins by which I injured or hurt another believer always requires me to reassess my real position in the body of Christ. I can no longer maintain a role as lofty intercessor or righteous counselor; now I bend to wash my brother’s feet with clearer understanding of my status as a servant. It is not an act of imagination that causes me to reassess the power equation between us: it is the grace of Jesus moving on my heart that allows me to finally see my brother with the full value with which Heaven sees him. I put away my old and carnal desire for the supremacy, even the spiritual supremacy, not as an act of will, but as a candid admission of the truth: there is just one status at the cross.

Humility, as it always seems to, has come with a dose of humiliation. As wounding as it feels, I know this is the way of life, of health, of peace, for me and for the wider body of believers. Relinquishing my self-appointed role as judge and jury, priest and counselor, I discover the blessedness of belonging to a fellowship of struggling but forgiven sinners. I need their warmth, their intercessions, their forgiveness. I need their quiet embrace and their counsel. I begin, albeit faintly, to understand the joy of living in a Spirit-created unity with my brothers and sisters in which each of us exercises gifts given for the common good.

This is a process through which I must pass not once but many times. Reconciliation, hard and painful at first, becomes sweeter with each friendship restored and each sin forgiven. Through the grace of Jesus, there will yet come a day when I seek it as a first impulse, sparing both myself and my fellow believers these long intervals in which we spar with each other.

In that undivided body, Jesus’ prayer for us will finally be answered, for we will be one even as He and the Father are one (John 17:20, 21).

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists.
Nilton Amorim: Humbled at the Heart

The Union President Finally Arrived at the mission station. Coming to my house, he took me aside and asked if I would accept an assignment in another country of the same union. It was an emergency, he said, and he needed me there.

I could not believe my ears! There was enthusiasm in his face, but not in mine. In fact, I was angry. I had in my hands a letter from the division office, informing me that the union had voted my permanent return and that I should start packing to go home.

A permanent return is a normal procedure when a missionary requests it. But whenever it is voted unilaterally by the administration, it is the equivalent of being fired. That was the reason for my anger. That unilateral decision had not only been taken without any explanation, but also after I had received positive feedback about my work and more responsibility had been added to my job description.

“Thank you, but I am already preparing to go home,” I said tersely. “Here is the division’s letter.” His face abruptly changed color. I continued pouring out my frustration, implying through my words how hypocritical the whole process had been.

Recomposing himself, he explained that he needed a budget for a physician, but the division was unwilling to allocate an extra budget. So he had used an administrative tactic: knowing that the division secretary was my friend, he had threatened to send me home if he did not get the extra budget. Unbeknown to him, the division secretary had taken him at his word and started the permanent return process.

The president’s explanation did not quench the burning anger inside my heart. It seemed so unfair to be caught in the crossfire of two leaders who each wanted to have his own way.

The president called a meeting with all the teachers of the station, who then tried to convince me to stay. But I was too hurt to change my mind.

I have to confess that not much prayer had occurred in that process. Finally, I fell on my knees and poured out my heart to the Lord. While I was in prayer, a question came vividly to my mind: “Who is going to profit or win in this struggle?” The question continued to haunt me even after my prayer: “Who is going to win?”

I told my wife about the troubling question, certain that it had come from the Lord. Together we asked ourselves: “If we go home, who will win and who will lose?” We considered the options:

1. We will end up losing, because we are happy in the mission field.
2. The president will lose, because he will have no clear explanation to give to his board for his blunder.
3. The field will lose, because it is not easy to attract missionaries who know the language and are willing to work in remote areas.
4. God will lose, because His work will suffer and two of His workers will remain miles apart in their hearts.
5. Only Satan will win.

I turned to my wife and asked, “Well, dear, should we just hand the enemy the victory trophy?”

“No way,” she declared.

We knelt together in our home and asked the Lord to change our feelings and let the victory be His. As we prayed, an amazing feeling washed over us. Peace returned. We were smiling again.

Suddenly the president knocked at the door, and we invited him in. Sadness was evident in his face, and he indicated that he had just come to say “goodbye.” Without much explanation, I informed him that we had decided to stay.

The man was transfixed. He threw his arms around me, and I saw tears in his eyes. We prayed together in my home, grateful for the reconciliation that was happening.

He left with a smile on his face. In fact, I’m sure that there were smiles all around—on our faces, and in heaven. Prayer made us rethink our circumstances, and rethinking led, in turn, to reconciliation.

Nilton Amorim is president of the Quebec Conference.
A TIGHTENING OF THE THROAT, A quickening of the heart. It must be my usual crowded-airport claustrophobia. I take a deep breath and drag my suitcase onto the escalator. Relax. You've seen people before. Just give yourself some space.

But as I stare at the neck of the man beside me, I realize that this feeling is more than a country girl's awe at the crowds around her.

I edge closer to the man. His padded gold work suit hugs his body like a dirty cocoon. Leaning over, I catch a glimpse of his face—jowled, bristly, and set in a stoic stare. My timid smile bounces off his eyes like sparks off a welder's mask.

What's he thinking? Suddenly, I simply have to know. Barely restraining my hand from patting his tired-looking shoulders, I look around me instead. Row upon row of humanity boards the escalator, adjusting their bags and setting their veiled stares in place. Mothers and daughters stand together as though estranged. Are they happy? Big, burly airport crewmen and a weathered old woman travel past my field of vision on the up escalator beside me.

Why don't they talk? Why aren't they smiling? My own grin seems clownish in the face of their studied isolation. Once again my fingers flutter forward to touch someone, anyone, with—

With what?

I feel the question as deeply as though a judge has directed it straight at me. What do you want to touch them with?

A small girl shuffles beside me, clinging tightly to a boy's hand. Her brother? For a moment our eyes meet. Would he notice if she left, if she cried, if she asked him for a kiss? So young and so alone.

I scan the lonely crowd again, and a crazy vision begins to form. I see myself reaching toward the nearest person, an earringed boy with blue hair, with a hug that would make him feel love. But my arms don't stop with the boy. They stretch longer and longer, encompassing everyone in the corridor, as far as I can see, around the world.

“You are now leaving the people mover. Watch your step as you exit.” Startled into reality, I obey the recorded instructions and step to my left. I blink several times. Without boarding a plane, I've taken a long journey and come back changed.

I'm not ashamed now. My tears are real, and I don't care who sees them. I look directly at each person I pass, holding their gaze as long as I can. Why? I can't stand the thought of all these people missing the greatest Friend in the world. I can't bear knowing they haven't met my Jesus. Maybe in my unashamed eyes they can see His gaze.

Maybe. But I'm not going to stop at the airport. Every grocery clerk I meet, every sales representative who calls, every face in a magazine makes me feel it again: the throat-tightening need to reach them all before it's too late.

It's become a passion for me, this touching of lives. Being a Christian calls for more than a passing interest in every person I meet. Christ's life on earth is example enough to prove it. And if I ever doubt? I'll find the nearest airport and walk it until I remember again. “We are therefore Christ's ambassadors, as though God were making his appeal through us” (2 Cor. 5:20, NIV).

Sarah Coleman is a junior English major at Walla Walla College and an intern at the Adventist Review for the summer of 1998.
'LL PUT UP THE FIRST $1,000 TO RENT THE best auditorium in town.” The elder’s words almost knocked me out of my chair.

The church board had been brainstorming about evangelism and what we could do to make a positive difference in that large metropolitan area when an exciting consensus began to emerge. Because God had big things in mind, this group obviously had big things in mind. Each comment moved us closer to recognizing evangelism as our first priority and committing the funds necessary to act. I knew we were being led by a Higher Power, but this was unbelievable!

The unabashed enthusiasm of a respected church officer spurred that small group of leaders into action. The question was no longer whether we would go forward, but how we would begin. Others echoed the elder’s declaration with additional pledges until we had enough money committed in that room to capture the attention of the church.

This was what classmates and I had dared to dream that ministry would be like when we shared visions in college. I’ll never forget the wave of amazing sensations that overwhelmed me. I think I understand the feelings the disciples must have experienced as they surrendered to the energy of the Holy Spirit on the day of Pentecost.

The inspiration didn’t end with the adjournment of the meeting. We moved through the labyrinth of church committees with startling success. The business session approved a historic allocation for evangelism, and both the conference office and the North American Division offered to contribute. Emboldened by what God was doing, we arranged to hold our evangelistic crusade at one of the city’s most prestigious venues. The management there agreed to a parking package that would provide parking at no cost to our visitors.

Fellow pastors in the city joined in the planning and execution of a program that was as inspiring as it was superbly organized. Talented musicians came from near and far to enrich the ministry of music. Each night was a new adventure with God.

As the meetings drew to a close, we faced an interesting logistical problem: the placement of the orchestra pit precluded a traditional altar call. Would listeners respond? Imagine how our team felt when 148 people crowded onto the stage of that beautiful auditorium to signify their willingness to accept the three angels’ messages.

In that series our team shared the gospel message with people from practically every strata of society and launched a citywide evangelistic program—all of it sparked by the enthusiasm of one member to see more souls in the Lord’s kingdom.

Walter Pearson is director/speaker of the Breath of Life television ministry.