O Jerusalem

Getting Excited About Bible Study

The Soul of a Giant

Religion in China
Intertwined Themes?
Travel plans changed, leaving me with an entire Sabbath afternoon to read back issues of the Review. What a blessing!
Am I correct in sensing two dominant themes?
1. A call to our young people to get involved in their churches.
2. Emphasis on enlarging our vision of “mission” and cultural understanding.


The cover of that April issue asks the challenging question: “Can he [Dwight Nelson] reach Gen Xers and still reach everyone else?” A pertinent—and fearful—question.

Not only do we need to think globally about gospel and culture for “foreign” missions among Muslims, Hindus, etc. I believe we must be just as creative and tolerant about reaching/winning back/retaining our own Gen Xers.

Keep challenging us. Keep expanding our vision!

—Lois R. Moore
VIA E-MAIL

Some Good People
Jeris E. Bragan’s “A Few Good People” (June 11) was a creative, inspiring thesis reviewing the history of Christ’s followers through the ages. Victory after victory took place in spite of the devil’s effort to destroy through persecution and other countless means. I found Bragan’s article tear-jerking in spots, but with a triumphant climax under the Holy Spirit’s leading that has kept the “chess game” going!

And God will continue to move the hearts of people until the glorious appearing of the King of kings is no longer just a hope, but a victorious reality. Thanks for the inspiring message.

—Laurice K. Durrant
KEENE, TEXAS

Urban Ministry
Regarding Bruce Campbell Moyer’s “Surrounded? Thank God!” (June NAD Edition), while the emphasis on reaching the unreached and unchurched is truly appreciated, the method to be used (10 percent of Adventists moving to New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, and Toronto to network for Jesus and make friends through their schools, homes, clubs, businesses, etc.) is not the plan that God’s people used in the patriarchs’ day or that we should use today.

A braham prayed for and witnessed to city dwellers while living in the country. Jonah was not called to live in Nineveh in order to witness to its people. Jesus did travel from city to city witnessing, but did not live permanently in the cities.

If only there were a way to write the message of this article in the hearts of every one of God’s people! This heaven-ordained philosophy would change our homes, our parents, and the precious children born to our homes—from much pain to much joy. I wish this article could be run every year; perhaps its message would sink into our thinking.

—Bonnie Evans
DEER LODGE, TENNESSEE

What’s Love Got to Do With It?
I appreciated Keith Burton’s excellent “What’s Love Got to Do With It?” (June 11 World Edition). What sometimes seems to be lacking among Christians is a response to Christ’s repeated command: “Love one another as I have loved you.”

In His 33 years on earth Jesus demonstrated how to love people of all backgrounds. He took children in His arms, but didn’t molest them. He took time to meet the needs of women without having an affair with them. He called men to be His followers and gave them jobs.

If we would share love as Jesus did, the work would soon be finished on this earth. What good is a form of godliness without the power thereof? What else is that power but the power to love as Jesus did?

—Ellen Crosby
VIA FAX

Letters
God's counsel through Ellen Gould White is to use country outposts to reach the cities: “As God's commandment-keeping people, we must leave the cities. As did Enoch, we must work in the cities, but not dwell in them. . . . Take your families away from the cities is my message. The truth must be spoken, whether men will hear, or whether men will forbear. The cities are filled with temptation. We should plan our work in such a way as to keep our young people as far as possible from this contamination. The cities are to be worked from outposts” (Maranatha, p. 184).

—Patricia J. Smith
Sondheimer, Louisiana

God Without Limits
In his “God Without Limits” (June NAD Edition), John Nixon states, “Eternity is not endless time, but the absence of time. God. . . . possesses the whole of His existence in one indivisible present.”

Not only does Nixon have an argument with the dictionary, but in all my studies I have never found such a concept in Scripture. In fact, as far as I am concerned, such a concept is meaningless.

When the saints inherit eternal life, will they suddenly find themselves outside of time or “in one indivisible present” (whatever that means)? Psalm 90:2 states, “From everlasting to everlasting, thou art God.” Simply stated, God’s existence has no beginning and no end. As a direct corollary, neither does time.

I believe that Nixon would do well to heed the injunction: “The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us. . . . that we may do all the words of this law” (Deut. 29:29).

—Timber Zwonkin
San Jose, California

Another Good One
Eileen Greenwalt’s “Honor Thy Father and Mother” (May 21 Cutting Edge Edition) was outstanding! I keep reading articles and stories in the Review that I have to read several times. It took courage to put this new face on the Review. I thought that the journal was just fine the way it was, but count me as another who applauds your work and, above all, your willingness to take risks in an effort to nurture the whole church.

—Kay Gunter
Rome, Italy

Eat Your Weet-Bix
I read with interest Beth Schaefer’s “Popular Breakfast Cereal to Help Ease Hunger in North Korea” (A pr. 23 AnchorPoints Edition). As Adventists we admire the work our church is doing through A D R A in feeding the hungry, guided by the words of Jesus: “I was hungry, and you fed Me.”

Many readers of this report may be unaware that the donor of the more than 1.2 million Weet-Bix, the Sanitarium Health Food Company, is owned and operated by the South Pacific Division of Seventh-day Adventists. The health food work of our church in this division began in the late 1800s with the importing of health foods from Battle Creek, encouraged by Ellen White and led by her son Willie. In 1898 Sanitarium began production in Australia. Weet-Bix has been made by Sanitarium for more than 70 years. The company exports breakfast foods and meat substitutes to more than 25 countries, and the profits fund more than 50 percent of the South Pacific Division’s budget.

Without Sanitarium, thousands of people in this division would have never heard the good news of Jesus and the salvation He offers.

—Geoffrey Frauenfelder
Sydney, Australia

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Vol. 175, No. 33
O Jerusalem

“Jerusalem is built like a city that is closely compacted together. That is where the tribes go up, the tribes of the Lord, to praise the name of the Lord according to the statute given to Israel” (Ps. 122:3, 4).*

From the Mount of Olives the morning sun bathes Jerusalem in soft beauty. The Kidron Valley lies directly below you: to the left lies the valley of Ben-Hinnom, where anciently children were offered as a burnt sacrifice to Molech.

The Mount of Olives itself is totally bare, wholly covered with Jewish gravestones. Believing Jews expect the resurrection of the dead to begin here when Messiah returns.

Nothing is flat: The Jerusalem skyline dips and weaves. But glittering in the morning light, dominating all is the Dome of the Rock, on Mount Moriah, where Abraham bound Isaac to the altar, and where the Holy of Holies once stood.

The currents of 3,000 years of history swirl around this city. The Jebusites built a city here, seemingly impregnable. But Joab discovered the entrance to the water shaft, climbed up, and opened a way to David and his men. King David made it his capital; it covered only about eight acres.

Solomon extended the city, built the magnificent Temple complex. During the next 3,000 years Jerusalem would change hands over and over—to the Babylonians, back to the Jews, to the Romans, Turks, Crusaders, British, and at last, in 1948, to the Jews once again.

Nothing is straight here. The streets of Jerusalem twist and turn: Jews, A rabs, and Christians live together in a fragile peace. Religious fervor, love, hatred, wounds, and memories bubble and boil just below the surface.

“If I forget you, O Jerusalem, may my right hand forget its skill. May my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth . . . if I do not consider Jerusalem my highest joy” (Ps. 137:6).

The hills of En-gedi rise gray and forbidding along the Dead Sea. The sun hits you like a tsunami and the light blinds you as you trek up into this waterless wilderness.

But surprise! As you follow the ravine you come upon a stream, then pools, then a waterfall. These waters nourished David when he fled from King Saul.

Now our guide gives us an option. A bove the waterfall lies the cave where David spared Saul’s life, but the trip will take an hour’s climb around the mountain in the blazing sun. He paints a discouraging picture, expects maybe a dozen brave souls to make the attempt. But the people keep coming—104 of them!

This is the most energetic, enthusiastic group I have ever joined. Days are packed full: lectures and seminars each morning, guided tours each afternoon, more meetings at night. The people show up on time, drink in every moment, and are eager for more.

It’s an extraordinary group. Probably 150 have earned the Ph.D. or D.Min. degree. A lmost every Adventist college and university in the world is represented.

A palpable spirit of love, harmony, and appreciation pervades the conference. A common love of the Lord and His Word binds heart to heart and mind to mind.†

“From Zion, perfect in beauty, God shines forth” (Ps. 50:2).

Our Jewish guide stops. If we wish to enter the Dome of the Rock, we will have to do so on our own. We cross the courtyard, remove our shoes, and walk into this sacred shrine of Islam. We see the craggy rock at its center—which also is Judaism’s most hallowed place. Orthodox Jews wish this Muslim shrine gone, want to build the Third Temple right here. If they try to do so, we’ll see World War III.

But this place isn’t holy for us. Jesus didn’t die here, didn’t die in a holy place. He “suffered outside the city gate,” “outside the camp” (Heb. 13:12, 13). And thereby He made the whole world His, His holy place.

O Jerusalem, your problems will never be solved. Not to you, but to our Lord—He who wept over you—we entrust our future.

“I saw the Holy City, the new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride beautifully dressed for her husband” (Rev. 21:2).

* All Bible references are from the New International Version.
† See “Church Scholars Examine Biblical Essentials in Jerusalem,” pp. 18, 19 of this issue.
They Still Go

ROY ADAMS

“By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive as an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went” (Heb. 11:8).

As a young Adventist I would spend hours reading the book of Hebrews, trying—without plan or guidance—to scale its majestic heights. And always I would linger on the above passage, to marvel at the naked faith of this ancient giant.

Years later, at seminary, I came across a concept that made the passage even more meaningful to me. We do not fully grasp the impact of a biblical story, the notion suggested, until we understand its Sitz im Leben—its life setting, its mood, its cultural matrix, the complex circumstances that gave it birth.

In the case of Abraham’s call, for instance, put yourself in his setting. Join him as he struggles, in the wake of that extraordinary divine imperative, to make the decision of his life. Listen as he briefs his dumbfounded neighbors about the bizarre expedition he’s about to undertake. Look over his shoulders as he directs the household packing in preparation for the strange journey. Hear the braying of donkeys, the barking of dogs, the bleating of sheep, and the excitement of little children as the caravan sets out for a place unknown. Stay with them as the city of Ur begins to fade from view. How does the patriarch look? Is his face riddled with fear or filled with hope? Does he waver, or is he reconciled to the will of an inscrutable providence?

Having thus entered into the Sitz im Leben, go one step further and make the application. What is the message of this story for today? Are the stakes still high? Do we have that same dogged faith? Does God still call? Are we prepared to go?

Whenever an Adventist college graduation brochure falls into my hands, I study the list of majors to discover what fields are popular now. And I think I see a trend toward those professions commonly associated with simply making a living in the here and now.

Is that something to be lamented? Not necessarily. For the fact of the matter is that the divine call knows no limitations. It comes to us, whether we be fishers (Peter), or gatherers of sycamore figs (Amos), or civil servants (Daniel). Abraham, at his call, was neither a Bible worker nor a clergyman. Yet the light he set ablaze by his radical obedience to the divine call has shone clear down the centuries to our time.

God is no respecter of either persons or professions. Electricians will hear the call in these last days. And engineers. And computer specialists. And builders. And people in the arts. And in the sciences. And in business. In every walk of life. And they will take up the task—the tools of their “trade” in one hand, and the Bible in the other. In fact, it’s happening now, and the stakes are as high as ever.

In our July NAD issue we carried a story from Sudan. According to the account, “Pastor Joseph Malesh and an Ethiopian man,” part of a group of 11 on their way home from an evangelistic meeting in Sudan’s upper Nile region in late May, “were shot and killed” during an ambush by armed men.1 In an update on the tragedy, Middle East Union communication director Roland Fidelia reported that Pastor John Pel, the second pastor accompanying the group, and who’d been missing since the incident, is now believed to have been killed, bringing the death toll to three.2

A side from the tragedy, the part of the story that arrested my attention came at the end of Fidelia’s update. It said that the survivors of the incident (all young people)—far from being discouraged—“are prepared to go out again.”

Yes, God still calls. A bove the siren songs of ease and pleasure. He calls us away from the gaudy theater of our times to take up His task, and, like the ancient patriarch, to walk the road less traveled.

And they still go.

1 Under the category They Still Go (see p. 28), the Review carries, once each month, a list of people still making tough choices every day.
PLEASANT PLACES

It is Friday evening. A light breeze brings into the house the sweet aroma from the orange blossoms on the citrus trees. I remember the words of David: “The boundary lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; surely I have a delightful inheritance” (Ps. 16:6, NIV). I become aware that this is the inheritance the Lord has given me after a lifetime in His work.

My mind continues to bring up the other pleasant places that I have lived in. Those vineyards overseas where we labored, Helen and I, for 20 years. Pleasant places made even more pleasant and joyful by our two growing sons.

And then I remember some of the pleasant places in another way. During our now 18 years of retirement we have had the privilege to serve five times in volunteer service in some of those original pleasant places. The old saying “You can’t go back!” is not true. We have been back!

Pleasant places. Anyplace the Lord sends you can be pleasant. If you are a young couple and the Lord calls you, by all means go. Make it your career. You will always be glad you did. If you are older, go as a volunteer. Pleasant places are there, waiting for you to enjoy them.

As the orange blossom aroma continues to invade the home, I pick up my Review and settle back to read. Suddenly a horrible thought: What if we had not gone when the Lord called?

—Gus Brodeur, former Far Eastern Division Publishing Department director, now living in Avon Park, Florida

JUST HAVING A LITTLE FUN . . .

A LONG WAY FROM LINCOLN: In January Maranatha volunteers, in conjunction with Global Mission, built a mission chapel near Jayapura, Irian Jaya (west half of the island of New Guinea). On the way from the airport to the job site, the bus was accosted by men who jumped out from the jungle with bows and arrows. Fortunately, it was only a staged attack, and the young warriors were friendly. Here, volunteer Geneva Blankenbaker of Lincoln, Nebraska, poses with the warriors.

CAUTION TO READERS

We have learned that the “pen pal” request printed in the May 14 World Edition might have ulterior motives behind it. We urge church members not to send money or merchandise to individuals who say they’re writing on behalf of their local church. The only safe way to donate to a church is through the General Conference Secretariat, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; phone: 301-680-6640.

WE NEED YOU

Send Give & Take submissions to . . . Give & Take, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Fax: 301-680-6638; E-mail: 74532.2564@CompuServe.com. Please include phone number. Submissions will not be returned.
IT'S BEEN SAID THAT IN CHINA "IF YOU try to nail things down, you are hammering on the surface of the ocean."

This notwithstanding, we should make every effort to understand this great land, this "middle kingdom"— center of the world— with its fascinating culture, history, and religion. For with its people we share a common humanity. Its 1.2 billion inhabitants are children of God, even as we are— and destined, like us, for eternal life.

China's numbers defy imagination: one fourth of the world's population inhabits a mere 7 percent of its land area, in a country 160,000 square miles larger than the United States. Approximately 70 percent of these people live in rural areas. Nonetheless, China still has 13 of the world's 50 most populous cities. The great majority of the people are ethnic Chinese—or Han, as they have termed themselves since the Han dynasty (202 B.C.- A.D. 220). In addition, there are 54 separate national minorities, totaling 40 million. Nearly 40 percent of the Chinese people are under 18 years of age. Although Mandarin is established as the official language, the nation’s 50 major dialects and more than 1,000 variants persist in daily use.

Ancient Religions in China

The earliest form of organized religion in China was manifest in the fourteenth century B.C. when the Chinese kings, the aristocratic class, and later the masses adopted ancestor worship. It was believed that by praying to their departed forebears in the spirit world, devotees would reap the benefits here on earth.

It was not, however, until the sixth century before Christ that Chinese religion and philosophy really began to flourish. A contemporary of the prophet Daniel, Confucius (551-479 B.C.) evolved a system of social ethics and values that by the second century B.C. became the state religion. Rather than contemplating "the beyond," the main concern of Confucianism is ethical— how to conduct oneself in this world. It stresses family loyalty, personal virtue, and respect for others. The Confucian "golden rule" admonishes: "Do
not do unto others what you would not want others to do unto you.”

About the same time that Confucius was instructing his disciples, a rival school, called Taoism, was founded by the philosopher Lao-tzu. It taught that man must conform to the Tao (“way”)—a difficult-to-define term referring to a cosmic energy or force of nature. As a way of life it involves a quiet, unresisting acceptance of the course of nature. Taoism teaches an immortal soul and, like Confucianism, presents only an obscure picture of the afterlife.

Missionaries from India and central Asia brought Buddhism to China in the first century A.D. It did not really begin to make headway in the country, however, until the fourth century. Interestingly, in his early pre-Communist years, Mao Tse-tung had been a devout Buddhist as well as a student of the Confucian classics (the Analects).

In addition to the san chiao (“three great traditions”) of China, two other faiths were later introduced, both from foreign sources—Islam and Christianity.

The Islamic faith, founded in the seventh century A.D. by the prophet Muhammad, was introduced into the western portions of China in the wake of early Muslim invasions through central Asia. Today the Uighurs of Sinkiang province in western China are predominantly Muslim. All told, there are, reportedly, far more than 10 million adherents to Islam in China today.

Christianity in China

Christianity was long in coming to China. It was not until the seventh century A.D. that Nestorian Christianity (from Persia) penetrated the country. That brand of Christianity survived for more than 200 years and then largely disappeared. Successive Christian missionary efforts also did not last long, because of Christianity’s failure to become rooted in Chinese society and culture. In fact,
it used to be said that when a Chinese became a Christian, China lost a citizen. By contrast, Buddhism—though it also originated outside China—has become truly indigenized into the Chinese culture.

During the 1800s Catholic and Protestant missionaries finally began to make some headway in China. But then came the Boxer Rebellion of 1900, an all-out effort to expel foreigners, especially missionaries, from China. Scores of missionaries, both Catholic and Protestant, along with tens of thousands of Chinese Christians, were massacred. But many congregations continued to meet in secret, and their numbers

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ACKNOWLEDGMENT:
Northern Asia-Pacific Division president P. D. Chun presents a plaque of appreciation to a Bureau of Religious Affairs official.

WONDER WALL: Stretching over one twentieth of the earth’s circumference—from Bo Hai, part of the Yellow Sea, to the Gobi Desert—the Great Wall of China (here shown at the Badaling Pass, near Beijing) contains enough building materials to girdle the globe at the equator with a barrier eight feet high and three feet thick. It’s one of the strangest structures ever erected. It snakes and loops and doubles back on itself, meandering across plains and valleys, scaling mountains, plunging into deep gorges and leaping raging rivers, for some 4,000 miles. If straightened out, it would span from New York to San Francisco and back to Salt Lake City.

Begun in the third century B.C., it reached its final form under the Ming dynasty (A.D. 1368-1644). Nearly a million laborers were conscripted to build it; and when they died, mostly from exposure, disease, exhaustion, and hunger, their bodies were buried in the foundations together with those who were bricked up alive for failing to work hard enough.

The Wall has thus earned the grim appellation of “the longest cemetery on earth.” Some Chinese argue that “though one generation was sacrificed to build it, it saved the hundred that followed.”

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GETTING READY: Presently we have nine students studying for the ministry at the East China Seminary in Shanghai, operated by the Three-Self Movement. Students are recommended by their local congregation, must have a high school diploma, and must pass an examination set by the seminary before they can be accepted into two- or four-year study programs.

THE LEGACY: Nestorian stone tablet, unearthed in Xian in 1625, bears witness to the work of these early Christian witnesses in China.
Protestant Christianity in China

In 1950 Protestant church leaders founded the Three-Self Movement to make the church truly indigenous and Chinese—through self-government, self-support, and self-propagation of the gospel. But the Cultural Revolution (from 1966 to 1976) interrupted church life with devastating consequences. Catholic and Protestant churches were closed down along with universities and other institutions. Ministers were assigned to secular jobs, and Bibles were burned in the streets. Christians were forced to gather in homes, as happened in the first century when Christianity was declared a religion illicitae. Yet this apparent adverse circumstance had a positive side, transforming a clerically centered church into a dynamic, lay-centered church and ministry. Since then lay leadership has played a very important role in Chinese Christianity.

The Bureau of Religious Affairs, a department of the Chinese government, governs all religious affairs. It has formally registered five religions: Buddhism, Islam, Taoism, Roman Catholicism, and Protestantism—of which Protestantism is reportedly the fastest growing.

According to a published report by the National Three-Self Movement Committee, “there are more than 12,000 churches open for public worship, among which more than 5,000 have been newly built.” A according to the same report, some 25,000 Protestant Christian groups meet in homes. “The total number of Protestant Christians in China,” it says, “is estimated at approximately 10 million.”

While the Seventh-day Adventist Church is not recognized as an independent denomination, there are an estimated 230,000 believers. They assemble for Sabbath services and midweek meetings in the Three-Self Movement churches and at registered “meeting points,” or house churches.

Is the Chinese church entering a new period of openness? In February of 1991 the China Christian Council became a full member of the World Council of Churches. “International contacts and exchanges with church groups and individuals abroad help Chinese Christians to appreciate the universality of our faith,” says the Three-Self report.

Problems and Challenges

Christian leaders see the following problems and challenges (among others) facing the church in China. 1. Bridging the age gap in leadership caused by the church’s inability to carry on adequate theological training for so many years. 2. Strengthening pastoral care and offering a ministry that can cope with the influx of new converts, particularly in rural areas where leadership is especially inadequate. 3. Helping people see that Christianity can make a positive contribution to social development so that the policy of religious freedom can be implemented to the full.

To reach the more than 1.2 billion inhabitants of the People’s Republic of China, the church will need to contextualize the kingdom message by a Christian manifestation of goodness and love in action. It’s a call for practical godliness. Non-Christians must first feel the effect of kingdom power before they will pay attention to the proclamation of the kingdom.

Rex D. Edwards is the director of continuing education for the Ministerial Department of the General Conference in Silver Spring, Maryland.
Five ways to draw nearer to God

1. Make Bible study a priority.

You want to be successful in everything you do. Well, what woman doesn’t? Why else do you perform 50 tasks at once: talking on the telephone while cleaning the coffee table with a dust rag in one hand and rocking the baby with the other?

Yet you must understand your desperate need of God and make Bible study a routine. Otherwise, more important earthly things will pop up. Pipes freeze over. Clothes washers break down. Noses run. Cars stall. Oprah Winfrey comes on.

When I spend time with God in the morning, my scurrying about later in the day proves more productive than when I do not spend that time with God. He promises to bless my activities (Deut. 28:8, 9) and He does.

2. Build a social identity around your spirituality.

Identify with God the way you identify with other cherished family members. Say, “He is my Saviour! Mine!” Claim Him! When you realize that His Holy Word is His way of talking to you personally, the Bible will charm you, draw you, and fill you. And when you attend church, don’t ask God to give you a blessing and then sit around waiting and expecting it to come. I used to do that, and I became a spiritual hermit! For the longest time I couldn’t figure out why I wasn’t growing spiritually when I was reading my Bible and asking God to bless me.

I kept praying and begging God, “Fill me with Your Holy Spirit.” Meanwhile, I went to Sabbath school like a rag doll with movable parts, while my insides were hollow. God must have looked at me and said, “Why do you want My Spirit? When you receive it, will you spread the gospel? Will you become involved at your place of worship?”

Because I didn’t understand why my prayers were not being answered positively, I complained to my friend Bill Ridley. I explained that lately at church something terribly offensive would often happen and I wouldn’t feel like attending church anymore.

Guess what Bill told me. “Don’t pray for a blessing,” he said. “Ask God to make you a blessing.”

I know Bill very well, and so I did not take offense at his advice. I changed my prayers. I begged God to make me a blessing to others, and since then, when I study my Bible, I comprehend it more fully. God opens my eyes to spiritual things I hadn’t seen before. I feel the Holy Spirit leading me. He also inspires me to share what I learn, and to get involved with making my church a more friendly place.
3. Invent no excuses.

Nobody has more time in a given day than you. Nobody! The same Lord who rains blessings on the good and the evil grants all of us the same 24 hours to spend every day.

Nobody is richer or poorer when it comes to having time. Some of us just stuff our time pockets more full than others. That's all.

4. Create a worship schedule.

Admittedly, during some of life's stages, creating a worship schedule may prove more difficult than at other times. When you're a single mother of three, working full-time and putting yourself through school, you'll have more conflicts with your study schedule than when you're 85, retired, and living alone.

I've been that single mom with three mouths to feed. I've had speeches to write, bills to pay, and news stories to anchor. I've felt like I couldn't possibly fit Bible study into my schedule. It was then that I challenged God.

"God," I prayed, "I'm so tired. You're going to have to give me extra energy to do all the stuff I have to do. Please, Lord, wake me wide-eyed early in the morning so I can study Your Word."

Three o'clock the next morning my eyes popped wide open. I had no desire to sleep, and classes didn't start until 8:00 a.m. So I got out of bed and studied my Bible for an hour. Then I suddenly felt very tired again and went back to sleep until 6:00. God and I met together that way for a few years.

5. Remember where God has led you in the past.

If you study your Bible diligently and act upon His Word, God will live in you. One spiritually fed woman can put away several hundred put-downs; I don't know why that is. The wisest man who ever lived said that Christians have more stamina and endurance than the ungodly. That doesn't mean that if you study your Bible regularly, trials won't come, you'll never feel anger, or you'll never feel tempted to rationalize on a biblical principle you know to be true. It doesn't mean Satan won't wage war against your family members. It just means God will give you the strength to deal with whatever trouble comes your way.

As you remember where God has led you in the past, you will be encouraged to confront the future. When I don't feel God's presence, I trust the lessons He's taught me. God never failed before. He never will fail in the future. ■

Tami Latsha writes from Auburn, Washington.
Is there any biblical evidence to support the idea that before Satan and his followers are destroyed they will acknowledge their sins and their deserved sentence?

In attempting to answer any biblical question, it is good to find a biblical passage or narrative that could provide an immediate explicit response. In the absence of an explicit passage, one could present a good case by bringing together several texts that linguistically and contextually suggest a probable answer.

In this case we have a passage that seems to express the idea contained in your question: “That at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father” (Phil. 2:10, 11, NIV). Let’s examine its content.

1. The event described takes place at the end: Philippians 2:6-11 describes the status of Christ before the Incarnation (verse 6), during the Incarnation (verses 7-8), His death on the cross (verse 8), His exaltation by the Father (verse 9), and the final subjection of all to Him. This last event takes place at the close of His work of redemption and will result in the healing of the universe.

2. Heavenly beings participate: John describes angels and other celestial beings as falling down before God’s throne and praising Him for His wisdom and power manifested in the glorious way in which He saves His people (Rev. 7:11, 12). They witness the judicial proceedings in heaven and they are absolutely persuaded that God is just in His judgments against evil (Dan. 7:10; Rev. 16:5; 19:1-10).

3. Humans participate: Paul includes the human race among those who will acknowledge the Lordship of Christ and glorify God. This eschatological expectation finds its roots in God’s Old Testament call to the nations to praise Him. His people were expected to come and bow down before Him (Ps. 95:6, 7), and the kings of the earth and all nations were invited to praise the name of the Lord (Ps. 148:11). Even nature was commanded to join this cosmic choir in praise to the Creator and Redeemer (verses 7-10).

4. Evil powers participate: The phrase “under the earth” may sound strange to modern ears, but in the ancient world it was commonly used to designate the realm of spiritual, demonic powers. Paul refers to those evil powers in order to emphasize that even they will finally recognize and confess that only God and Jesus are worthy of praise and worship. At that moment the cosmic conflict will come to an end.

We find in Israel’s history an interesting parallel to Paul’s description of the experience of those demonic powers. Joshua 7 narrates the incident of Achan’s hidden sin against the Lord and the people of Israel. After careful investigation the culprit is finally identified and confronted with his sin and its consequences. But just before the death sentence is executed to restore social and spiritual order, Joshua speaks to Achan: “My son, give glory to the Lord, the God of Israel, and give him the praise. Tell me what you have done; do not hide it from me” (verse 19, NIV).

In this context, to give glory to the Lord and to praise Him means that Achan accepts responsibility for his sin and declares that God’s judgment against him is deserved and righteous. This is not a confession of sin leading to forgiveness, but a recognition of the fact that the person is guilty as charged and that the verdict is just. God’s name is cleared before the death penalty is inflicted on the high-handed sinner.

Achan’s experience could be used to illustrate the experience of evil forces at the end of the conflict. The judicial process will conclude when those powers acknowledge that God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit are worthy of praise and worship. They will finally recognize that the sentence pronounced against them is righteous.

It would appear that it is God’s intention to persuade even the archenemy, Satan, that he is indeed a God of justice and love. No intelligent creature will go into eternal extinction thinking that God is not who He claims to be. They will all give glory to Him before giving up the breath of life.

Angel Manuel Rodríguez is an associate director of the Biblical Research Institute at the General Conference.

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Wow! What a Gift!

So why aren’t we shouting?

BY GEORGE W. REID

The following article was condensed from a devotional originally presented at the 1996 Annual Council in San José, Costa Rica.—Editors.

HERE WE STAND, ALL AGOG, WIDE-eyed, with the priceless gift in hand. We are justified—declared righteous before the court of eternity. In the blood of Christ we are reconciled. “We also rejoice in God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have now received our reconciliation” (Rom. 5:11, NIV).

When we choose Christ, hanging on Him our very will and life, He confers on us the full virtue of His life, death, and resurrection in a dynamic so potent that every plot of a million devils is confounded.

From the gloom of sin’s lair, its chill reaching from the very gates of Eden, we now are set into full harmony with our Creator. A warm glow floods our life. We take off the filthy rags of human weaving and put on the gleaming garment of His perfection. (Dare I use that word? Oh, yes, that’s what it is in every detail. Christ’s perfection—now made ours by a sweeping gift of grace.)

Imagine the joy! In one moment transformed from a starving pauper in the alleys of earth to an owner of measureless wealth, to noble standing, to joint heirship with Christ in His glorious kingdom that spans the universe. How does this happen? It is the fulfillment of the gentle words of Jesus: “Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father’s good pleasure to give you the kingdom” (Luke 12:32).

“Hallelujah!”

First, the Dessert

In this banquet everything is reversed. It is God’s feast, not ours. His ways, not our way. And the dessert comes first.

ILLUSTRATION BY LARS JUUSTEN
Soup, salad, and main dishes are all there, but the dessert comes first. We start at peace with Him, all at peace. God is the reign of cringing fear, the leaden weight of guilt. The gleams of the golden morning spill across the hilltops into our lives.

To be sure, there are clouds out there still—clouds that sometimes hang dark and heavy and oppressive. But we are free. We are no longer in bondage to sin and Satan. We are free. Free! Whatever storm rages across our world, we stand facing the wind. Beyond the storm the eye of faith spots the harbingers of a better day. We are delivered from the anxious times built upon ignorance and clouded by an uncertainty about salvation. We know how it all will end, and that end, as David put it, is “sweeter also than honey and the honeycomb” (Ps. 19:10).

Doesn’t your heart lift into the air by such jubilation? We hear the shouts of the prisoner, long in bondage, now set free. And the fact is, this prisoner was guilty as charged. By every accepted standard of justice, he deserves exactly what he is getting, and by all rights should end up in no good place. But now all that is changed. We were the enemies, scowling at God from our cages of sin, wrapped up in self, spitting blasphemies from tainted mouths, blaming Him for the tragedies of life, vowing someday to get even, and truly reflecting Lucifer in both attitude and behavior. What irony that noble beings, created in the very image of the Creator, can sink to this level!

In this very moment the Creator Himself, moved with compassion, comes to offer Himself as sacrifice, to have laid upon Himself the consequences of our rebellion. In our place He suffers the ignominy of extinction by eternal death, the rightful end of such corruption. Behold such love that none ever can fathom! While we were yet enemies, Christ died for the unrighteous.

Were We Really That Bad?

Satan’s first tactic is to persuade us that such language indulges in overstatement and melodrama, that the picture is not really us. We are upright people, well-washed, tidy, and groomed, as we have always appeared to be before our fellow citizens. From a purely human perspective, that may seem quite the case.

But what happens when we turn the coin over and see it from God’s perspective? Of all those ever worshiped as gods, only the one true God reveals Himself as infinitely moral. He is flawless character stands as the norm for all that is right or wrong. Despite an insistence within contemporary culture that morality is culture-bound and comparative, and that words such as right and wrong are no longer acceptable in contemporary society, these things can no more change than can God’s character.

“All thy ways are righteous.” The verdict in our case is “guilty as charged.” Not until we understand the pit from which we were lifted can we begin to grasp what it took to lift us. But the glory in our case is that those who were forgiven much love much. This sets the foundation for the future of the justified person.

But We’re So Distracted

Satan’s second ploy is to push into the background the very things we are reviewing here. He intends that tracking through the foothills must so occupy our attention that we will never reach the heights from which cometh our help. All these things—good things, for the most part—lead us to act as though the Saviour has evolved into a piece of history, a wonderful teacher in a faraway time and place who inspires us but is less than the center of our lives today.

In such a setting the sense of our lostness fades among the thousand urgent duties, and we live lives preoccupied, and the important falls victim to the urgent.

Adventists are world-famous as doers rather than thinkers. Jesus also was a doer, but His example must teach us how necessary it is to keep our walk with God the prime goal of our lives. Then the Holy Spirit can have His way with us.

Let us be altogether practical. What is God’s plan for the justified Christian who now realizes the magnificent dimensions of what it means to have such a gift? The Scriptures are as explicit about this as they are about Christ’s saving sacrifice. God’s plan is to transform that person into a dedicated, sanctified servant of God, filled with the joy of salvation.

Many of Us Don’t Get It

An unnecessary confusion persists among Seventh-day Adventists about justification and sanctification. Almost every church member is familiar with a well-known saying from Ellen White, that “sanctification is the work of a lifetime” (Selected Messages, book 1, p. 317). Although true, Ellen White never intended this as a plenary definition, for it is but a portion of the biblical teaching of sanctification. In her own writings she broadens the understanding of this experience.

On this statement, however, many of God’s people have erected a curious theological structure that promotes the concept of a lifelong process of improvement on which hangs our final acceptance with God. Since a person’s life stretches ahead of them, the process means a perpetual regression of certainty about salvation. Full acceptance with God seems to stand at the top of a long stairway, to be reached by some form of patient, persistent toil.
The truth that we are accepted by faith on the basis of Christ's sacrifice, and that we carry acceptance with us as long as we love and serve Him, seems to recede into the corner. In its place surfaces a program of merititorious moral improvement. As we climb the stairway of life, which indeed we all must, we go with unsteady step for fear that a mis-step may cost us the progress we have made, perhaps even eternal life itself.

Ellen White's earnest appeals for growth in Christian living, and her warnings to remain close to Christ, become bent into a message of uncertainty, with the result that what should be a reassuring gospel highway is plagued with struggling souls bound to a program of merit-bearing efforts. We are told that all success in this program comes from Christ, so that makes it Christ-centered. But sadly, the shoulders of this roadway are littered with pilgrims who have given up in despair. Further along, the despair degenerates into a comparison with others that silences the last songs of rejoicing. Some simply give up and disappear.

Getting It Right

We accept fully the truth that only by continuing in Christ is our place in the plan of God secured. It is possible to turn away. The Epistle to the Hebrews counsels us to "exhort one another every day . . . that none of you may be hardened by the deceitfulness of sin. For we share in Christ, if only we hold our first confidence firm to the end" (Heb. 3:13, 14, RSV). The Bible itself provides classic examples, and we are forewarned.

But to turn this possibility into a debilitating jeopardy, when Christ intends us to rejoice in the glorious good news, steals from us the pleasure to be found in His service. No true understanding of salvation can include the idea that we contribute to our own salvation. Paul's appeal to work out our salvation with fear and trembling never suggests more than carrying through to completion our commitment to Jesus, falling at the foot of the cross, then rising to newness of life. Our works of obedience have no merit in themselves; they show our sincerity only in His service.

Actually, the New Testament speaks of both justification and sanctification as works already accomplished. After reviewing the unsavory past of some of the Corinthian believers, Paul writes, "And such were some of you. But you were washed, but you were sanctified, but you were justified in the name of the Lord Jesus and by the Spirit of our God" (1 Cor. 6:11, NKJV).

What Difference Does It Make?

Now that we have touched the great truth of what happens to the person walking in Jesus, we have to ask the question, "What difference does it make?" Are we talking dry theory—theological rambling that never seems to find a point?

Real sanctification comes as God's gift of empowering grace, the work of the Spirit in hearts dedicated to Jesus. Watch as He turns over our natural selfishness, transforming our lives. It is not a case of obscure theology. What are the evidences? Homes where peace reigns, where tender compassion mediates between spouses, even when differences of opinion seek to divide; children who run to fling trusting arms around the necks of fathers and mothers; individuals who show genuine concern for neighbors and friends and strangers in need of help. Look for blossoming gifts of the Spirit, for patient and thoughtful people. The Spirit snuffs out gossip and self-satisfying criticism. He builds generosity on the ruins of former greed, promotes honesty in business. Christ's sanctifying power leads us to take initiative to seek reconciliation with those whom we may have hurt and to become living examples of what it means to represent Christ.

We may ask, is such living possible for mortals? In human power, no; but in the power of the cross, yes. To fall into the hands of Jesus is the ultimate joy of all eternity. And all this He gives us despite our fragile humanness. Let us claim Him now, today, tomorrow, and until His appearance fills the eastern sky and at last our pilgrimage is over.

George W. Reid is director of the Biblical Research Institute in Silver Spring, Maryland.
Church Scholars Examine Biblical Essentials in Jerusalem

BY JONATHAN GALLAGHER, AN ASSOCIATE DIRECTOR OF THE GENERAL CONFERENCE COMMUNICATION DEPARTMENT

With more than 230 participants from 40 countries, the First International Jerusalem Bible Conference June 8-14 brought together many theologians, pastors, and scholars from varied backgrounds. Cosponsored by the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, the Adventist Theological Society, and the Institute of Archaeology at Andrews University, the program blended theology and site touring that most agreed was a helpful aid to understanding biblical fundamentals.

Demonstrating Truth

Jerusalem mayor Ehud Olmert opened the conference and welcomed the delegates to the city “at a very special time,” the 3,000th anniversary of David’s proclamation of Jerusalem as Israel’s capital. “Both you Adventists and we believe that he did live here, too,” added Olmert, noting that some saw David as a mythical figure from some ancient legend.

Demonstrating the truth of the biblical account became a conference theme as a wide range of presenters gave more than 90 papers on subjects ranging from moral dilemmas to cosmogony through chiastic structures and practical Bible teaching.

Among the plenary sessions, Randall Younker, director of the Institute of Archaeology, gave examples in which archaeology could be used to confirm the historicity of the Bible, while George Reid, director of the General Conference Biblical Research Institute, showed how Sabbath observance changed from biblical principle to Sunday convenience, “a classic example of capitulation in the face of societal disapproval.”

Angel Rodríguez, an associate director of BRI, affirmed that “Scripture is more interested in what was accomplished by the atonement than explaining how it was accomplished.”

The practical aspects of faith were enhanced by the devotionalals. Reminding participants of the purpose of salvation, adult Sabbath school lesson editor Philip Samaan spoke of God’s work for us through Christ. “Jesus takes us, burdened with the guilt of sin, until He has brought us to glory. We are Christ’s project, and He does not give up on us until His project is completely finished.”

Also sounding a positive note, North American Division president Alfred McClure said, “It’s possible to be so preoccupied with bad news that we are blinded to the good news. We must never forget Jesus. We need to seek God’s presence, not His gifts.”

Where Jesus Walked

Such fundamental themes were complemented by the visits to Jerusalem and the surrounding area, where participants saw for themselves the layout of the ancient city, the places seen and routes walked by Jesus and the disciples.

GARDEN WORSHIP: Sabbath morning service was held at the garden tomb.

HOLY COMMUNION: Conference attendees take part in Communion near the garden tomb.

A CERTAIN SOUND: Richard Davidson, of the Adventist Theological Seminary, opens the worship service by blowing the shofar.
and some of the more dramatic remnants of history. For example, Hezekiah’s water tunnel, chiseled through bedrock to provide a safe and reliable water source for the city in times of siege.

The sight of learned professors sloshing through thigh-deep water as they relived history confirmed the dedication of church scholars to plumb the depths to discover truth, according to one observer.

One of the conference participants had been in Jerusalem in 1964 and had a good story to tell. Graham Mitchell, an Adventist from Lismore, Australia, decided to enter the International Bible Quiz, sponsored by the Israeli government. Winning at both state and national levels, Mitchell became the Australian representative and was flown to Israel. He achieved a perfect score on the first round in Jerusalem and made it to the final four.

In the final round Mitchell was neck and neck with a local rabbinical student. By answering the last question, presented by the president of Israel, Mitchell won, and became instantly famous throughout Israel.

His secret of success? Spending time with the Bible morning and night, and regularly preparing sermons and Sabbath school lessons. But Mitchell says that the facts are not the most important part. “Each person has to have their individual relationship with the Word,” he told the conference. He noted that much had changed since his first visit, when there were only a “handful of others visiting the sites—not coachloads like now!”

The Sabbath service in the quiet of the garden near the garden tomb provided the week’s highlight for many. With a moving Communion service and the inspiring words of Walter Pearson, speaker/director of the Breath of Life telecast, the impact of Calvary and its meaning hit home hard. U sing the story of the bronze serpent in Numbers, Pearson drew parallels with the cross, which, he noted, “not only draws mankind but keeps unfallen worlds by the love of God displayed.” He also emphasized contrasts, and the dangers of the serpent image.

“We must be careful not to become like the Israelites who ended up worshiping the image of the cure as an idol,” he commented. “We do not worship a symbol; we worship a risen Saviour. The serpent had no power in itself. Jesus is all power in Himself! I beg you, even at the garden tomb, never let the symbols overcome the Saviour.”

In the final meeting of the conference, held in the Church of the Upper Room, Dwight Nelson, evangelist for NET ’98, spoke deeply of the fundamental wants of this world. “What part do all the white papers of internal communication play when the world needs to hear the words of Jesus?” he asked in a question that pleaded for all theology to be relevant.

In that upper room, perhaps the place where the disciples had been changed from trembling cowards to victorious champions of the truth, Nelson, in a fitting finale to the Bible Conference, looked forward to the day when “the Holy Spirit will be poured out to enable us to testify boldly of Jesus.” And in case self should get in the way, he encouraged all to pray, “Lord, make me invisible.”
Programmed to Believe?

BY ROGER HUNTER, ENGLISH TEACHER, STANBOROUGH SECONDARY SCHOOL, WATFORD, ENGLAND

Religion is genetic." So claimed Professor John Burn, head of human genetics at Newcastle University, in a recent lecture in London. Burn's speech, transcribed in The Telegraph on July 15, was complex yet fascinating. He pointed out that religion has existed in every tribe and people throughout history, concluding that we are programmed to believe.

Further evidence of this genetic tendency can apparently be found from studies done at the University of California, where scientists have identified a region of the brain that is especially active during religious experience. (This area is also particularly active in epileptics.)

Evolutionary theorists have seized on this with a degree of glee and are putting forward the idea that religious belief encourages a number of benefits for humankind, thus ensuring the survival of the species. For example, say the theorists, religion encourages group unity and solidarity to a cause. Belief has also been linked to improved health, happiness, and, as Adventists can attest, increased life span. Even the act of praying seems to help reduce stress, while going to church helps the elderly achieve companionship and even allows them to be given support by wealthier, healthier members.

The theorists didn't comment, among other things, on the issue of martyrdom. After all, dying for one's beliefs, the ultimate honor for a true believer, does not ensure the survival of the species. Further, if one believes in Creation, then all this debate is specious and irrelevant. As the bishop of Oxford said: "It would not be surprising if God had created us with a physical facility for belief."

Once again, we've been shown that trying to explain God scientifically is like trying to mix oil and water—a futile waste of time.

Health Food Company Reacts to Contamination Threat

Following a June 29 letter claiming that its "liquid products" had been contaminated, the Sanitarium Health Food Company (SHF) in New South Wales, Australia, immediately recalled those products, says Robert E. Smith, SHF chief executive officer.

"When we received the threat, we immediately contacted the police and the department of health," Smith says. "They assured us the risk was remote. They didn't force us to take the product off the shelf, but we believe we had no alternative than to voluntarily recall the targeted stock. Our first priority must be consumer safety." Reports have already appeared in national media, as well as international wire services. The police investigation is continuing.

The stock involves only products distributed in Australia. No overseas shipments are affected, according to the company, which stresses its commitment to customer care and safety.

Sanitarium Health Food Company is owned and operated by the Seventh-day Adventist Church.—Adventist News Network.

India Series Yields 122 Baptisms

An evangelistic series sponsored by the Quiet Hour ministry in Nellore, India, resulted in 122 baptisms in June, reports John M. Fowler, an associate director of the General Conference Education Department and speaker for the series.

The program was the first initiative of its type conducted in Nellore in the past 15 years. Though Nellore, located 78 miles (130 kilometers) north of Madras, has just a small Adventist congregation, the series attracted an average nightly attendance of 700. The crusade was the result of a month of preparation which included cottage meetings, door-to-door visitation, and group Bible studies, says Fowler.

The newly baptized members formed two new congregations, and land was purchased for two new church buildings.

Arkansas Declares Safe Television Day Again

For the second consecutive year, Arkansas governor Mike Huckabee proclaimed May 8 "Safe Television for All Ages Day."

The proclamation honors KSBN-TV's mission to provide safe, wholesome, television programming and recognizes the station's second anniversary. Located in
Test Your Global Mission IQ

1. In the Andes near the equator, people in the forest of Putumayo eagerly receive the Word of God. As a result of Global Mission several Adventist groups have been formed. The northernmost of the three countries that border on the Putumayo River, this country is the only one that is part of the Inter-American Division. Which country is it?

A. Peru  
B. Brazil  
C. Ecuador  
D. Colombia

2. “For such a small place it is a miracle!” wrote Valdis Zilgalvis, union president, who with Andrejs Arinsh, union Global Mission coordinator, conducted meetings in Valka, Latvia. Among the 17 baptized were three doctors, a nurse, and an agricultural specialist. Valka is located in what union conference?

A. Polish  
B. Baltic  
C. Finland  
D. Nordic

3. Though separated by hundreds of desert miles, Brian Sampson and Adrian Young simultaneously had the same dream that led them to the Adventist Church. Brian is now eager to work for his people and testified at a camp meeting in Perth. Global Mission will help send a pastor to this remote region to assist lay pastors. This country is divided north and south by the Tropic of Capricorn and bordered by the Indian Ocean on the west and south. It is:

A. India  
B. Indonesia  
C. Australia  
D. Fiji

Answers:

1. D. Colombia. Putumayo is in the Pacific Colombia Conference (Inter-American Division) with 81 churches and a population of 7.4 million.

2. B. The Baltic Union. With 4,000 members, Latvia has the largest church membership of the three countries of the Baltic Union—Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania (once part of the Soviet Union).

3. C. Australia. The aborigines, Australia’s original inhabitants, are about 1.1 percent of the population.

Northern and Southern Asia-Pacific divisions, the 1000 Missionary Movement has operated for nearly 10 years. The program has graduated 1,011 missionaries from 30 countries. Nearly 11,000 persons have been baptized and nearly 150 new congregations have been established as a result of the missionaries’ work, reports John Duroe, communication director for the Southern Asia-Pacific Division.

What’s Upcoming

Sept. 5 Lay Evangelism Day
Sept. 19 Youth Spiritual Commitment Celebration
Sept. 19 Family Togetherness Day
Sept. 26 Pathfinder Day

Philippines Movement Graduates 1,000th Missionary

The 1000 Missionary Movement, an Adventist organization based in the Philippines, recently celebrated the graduation of June Po—the movement’s 1,000th student missionary.

Po, from Singapore, will be sent as a missionary to Chinatown, Washington, D.C. Administered by the Northern and Southern Asia-Pacific divisions, the 1000 Missionary Movement has operated for nearly 10 years.

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News Notes

✔ The Canadian Deaf Ministry recently launched a new Web page. The Internet site is designed to help those who are deaf or hard of hearing, parents of deaf children, and those who desire to start a deaf ministry in their church. The Web address is www.tagnet.org/deafministry.

Springdale, KSBN-TV is owned and operated by Seventh-day Adventist businessmen. Station founder Carlos Pardeiro (right) received the proclamation from governor Huckabee (left) at the Arkansas statehouse.

June Po

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One bright day in Dhaka, Bangladesh, three women and four men walked down into baptismal waters and emerged into new life. But people get baptized all the time, you say; what’s so different about these people?

Six of them are the firstfruits of a special kind of evangelism that has been going on for nearly five years: the broadcasting of Bangla programs on Adventist World Radio. And five of these young people are former Muslims.

Bangladesh, which means “the land of the Bengali-speaking people,” is a new country with an ancient history. About the size of Illinois, it is home to more than 123 million people, most of whom are Muslim (83 percent) or Hindu (16 percent). Located on the Ganges River Delta, formed by the confluence of the Meghna with the Ganges and Brahmaputra rivers, Bangladesh is a fertile land where rice, tea, and jute are grown. A tropical monsoon often brings hurricanes and floods with catastrophic consequences. In 1989 a constitutional amendment declared Islam the official religion.

In this environment the Bangladesh Union Mission found a way to reach people with the gospel throughout the country: Adventist World Radio. Beginning on March 28, 1993, a daily hour of broadcasts began, which included Bible stories and studies, health advice, children’s programs, worship programs, listener letters, and interviews. Letters and requests for Bible courses began to arrive soon thereafter.

Then some listeners organized an AWR Listeners’ Club, and Sopin Bonowaree, communication director of the Bangladesh Union mission, realized that this would be a way to “tie” the listeners to the radio ministry. He planned a listeners’ conference for November 1994 to feature discussions on AWR programs, games, quizzes, and prizes. Response was good: 35 of 49 invitees came. Bonowaree organized another conference in 1995. He said there are now five listeners’ clubs in Bangladesh and another one in India—where 90 million people speak Bangla.

But the Listeners’ Conference of October 1997 was different: at this conference several listeners would be baptized—a pastor and his wife, a student, an electrician, and two homemakers—declaring their newfound faith for all to see, people whose hearts had been
touched by the Holy Spirit. Some told their stories:

Anarul, who traveled 300 miles (500 kilometers) to be at the conference, said, “I won’t leave until you baptize me.” He wants to be a teacher and share his faith with his students.

Habibul and Rina, 26 and 22, worried about family opposition to their new faith. The families seem more tolerant now, and the young couple want to witness to them. Now they say, “If anything happens, we will still be happy, because we have accepted Jesus.”

Anil and Aronti, already Christians, embraced the Sabbath message. He is still the pastor of his former church, but is now preaching the Adventist message to his 60 church members, who are responding eagerly.

Harald Wollan, East Bangladesh Region president, excitedly tells about the new idea they have for making the AWR Listeners’ clubs even more effective in the future: pastors will take a radio, visit villages, invite people to gather round the radio, and afterward discuss the program, offer Bible studies, and organize new Listeners’ clubs. “This will create a new door into relationships that otherwise could not happen,” says Wollan.

Don Jacobsen, AWR president, preached for the baptismal service in Bangladesh. “As I listened to the stories of these folks, an industrial-size lump grew in my throat. For most of us, becoming Christians creates only minimal dissonance with those around us. But these dear people will go back to environments where Christianity is not an acceptable belief system. Would their faith survive? Could they witness? How would they cope? As the service concluded, I found myself breathing a silent prayer over and over; a prayer that God will give them extraordinary strength and use them to tell the story in words that would bring others to Jesus.”

Andrea Steele is director of public relations and development for Adventist World Radio.
If God doesn’t care about our dreams, who does?

By Chantal Klingbeil

The reddish disk of the sun slipped behind the gray dust and dirty smog of Lima, Peru. Sabbath, December 30: what a way to end the year! My husband and I were on our way back from the clinic, where I had just lost our baby.

It had been one of the toughest years of our lives, adjusting to a new culture, learning a new language. And then there was one bright spot: after years of waiting we were going to have a baby. But now that hope, that joy, had been cruelly snatched from us.

I remembered the promise we had clung to on our way to the clinic: "Which of you, if his son asks for bread, will give him a stone? . . . How much more will your Father in heaven give good gifts to those who ask him!" (Matt. 7:9-11, NIV). You promised no stones, Lord; no stones!

Can I Trust You?

My mind drifted back to another time that I really hadn’t understood God’s leading in my life. During college one day I had decided that I wanted to serve as a student missionary in Europe. This dream was really far-fetched. In South Africa (I’m South African) at that time the local currency, the rand, was 3.50 rand to one U.S. dollar, and since student missionaries were expected to pay their own fares, the cost of my flight would be astronomical.

My parents were struggling just to keep my brother and me at our Adventist college in South Africa. But I knew that with God all things are possible, and that if it was His will, then nothing, not even the lack of money, would stand in my way.

So I set about trying to discover God’s will. I spent a lot of time praying and reading my Bible.

Unfortunately, the Bible doesn’t say anywhere that “thou shalt go to Europe.” Still, I started the application process, and things seemed to be moving along. I had to apply for a passport and visas. The process would take months and involve spending money that I really couldn’t waste. I needed God’s assurance before I made the investment.

That week has stood out as one of the most memorable in my relationship with God. I was spending a lot of time listening to God, trying to hear Him. One day I told God that I really needed to know—for sure—whether I would be going as a student missionary. That very afternoon as I knelt by my bed, I received an impression that was so strong it had words: “You will be going to Europe.”

That was it! God had told me that I would be going to Europe. Never before or since have I received such a strong impression. Over the next few weeks I floated on clouds. I invested all my hard-earned savings, did the paperwork, and told all my friends that I would be going to Europe. Some of my friends just smiled a “dream on” type of smile when I explained that God had told me I would be a student missionary.

Then came the telephone call. There had been some last-minute changes, and the position I had hoped to fill was no longer available. My little world crashed down on me. God, how am I ever going to trust You and Your leading again? I prayed.

The next little while was puzzling, confusing, and embarrassing. Everyone kept asking me when I would be leaving,
and many—myself included—questioned this “assurance” that I had received from God.

Still Dreaming
Gradually the whole thing blew over. I picked up my relationship with God and packed this whole episode under an “I don’t know” label. Six months slipped by. Some foreign students came to our school, among them a young German theology student. He was nice, and a friendship developed and blossomed just prior to graduation.

Gerald’s friends gave us some good advice about our relationship and suggested that if we were serious, I should go to Germany to get to know Gerald’s real family, his friends, and his culture.

Of course, we thought this was a great idea, but there was one problem: no money. “Well,” said the husband, putting his arm around Gerald, “what would you say if I paid Chantal’s fare?”

There wasn’t time to apply for a passport and visas. Fortunately, I already had them.

From my window seat in the airliner, viewing for the first time the snow capped Alps, words suddenly exploded in my consciousness: “You will be going to Europe.” And here I was, going to Europe. God had not lied! He simply had another way of doing things, a much better way. He gave me a free trip to Europe—and a husband. And the missionary zeal God planted in my heart when I was in college has also been fulfilled; now we’re serving God in Peru.

The Next Step
Yes, God has plans much bigger, much wider, much more beautiful, than our little perspective. As we face the dark future with its whys, tears, and shattered dreams, I know that God loves us and will never give us stones when we ask for bread.

We have only to wait through the dark night to see the beautiful sunrise of His providence.

Chantal Klingbeil, her husband, Gerald, and their 14-month-old daughter live in Lima, Peru, and serve at the Union Adventist Educational Complex.
In the March 12, 1998, Letters section of the Adventist Review, Reo M. Christenson presented a challenging question. “I keep reading and hearing about the importance of a ‘close personal relationship with Christ.’ I also keep wondering what this ... means.” Dr. C. Christenson’s detailed questions call us to go beyond semantics—to look into our souls and explain what may have become a cliché to many Christians. Here are parts of a few of the answers he received. (All original letters will be sent to Dr. C. Christenson.)

When my thoughts are focused on the cross or the throne—that seems to draw us together... It seems to make a difference when the subject of prayer is surrendering “all of me” for His service. There is no actual presence... maybe it is more like faith. I just know He is listening. ... Maybe joy is a better word for God’s presence during prayer, as described in Psalm 16:8, 9.—George E. Hill, D.O., Grand Junction, Colorado.

When I was 13, I realized God was missing in my life. He had made me in His image. Jesus died for me. I wanted to know more about that kind of God. As I grew older and learned more about the plan of salvation, I knew God was drawing me. Through His Spirit I could have His abiding presence daily. This love I couldn’t resist. Thus began my close personal relationship with God.

It is tremendously exciting and rewarding to be in a bond of love with God. He is my best friend. The peace of heaven allures me. I pray more. I sing. I express my gratitude and praise Him. It is as though I am not alone. I know my faith has touched the hem of His garment.—Jessie Pritchett, Burleson, Texas.

We must first get acquainted with Him. The theme of the Bible is Jesus. By studying it we come close to Him. Isaiah 58 and Matthew 25 connect Jesus with our fellowman. If we do these things, we have a close personal relationship with Christ—it cannot be separated from daily life.—Robert A. Dexter, M.D., Reno, Nevada.

Recognize that in spite of your problems in obeying the Ten Commandments, Jesus never disobeyed them. Thus by faith you secure your heavenly mansion. Then no matter how you feel, know that Jesus is in you to do His good pleasure as long as you are willing to be made willing.—Bill Tassie, Burlington, Michigan.
A
bout 25 years ago, I heard a group of young people share their personal relationship with Jesus. I realized I didn’t have it and prayed, “God, don’t leave me out.” Before this my religious reading seemed only a ritual. Now in my quiet time I start out singing praises to Him. Then I listen. Usually one or two Bible verses stand out for me, and I know He is speaking to me for what I need for that day.—Virginia Collins, Alimesa, California.

F
rom the time I was 4 years old, God has been real to me. I felt that I could talk to Him about anything. But my understanding of Him was clouded. I still see God as involved in my life, but with more balance. I’m not so driven to have Him meet all my emotional needs. I focus more on the truth of who He is and how that plays out in my life and the world around me.—Lani Glaser, Lincoln, Nebraska.

M
y relationship is that of a chick under the protecting wings of its mother. My prayers have been answered, miracles have happened, and He has given me strength to overcome trials. Reading His Word, believing, obeying, and trusting Him are the secrets of this close relationship.—Birol Christo, Hosur, India.

Y
ears ago I did not understand a “close personal relationship with Christ.” Depressed and unable to bring about this relationship, feeling a failure, and exhausted, I listened. I heard that God loved me as I was. I rest my life upon this unshakable truth. Through this love relationship the Bible became a different book. When I read Scripture, I know Him better. I ask questions, and as I read, my questions are answered. The Bible tells how our loving God desperately tries to open and maintain communication with His creation.—Harvey Elder, M.D., Loma Linda, California.

I
had always been a believer, but without much direction. In the 1950s money was hard to come by. I saved a small amount from my household budget to buy some art supplies. Finally I had enough, but I gave the money to the church. Then came a powerful exhibit of God’s caring. A day later a neighbor knocked at my door. She said a relative who was an artist had died. They had so many paints and materials, she hardly had room for them. Through the years most of my concerns taken to the Lord have resulted in awesome results.—Patricia Courtney, San Jose, California.

M
y Mennonite mother taught me to believe in Jesus. He is now my most treasured friend and companion. My relationship began when I fell in love with Jesus. Grieved of my failures to be good, I searched for assurance that Jesus loved me. While reading the book of Isaiah, suddenly the Holy Spirit touched my heart and the words became personal.—Alice Ott, Perham, Minnesota.

G
do is changing this sometimes selfish, unloving heart of mine. I see victories that I could not attain on my own. When I fail, lovely words come to me from a Christian song through the Holy Spirit. That kind of closeness is exquisitely lovely.—Carol Renshaw, Collegedale, Tennessee.

A
real relationship is not based on feeling; it is not based on objective knowledge of the Word. A saving relationship is based on daily bilateral communication with God.—Roderick L. Yip, M.D., Hollister, California.

M
y personal relationship grew from knowing God cares about me into full assurance that Jesus’ presence surrounds me all day. It may not occupy my every thought or detract from my work. It complements my work. Applying Bible principles rather than straining over arguable points, praying and praising often, and befriending others are the prescription I have followed. I would also credit members of the Belleville church, which I attend, in providing insight and support.—S. Smith, Belleville, Ontario.

T
hree years ago I shared during a home Bible study group that I was scared of the time of trouble. I did not wholly trust Jesus. This fall I will be 80 years of age. For all those years I had been self-sufficient. A little more than a year ago I would not have known if I had a close relationship with Jesus. The change came when I had to struggle with failing health. I limited my reading to the Bible and the Spirit of Prophecy. Prayer seminars helped me adopt a regular prayer schedule. Now I have peace, joy, and love that I am eager to testify to. I now welcome the time of trouble. I have assurance that Jesus loves and saves me. He will never leave me.—Geraldine Olmstead, Inyokern, California.

F
or the first half of my 74 years, my concept of God was of one who was “making a list and checking it twice to see who was naughty or nice.” Then I read an article in the Adventist Review on righteousness by faith. I had not heard this in sermons. . . . I got to know this loving God by talking with Him as a friend, studying the Bible to know Him better than to prove doctrines. A relationship developed slowly that has paid off in love, trust, joy, and peace.—Mable Gantt, Havelock, North Carolina.

C
an we know God personally? Yes. I have found four things to be helpful to me: 1. You must really want Him. 2. Be honest with Him. When you pray, be real. 3. Be open. Try new ways to worship. Instead of reading three chapters in the Bible, read two or three verses searching for a treasure. 4. Remember, the rest is the Holy Spirit’s work.—Janet Wilkinson, Naches, Washington.
They Still Go

We haven’t printed the names of those going into regular missionary service for some time. Below is a list of individuals and families who have left their home countries to work for God overseas. Most left at the end of 1997 and the early part of 1998. Please remember them in your prayers.


Led ado A buton A ng, to serve as Business Department head and senior lecturer, B ethel College, S outh A frica, W ilma T ajoda A ng, and three children, of Weimar, California.

John W illiam A sh III, returning to serve as radio broadcaster, E ast A sia A ssociation, H ong K ong, C hina, and C onnie M arthe lle A sh.

I ra Eugene B allie, to serve as medical director/surgeon, S cheer M emorial H ospital, B anepa, N epal, and R ita B allie, of D enair, California.

David V incent Bell, to serve as director, A DRA /B hutan-T ibet P roject, I ndia, A mbel G reta B ell, and one child, of S ylvan Lake, A lberta.

W ilma L ouise B oulieris, returning to serve as optometrist, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam.

W alter G abri el B ritton, to serve as A DRA director, C entral A merican U nion, A lajuela, C osta R ica, H elda L ucia B ritton, and three children, of P iscataway, N ew J ersey.

J ason M atthew B rooks, to serve as management intern, A DRA /A zerbaijan, B aku, A zerbai- jan, E lizabeth A ma B rooks, and one child, of M artinsburg, W est V irginia.

J ames M urdoch C ampbell, returning to serve as secretary, S outhern A sia D ivision, I ndia, and F rances L illian C ampbell.

K royl on C hristion, returning to serve as elementary school teacher, K endu A dventist H ospital, K enya, and S usan C hristion.

Phyllis E llen C ollins, to serve as advanced adult nurse practitioner, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam, of B errien S prings, M ichigan.

B ry an A nthony C ox, to serve as monetiza- tion manager and logistics officer, A DRA /A zerbaijan, B aku, A zerbaijan, and E rin C ourtney C ox, of B urtonsville, M aryland.

R obert J ose C ruise, to serve as statistics and research professor, A dventist I nternational Insti- tute of A dvanced Studies, S ilang, C avite, P hilippines, of H ong K ong, C hina.

L uzelin D amayo, returning to serve as physic- ian, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam, and M ike A rries D amayo.

T homas B ruce D avis, returning to serve as phy- sical therapist, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam, and P auline D avis.

L oni A tsa F attic, to serve as director, A DRA /K yrgyzstan, and R ichard F attic, of T wisp, W ashington.

H enry L e sli e F oster, returning to serve as associate professor of business, A dventist I nternational Institute of A dvanced Studies, S ilang, C avite, P hilippines, I da P atricia A nn F oster, and two children.

B evan A li G eslan, to serve as physician, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam, M aiya D orothy G eslan, and two children, of L oma L inda, C alifornia.


O scar A nal G iordano, returning to serve as health and temperance director, I ndian Ocean U nion M ission, A ntaanarivo, M adagascar, M aria E ugenia G iordano, and three children.

E lias G alvan G omez, returning to serve as theology professor, C olombia A dventist U niver- sity, M edellin, C olombia, and M arcia G alvan G omez.

D esi ree A n N ham-Y ing, returning to serve as vice president for development and public relations, C aribbean U nion C ollege, P ort-of-Spain, T rainid, and J ohn N ham-Y ing.

D avid W inston H ardware, to serve as busi- ness manager, P akistan A dventist S eminary, S heikhupura D istrict, P akistan, S onja H ope H ardware, and two children, of S ilver S pring, M aryland.

A ndrew M ichael H erold, returning to serve as maintenance director, E thiopian A dventist C ollege, K uyera, S hoa D istrict, E thiopia, D ebo- rah H erold, and four children.

E dward A lan H ollister, to serve as headmas- ter/teacher, G rianach H ouse S chool, G alway, I reland, L ynn H ollister, and two children, of C hula V ista, C alifornia.


O tinel C ornel I ancu, returning to serve as pastor, H aifa c hurch, J erusalem, I srael, D enisia I ancu, and two children.

J effrey J ohn I nge, to serve as physician/o ph- thalmologist, B elia V ista P olyclinic, M ayaguez, P uerto Rico, H elen I nge, and one child, of R ochester, M innesota.

G ertrude E lizabeth J ordan, to serve as teacher, U niversity of E astern A frica B araton, E doret, K enya, of E lliscott C ity, M aryland.

J ill A lison L aFe ver, to serve as dental hygienist/office manager, D jibouti A dventist H ealth C entre, D jibouti, A frica, of D onna, T exas.

J os e R afael L izardo, to serve as treasurer, E astern A frica D ivision, H arare, Z imbabwe, and C andida R uth L izardo, of D avie, F lorida.

C lara ssa J oy L ong, to serve as elementary teacher, L a Rue V illa S chool, H ong Kong A dventist H ospital, H ong K ong, C hina, and one child, of A rmstrong, B ritish COLUM bia.

V ictor O thinel M orales, returning to serve as business professor, A ntilian A dventist U niver- sity, M ayaguez, P uerto Rico, I rma E stella M orales, and three children.

J anet A my E llen N ightingale, to serve as certified nurse midwife, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam, and B errien S prings, M ichigan.

J ohn N obou N ozaki, returning to serve as physican, G uam S DA C linic, T amuning, G uam, and V eerna K elko N ozaki.

W illiam M artin O lsen, to serve as secretary/treasurer, M iddle E ast U nion, N icosia, C yprus, and Sh aron J udy O lsen, of S umas, W ashington.

J oseph O sorio, to serve as evangelist, C entr al M exican C onference, C olonia N avarte, M exico, and A lida O sorio, of C enterville, O hio.

I eilua H enrikk O ster, to serve as physician, H eri A dventist H ospital, K igoma, T anzania, E ast A frica, of T appahannoc k, V irginia.

B arbara P ayt on, returning to serve as direc- tor of nursing services, A ndrews M emorial H ospital, K ingston, J amaica, W est I ndies.

D elbert B ervin P earman, to serve as trea- surer, S DA C hurch in S Sri Lanka, C olombo, S Sri Lanka, M arilyn C urdell P earman, and one child, of W arwick, B ermuda.

T erry K ent P ottle, returning to serve as maintenance director, M axwell A dventist A cad- emy, N airobi, K enya, D ana L ynne P ottle, and one child.

E lwyn R oy P ryc e, to serve as compliance officer/commodity controller, A DRA /S udan, S udan, A frica, and R uth E sther P ryc e, of C leburne, T exas.

A lvin R ocre, returning to serve as physi- cian/surgeon, I shaka A dventist H ospital, U ganda, E ast A frica, and D elliah R ocre.

E milia E lena R osu, returning to serve as dentist, K inshasa D ental C linic, K inshasa, Zaire, A frica.

R oy E dward R yan, to serve as associate trea- surer, S outhern A sia-P acific D ivision, S ilang, C avite, P hilippines, and C arol J ean R yan, of Lodi, C alifornia.

G regory E lton S ounders, returning to serve as physician/surgeon, S DA H ospital I Ie-I fe, I Ie-I fe, N igeria, W est A frica, K athen e Y vonne S aunder s, and four children.

D onald S chatzschneider, returning to serve as administrator, K arachi A dventist H ospital, K arachi, P akistan, and G ail S chatzschneider.

B erthold H erbert S tickle, returning to serve as associate treasurer, E astern A frica D ivision, Z imbabwe, A frica, and R osabel E llen S tickle.

K arl E dwin T homp son, returning to serve as acting chief engineer, A WR- L atin A merica, A la- juela, C osta R ica, J ebecca S ustanne T homp son, and four children.
Rubber Bands

ROSY TETZ

Do you know how to shoot a rubber band? You can just hook it over the tip of one thumb and pull back on it with a finger of the other hand. But you can’t really be accurate with that method, and half the time you smack your own thumb with the rubber band and it hurts.

Here’s a better way. Make a “gun” shape with one hand. Hold one end of the rubber band in the crook of your little finger. Stretch the rubber band around the back of your thumb and hook the other end on the tip of your pointer finger. Point at your target, then let go with your little finger. It might take a little practice.

Of course, you must never shoot it at a person. A person or animal is not a good target. I was thinking you could draw a “bull’s-eye” and aim at that, or perhaps you could try to knock over a tower of blocks.

The rubber band shoots because you stretch it. When you let go, it snaps back into shape. Have you ever wondered why rubber bands can stretch so far and then shrink right back to their normal shape? They are made out of rubber.

Rubber is a material with molecules that change shape easily. The rubber molecules have strings of carbon atoms in a zigzag pattern. They can be stretched any which way, then they snap back into the original shape.

Rubber is flexible. That’s why it’s so useful. People need to be flexible too—in the way they think and behave toward others.

Now, there are some things you can’t be flexible about. “Don’t shoot rubber bands at people” is an inflexible rule.

But at times you need to be flexible. If your mom says, “How about ice cream?” and you say, “Yes! Chocolate!” but all she has is vanilla, you are going to have to be flexible. You can have vanilla or you can have none, but you can’t have chocolate.

You can’t always get what you want. You can’t always have your own way. The Bible says, “Show mercy to others; be kind, humble, gentle, and patient” (Colossians 3:12, ICB). Be flexible. Stretch. And after you are all stretched out, do you know what returns you to your normal shape? Love. “Love is what holds you all together in perfect unity” (verse 14). Love is like a rubber band. And so, I hope, are you.
I would like to ask a question regarding the maintaining of a website on the Internet, which is in operation 24 hours a day seven days a week. If an Adventist maintains such a website, and the website is selling products during the Sabbath hours, would this situation, in your opinion, violate the fourth commandment? Would this situation be the same as opening a retail store or business on the Sabbath?

A primary difference between the operation of a neighborhood retail store and a website business is the technical impracticality (and under some arrangements, contractual impossibility) of closing down the latter on Sabbath hours only.

Notwithstanding, the operator of such a business is faced with some sobering questions. One is, Given the challenges of shutting down the website operation on Sabbath hours only, should a Seventh-day Adventist get involved in such a business operation?

To answer "No" suggests comparisons with other money-making ventures, such as stock market and real estate investing, and even rental and lease arrangements that accrue to many Seventh-day Adventists monetary benefits earned during Sabbath hours that are not questioned.

But to answer "Yes" is to prod one's conscience concerning the disposition of that income identifiably gained on the day when we are to rest from business activities.

I believe that operating such a website business is not sinful. However, the proprietor would probably feel better, and the business be blessed, if the income for that day (or if that is not identifiable, its estimated equivalent) were dedicated to the cause of God.

What do I do with this information? Just pray about it for the Lord to convict them if they are not being faithful mon eywise? I don't see in the Church Manual that it is my job to share with the particular people about the situation or even to bring it up to the pastor. But in the Church Manual, if I am not mistaken, one of the prerequisites for holding church office is to be an example in tithe faithfulness.

How does this work? Would I be responsible for someone's salvation, knowing this about them and not trying to encourage them to trust the Lord in their financial matters?

You are correct. Individuals who do not tithe or who obviously do not do so appropriately are in need of spiritual enlightenment and/or encouragement.

While your responsibilities as church treasurer do not include divulging information regarding individual performance, it is a part of the pastor's job not only to preach, teach, and model this aspect of stewardship, but to assist individual members who need growth in this area.

The pastor can perform such service only if knowledgeable of the need to do so. That knowledge can best be gained by being informed by you or by his or her personal review of the books. The members' understanding of the pastor's duty to make contact with those unfaithful will help mute resentment on the part of those who are approached. It may also motivate some (albeit for the wrong reason) to more regular tithing performance. In any event it is the responsibility of the pastor and/or pastoral staff to provide this spiritual help and, as you have correctly indicated, yours to keep the records.

Calvin B. Rock is a general vice president of the General Conference. He holds doctoral degrees in ministry and Christian ethics.

Church treasurer responsibilities do not include divulging information regarding individual performance.
Very landscape gardening student has heard the name of Capability Brown, who left his indelible mark on many of the stately homes of England. Although he lived in the eighteenth century, his work and ideas still survive and have influenced gardeners throughout the world.

It was Capability Brown who landscaped Blenheim Palace, birthplace of the late Sir Winston Churchill; Warwick Castle; the Royal Gardens of Richmond, Kew, and Wimbledon, near London. He improved, beautified, and altered so many parks and estates that he became one of the most sought-after men in England.

Although his parents gave him the name of Lancelot, he is simply called Capability because in his work for English estate owners he made frequent references to the capabilities of a given landscape. He had an uncanny ability of knowing what the owner of an estate needed in order to bring the property in line with existing trends and in recognizing the land's capabilities. His eye was quick and sure, and after surveying the land for an hour or so he could conceive a design for an entire park. Given another few hours, he could mark it all out on the ground.

He was able to transform seemingly hopeless areas into places of beauty, diverting or damming rivers for greater effect and creating lakes in grounds that first had to be excavated with pick, shovel, and wheelbarrow. He planted millions of trees—oak, beech, ash, and other varieties—and created wonderful gardens and shrubberies out of barrenness. When others could see nothing worthwhile in a particular plot of ground, Capability could see a semi-Eden.

Capability began as a gardener's boy in Northumberland and served his seven-year apprenticeship on the estate of Viscount Cobham. His extraordinary abilities began to be noticed when he became head gardener on the Duke of Grafton's estate in Suffolk and was allowed to put some of his ideas into practice. He eventually became surveyor to His Majesty's Gardens and Waters at Hampton Court with a budget of £2,000 a year to maintain the royal gardens.

Although born in obscurity and mostly self-taught, Capability rose to become the confidante of kings and noblemen who eagerly sought his advice on the capabilities of their properties. He was also a fine architect, but his fame in this area was eclipsed because of his landscaping abilities.

There is, of course, a greater Gardener than Capability Brown who not only designed this magnificent universe but is a master hand at turning the barren places of our lives into gardens. He can see capabilities in all sorts of seemingly hopeless conditions. Notice what He said to Gideon, who was threshing wheat in a winepress. “The Lord is with you, mighty warrior!” (Judges 6:12, NIV). He wasn't yet a warrior, but God saw capabilities in Gideon that Gideon wasn't even aware he possessed. God saw in Moses' hesitancy, Jacob's deceitfulness, Paul's legalism, and hosts of other seemingly hopeless cases capabilities for service. He saw in the two brothers Simon Peter and Andrew, not just rough fishermen, but “fishers of men.”

We read that “Mary had been looked upon as a great sinner, but Christ knew the circumstances that had shaped her life. He might have extinguished every spark of hope in her soul, but He did not. . . . When human eyes her case appeared hopeless, Christ saw in Mary any capabilities for good. He saw the better traits of her character. The plan of redemption has invested humanity with great possibilities, and in Mary these possibilities were to be realized. The one who had fallen . . . was brought very near to the Saviour in fellowship and ministry. It was Mary who sat at His feet and learned of Him. It was Mary who poured upon His head the precious anointing oil, and bathed His feet with her tears. Mary stood beside the cross, and followed Him to the sepulcher. Mary was first at the tomb after His resurrection. It was Mary who first proclaimed a risen Saviour” (The Desire of Ages, p. 568).

Christ sees the capabilities of every one of His children; therefore, let us try to see others through His eyes. And let us allow Him to work in and through us for His glory.

Edna May Olsen is retired and enjoys freelance writing.