The Bible Still Speaks
Experience the Power of His Word
Experience the Power

A Message From the Officers of the General Conference

Suppose the Scriptures were not available to us. Would we be acquainted with the plan of redemption? Would we have any knowledge about God? Would we know that Christ died for us? Yet to know Him is life eternal (John 17:3).

While God could and did employ many avenues of communication that He deemed appropriate, He gave humanity the inspired written Word. I thank God for the gift of Scripture. It is the Inspired Word that reveals the plan of redemption, how we may be brought back into a loving relationship with Him. Indeed, the power of His Word can transform anyone into a loving and lovable Christian! What a merciful heavenly Father and precious Saviour we have!

No wonder Satan continues his ferocious attacks on Scripture. His fiendish intent is to destroy our confidence in the reliability and trustworthiness of God’s revelation to humanity. But even though the Bible is under continual satanic attack—be it by direct frontal assault or subtle devious undermining, let us continue to fortify, immerse, and saturate ourselves with Scripture. Our only safe haven is in Him whom Scripture reveals. A we come to know Christ better, we shall see more clearly the beauty, unity, and grandeur of the Word. I thank God for the gift of Scripture. It is the Inspired Word that reveals the plan of redemption, how we may be brought back into a loving relationship with Him. Indeed, the power of His Word can transform anyone into a loving and lovable Christian! What a merciful heavenly Father and precious Saviour we have!

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We Still Believe the Bible

May the world see it in our every word and action.

Back in 1997 MCI ran an amusing TV ad for their long-distance telephone service. The ad was particularly aimed at the quality of their competitors. The scene begins with the space shuttle sitting on its pad while the camera slowly moves in. The voice of the launch director is then heard over an intercom counting down to liftoff.

"Approximately 10... 9, give or take... somewhere in the vicinity of 8... about 7... 6 or so... 5—plus or minus... 4, I think... uh, 3... 2ish... 1—liftoff! [the shuttle sits there]

Any moment now... [still no action]

Here it comes... still waiting."

The words "Precision Is Important" then flash over the earthbound shuttle, and it's not hard to get the point. The commercial works because everyone knows that there can be no margin for error when it comes to getting something as technologically sophisticated as the space shuttle off the ground and into the heavens. There's no guesswork, or approximates, or best estimates, or instincts. Every moment of the launch sequence is planned, timed, and accounted for. The lives of the astronauts depend on their following a detailed flight plan.

We Christians are travelers too. We who believe in Jesus are traveling to a "city which has foundations, whose builder and maker is God" (Heb. 11:10, NKJV). We too have a detailed “flight plan” called the Bible. And our eternal lives depend on following that plan.

Strangely, while most of the world applauds the precision and accuracy of watches, computers, and the space program, more and more people seem to be content to view God's flight plan to heaven with sloppiness, human speculation, guesswork, and distrust. Even some professed Christians openly question whether there are true absolutes in the world, and often treat the Bible with doubt and, in the worst cases, outright contempt.

Is the Bible still relevant for today? Does it still speak to the needs of the college student? the troubled administrator? the teenage runaway? the cashier at the supermarket? the business executive? the computer programmer? the cancer patient? the busy homemaker?

Does it speak with the authority of the Creator-God, providing humanity with a fully trustworthy "map" through the wilderness of life here on earth to the promised land of heaven? Or is it like the flawed shuttle countdown in the TV commercial—uncertain and untrustworthy, filled with fables and myths, and subject to the whims and opinions of fickle society?

May the world see it in our every word and action.
Doubt Is “In”

Doubt is in vogue today. It’s “cool” to disregard authority. Tim “the Tool Man” Taylor of TV’s Home Improvement has turned ineptitude and disregard of directions into an art form.

And Ellen Degeneres, the first openly gay actress in a lead role on a TV sitcom, has caused millions to view the moral guidelines of the Bible as hopelessly outdated, narrow, and politically incorrect. Everywhere we turn today, we’re told, “Color outside the lines,” “The rules have changed,” and “Question everything.”

Sadly, the Bible predicts a time when trust in the Bible will erode: “For the time will come when men will not put up with sound doctrine. Instead, to suit their own desires, they will gather around them a great number of teachers to say what their itching ears want to hear” (2 Tim. 4:3, 4, NIV).

And though there are more Bibles available than ever before, our lives seem to be less impacted by the words in those Bibles. Pastor Jesse Wilson noted this trend in the May/June 1997 issue of The Day at the Truth magazine: “The research of George Barna and George Gallup, in The Day America Told the Truth, has revealed some embarrassing facts: the actions of many Christians do not line up with their words. In fact, recent surveys seem to indicate that Christians lie, cheat on their taxes, fornicate, divorce, and generally sin at roughly the same rate as non-Christians” (“Test of Discipleship,” p. 6).

We are a people who love “good preaching”—to hear the Word proclaimed with power and authority. But more and more our response imitates how we respond to secular entertainment: we sit; we watch; we applaud, laugh, or cry; we talk about the good time we had—and then we go home. We seem to react like those who listened to Ezekiel preach:

“As for you, son of man, your countrymen are talking together about you by the walls and at the doors of the houses, saying to each other, ‘Come and hear the message that has come from the Lord.’ My people come to you, as they usually do, and sit before you to listen to your words, but they do not put them into practice. With their mouths they express devotion, but their hearts are greedy for unjust gain. Indeed, to them you are nothing more than one who sings love songs with a beautiful voice and plays an instrument well, for they hear your words but do not put them into practice” (Eze. 33:30-32, NIV).

We must resist the temptation to mix the water of human wisdom and doctrinal compromise with the precious blood of Christ.

As we prepare to cross the threshold of a new millennium, we will need greater grace and wisdom to be able to articulate the everlasting gospel and the revelation of His imminent return in glory to a global family living in the twenty-first century. If our message is to remain relevant and bear the divine credentials of Holy Spirit power and authority:

- we must reaffirm our commitment to proclaiming and living present truth as it is revealed in Christ Jesus through the Word of God.
- we must draw near to God and resist the temptation to mix the water of human wisdom and doctrinal compromise with the precious blood of Christ, thus giving thirsting humanity a polluted concoction that has the appearance of the water of life, while in reality it’s the wine of Babylon.

Let’s keep in mind the following:

1. Our message will remain relevant if we remember that the Bible, not human opinion, is the foundation of the Seventh-day Adventist message.

Despite what some individual Adventists have been teaching, we still believe in a literal creation and a literal seven-day Creation week, of which the Sabbath is a memorial.

“By the word of the Lord were the heavens made, their starry host by the breath of his mouth. . . . For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm” (Ps. 33:6-9, NIV).

The Bible excludes a multimillion-year evolutionary process and simply states that God spoke and it was so. Even some modern, secular scientists acknowledge that the evolutionary model of origins requires as much faith (if not more) as does accepting the Word of God.

Why then do so many find godless evolution attractive? A h, simply because it is godless. “The higher critics put themselves in the place of God, and review the Word of God, revising or endorsing it. . . . These higher critics have fixed things to suit the popular heresies of these last days. If they cannot subvert and misapply the Word of God, if they cannot bend it to human practices, they break it” (“The Upward Look, p. 35).

The Bible still teaches, and we still believe, that Jesus is coming soon, that death is a sleep, that salvation comes through faith in Christ alone, that the Sabbath is God’s sign of salvation, and that Jesus’ ministry in the heavenly sanctuary is cleansing our lives right now.

2. Our message will remain relevant if we remember that the Bible, not pop psychology, provides power for character change and Christlike living.

“For the word of God is living and active. Sharper than any double-edged
sword, it penetrates even to dividing soul and spirit, joints and marrow; it judges the thoughts and attitudes of the heart” (Heb. 4:12, NIV).

It was the power of the living Christ, through the Word of God, that transformed Mary Magdalene from prostitute to daughter of God, the thief transformed Smart and his wife, Evelyn, during NET ’96 by the same pastor he had once sentenced to jail; and that transformed Mormon high priest Ray Smart and his wife, Evelyn, during the NET ’96 meetings in Orlando, Florida. Evelyn quit teaching Sunday school—something she had done for 23 years (Touched by the Spirit: Stories From NET ’96, p. 9).

3. Our message will remain relevant if we remember that the Bible, not culture, is the essence of Seventh-day Adventist standards and always lifts us above our cultures.

Born-again believers have a new culture. The Bible describes it: “For you were once darkness, but now you are light in the Lord. Live as children of light” (Eph. 5:8, NIV). “Here there is no Greek or Jew, circumcised or uncircumcised, barbarian, Scythian, slave or free, but Christ is all, and is in all” (Col. 3:11, NIV). “But you are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God, that you may declare the praises of him who called you out of darkness into his wonderful light. Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God; once you had not received mercy, but now you have received mercy” (1 Peter 2:9, 10, NIV).

We are citizens of heaven and adopt the culture of our new home. We must remember that once we join Christ, this world, with its culture, is not our home. “Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind” (Rom. 12:2, NIV).

4. Our message will remain relevant if we remember that the Bible, not trends in contemporary society or even Protestantism—forms the heart of all Adventist worship.

Worship of the true God—how we worship, why we worship, when we worship—is central to the great controversy and forms part of the first angel’s message: “He said in a loud voice, ‘Fear God and give him glory, because the hour of his judgment has come. Worship him who made the heavens, the earth, the sea and the springs of water” (Rev. 14:7, NIV).

Remove the Bible, and you have consumer-driven worship, focusing on what people want and not on what God wants. This is not true worship, no matter how entertaining the “show,” how big the “cathedral,” or how large the crowd in the pews.

A watered-down gospel will never save the lost. Ours is a message of total salvation. Our ability to respond to heaven’s call, to return to true worship based on the Word of God and our own whim, will lighten the whole earth with the glory of God and prove Satan a liar.

5. Our message will remain relevant if we remember that the Bible, not sociology, motivates us for world mission.

Making disciples of the Lord Jesus Christ is the only reason the church exists. Our commission comes from the Master Himself: “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And surely I am with you always, to the very end of the age” (Matt. 28:19, 20, NIV).

Our mission has not changed. “We [still] believe that God has given this church a unique end-time assignment: to proclaim the three angels’ messages of Revelation 14, including (1) the arrival of the judgment in the context of the everlasting gospel, (2) the importance of keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus, and (3) the imminent return of Jesus” (We Still Believe, p. 51).

Perhaps the Bible is under attack today because we haven’t lived it. We’ve studied it, debated it, interpreted it, argued over it, preached from it, bludgeoned each other with it, quoted it, read it, memorized it—but we just haven’t lived it. Jesus—the Living Word of God—is coming again. And if we plan to receive the Living Word when He comes, we must receive His Written Word today.

Questions for Discussion

1. Review and discuss the ways our author thinks the Bible can remain relevant today. How would you describe the contribution you can make to each of these?

2. The article stresses the transforming power of Christ in the Word and cites examples of people so transformed. Do you know of others, and how can such testimonies enhance our attempts to spread the gospel?

3. How is your confidence in the authenticity and reliability of the Bible? What evidences can you cite in your personal life to support your position?

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any books have appeared in the history of humanity, but none of them have had such permanence and universal influence as has the Bible. The excellence of the Bible resides in the fact that it is not a simple text of religious sayings, or a catechism on a system of doctrinal truths or moral precepts, or even a compilation of religious traditions. The Bible is much more than all of that. It is the book of salvation history, a history in which God and humanity are the main protagonists in the effort to resolve the most fundamental problem of our world: the problem of sin.

Indeed, that's one of the things that make the Bible unique and of continuing interest—its extensive and definitive treatment of the universal phenomenon we know as sin—or evil. Written over a period of some 15 centuries, the book pulsates with one objective, namely, to show the divine plan for humanity and the progress of that plan in the great arena of history.

The Bible presents an extensive repertoire of the activities of God working for the transformation of humanity. It talks about the pride, the ambition, the envy, the injustice, the oppression, the fear, the impotence, the guilt complex, the desperation, that exists in the heart of sinful human beings. But it also speaks about liberty, love, faith, trust in God, hope, and the joy that God gives to the converted person. Its stories are a living witness of the transforming power of divine grace and an example of what God is willing to do for us today: “For whatever was written in former days was written for our instruction, that by steadfastness and by the encouragement of the scriptures we might have hope” (Rom. 15:4).

The Bible—Source of Divine Encounter

God has revealed Himself in nature (Ps. 19:1, 2). There we can behold His admirable, invisible perfections—His “eternal power and deity,” as Paul puts it (Rom. 1:20). This is what theologians refer to as general (or universal) revelation. Another kind of revelation, also general but more intimate and eloquent, is that of conscience—an inner voice that distinguishes between good and evil (see Rom. 2:14-16). God uses it as a contact point to reach us. Sin, however, has darkened the human conscience and marred the perfect work of God in such a way that after the Fall, nature and conscience—by themselves—constitute an insufficient means of revelation.

And so God provided the supreme revelation in Jesus Christ—Emmanuel, God with us, the revelation of God par excellence. Since the Fall, and until the supreme revelation came through Christ, God used a series of intermediate written revelations to educate humanity and reveal Himself. Known today in their collected form as the Old Testament, these were mediated to Israel through the ancient prophets. The New Testament, coming after Christ and complementing the Old, was brought to us through the writings of the apostles as they reflected on God's supreme revelation in Christ (Heb. 1:1; 1 Thess. 2:13; 1 John 1:1-3).

In both Old and New Testaments we find God and humanity in action, in a personal encounter that made pos-
sible a revelatory process. In the pages of the Bible God speaks to us, intervenes in our affairs, corrects us, shows us His will, announces His plans to us, and strengthens our faith and hope. We, in turn, react, responding to God with trust or doubt, with devotion or rebellion, heroism or fear, loyalty or betrayal, love or apathy. God and humanity are always involved in the revelatory process. The Bible is written by human beings, but proclaimed as the Word of God.

The Word of God continues today as a system of communication between God and humanity, both a revelation and an encounter. It’s important—I would say, indispensable—that we study its message. But unless that study leads to a personal encounter between God and us, it will have failed to reach the divine purpose and will lack the power to transform the heart. Says Ellen G. White: “He who with sincere and teachable spirit studies God’s Word, seeking to comprehend its truths, will be brought in touch with its Author; and, except by his own choice, there is no limit to the possibilities of his development” (Education, p. 125).

Inspiration and Illumination: The Work of the Holy Spirit

The intervention of the Holy Spirit in the reception and writing of the Holy Scriptures is affirmed in the multiple testimonies of its authors. Thousands of texts in the Bible speak about the supernatural origin of the messages of the prophets. David said, “The Spirit of the Lord speaks by me, his word is upon my tongue” (2 Sam. 23:2). When Ezekiel describes how his visions came, he employs such expressions as “the Spirit entered into me,” “the Spirit . . . fell upon me,” “the Spirit lifted me up” (Eze. 3:24; 11:5; 43:5). Paul considers the prophetic ministry as a gift of the Holy Spirit (1 Cor. 12:7-10). Peter, in two fundamental texts, explicitly affirms the inspiration of the Holy Spirit in the ministry of the prophets, “the Spirit of Christ within them,” stating that “no prophecy ever came by the impulse of man, but men moved by the Holy Spirit spoke from God” (1 Peter 1:10, 11; 2 Peter 1:21).

We find the same explicit affirmation on inspiration in the words of Paul to Timothy: “All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work” (2 Tim. 3:16, 17). The transforming power of the Word of God lies in the fact that it is inspired; the presence of the Holy Spirit is in its pages. It is the supernatural activity of the Spirit in the work and in the lives of its authors that gives to the Bible an unparalleled convicting power, an irresistible spiritual force, the capacity to break the rebellious human spirit, to teach, to correct, to train in righteousness, to perfect, to transform, and to convert the soul of its readers, equipping them for good works.

The work of the Holy Spirit does not end with the inspiration of the biblical writer, but continues in the process of illumination. In other words, the Spirit illumines the reader of the Bible, as Jesus promised (John 14:17; 15:26; 16:8, 13).

Accepting the Authority of the Word

Finally, the third agent in the process of revelation is the believer, who in the use and exercise of this freedom makes possible or hinders the transforming power of the Word of God. Once the Word of God is received as God’s revelation and its plenary inspiration is accepted, it becomes in the human spirit an incontestable source of authority. The believer who accepts with faith and confidence the normative authority of the Word of God incorporates its holy principles into his or her lifestyle. The teachings and precepts of the Bible become an integral part of that person’s life and character, and through the simultaneous work of the Holy Spirit they become a new creature. Peter describes this in the following way: “You have been born anew, not of perishable seed but of imperishable, through the living and abiding word of God” (1 Peter 1:23). Surrendering our autonomous will to the illumination of the Spirit and to the sovereign authority of the Word of God as a rule of faith and practice generates in us a new birth of hope, strength, and character.

Ellen G. White states: “The creative energy that called the worlds into existence is in the Word of God. This Word imparts power; it begets life. Every command is a promise; accepted by the will, received into the soul, it brings with it the life of the Infinite One. It transforms the nature and re-creates the soul in the image of God” (ibid., p. 126).

Questions for Discussion

1. How does the author explain the continuing appeal of the Bible?

2. Compare and contrast the sources from which we draw our knowledge about God. How is each of these sources important in meeting the variety of peoples and cultures we might face?

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Ten years ago thieves broke into a self-storage facility and stole practically all my family’s household goods. A slip of paper bearing my wife’s handwriting was all that was left to confirm that this was indeed the space that had held our possessions while we looked for a home. The financial loss was staggering, but greater losses began to appear. A long with the items that the thieves thought could be sold for quick profit were cartons of priceless pictures, books, and letters. A library that represented 20 years of painstaking collection was gone. Pictures that traced the development of my children from birth had vanished. Most painfully, the robbers had also stolen cardboard containers of pictures and letters from my mother, who had died nearly 20 years earlier at the age of 49.

The loss of memorabilia related to my mother’s life was stunning, for I had begun to organize papers and photographs with hopes that they would serve as the basis for a book. That thought was virtually extinguished with the loss of so much that was irreplaceable.

I’ll never forget the emotions that overwhelmed me some months later, in the process of cleaning a cluttered dresser drawer, I came upon a letter from my mother. It was a grand discovery. I had thought that I would never see another. Though only ink stains on paper, this letter was precious. Her penmanship reminded me of what I had seen in those albums from long ago. Her voice was audible in my mind as I read her words slowly, cherishing each one.

Somehow, the intensity of the problems I was experiencing diminished as I recalled her wise counsel and her excellent example. The power of communication from my dear mother under those circumstances was greater than even I might have suspected. I drew strength from the words that my mom had penned.

But even a letter written by a mother who had died almost two decades earlier pales in significance when compared to the impact of the revelation from God contained in the Bible. The analogy with my mother’s letter doesn’t fit perfectly, for we serve a risen Saviour. Our God is not dead. We have no lack of information communicated from heaven to us through prayer and fellowship, but the Bible does indeed represent a primary and precious resource because of our relationship with the Author, Jesus Christ.

My own experience with the Word has shown it again and again to be a treasure worth savoring and sharing, a genuine joy in my life. Dramatic, positive changes occur in my thinking and my living as I make time to read the Bible systematically or listen to it on tape.

An Incredible Collection

The Bible has infinite value as a letter from One who loves us supremely, but its pages encompass much more. Its literary significance would recommend it even if the divine origin could somehow be discounted. What other book can better substantiate its claim to actually make the reader wiser? Psalm 19:8 reminds us: “The precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes” (RSV). Or as one favorite paraphrase puts it: “The commandments of the Lord are radiant, enlightening the mind” (Clear Word).

I’ve actually seen this process at work. I’ve been privileged through the years to know many older Christians who never had the opportunity to acquire a formal education. But almost without exception their temperament, conversation, and even their countenance seemed refined and uplifted by the influence of the Bible. Let none doubt it: this is a powerful book!

No book in human history can hold a candle to the vast scope and great depth of this Word:

“In its wide range of style and subjects, the Bible has something to interest every mind and appeal to every heart. In its pages are found history the most ancient; biography the truest to life; principles of government for the control of the state, for the regulation of the household—principles that human wisdom has never equaled. It contains philosop-
The importance of Scripture as a faith link to the history of God's people and thousands of steadfast lives also cannot be overstated. Scripture ties us to the wisdom and the experience of those who have stood faithfully in times past, giving us inspiration for our own challenges.

“Through the study of the Bible, converse is held with patriarchs and prophets. The truth is clothed in elevated language, which exerts a fascinating power over the mind; the thought is lifted up from the things of earth, and brought to contemplate the glory of the future immortal life. What wisdom of man can compare with the grandeur of the revelation of God?” (Fundamentals of Christian Education, p. 130).

**A Survival Resource**

Ellen White’s description of the experience of John the revelator on Patmos has always captivated me, for it illustrates how Scripture can bring joy in the most desolate circumstances and connectedness with God even when we are alone.

After his dramatic deliverance from the cauldron of oil, John might well have been forgiven for any bitterness as he faced this banishment. But this experience would not turn out to be punishment for the last of the disciples. His faith in the God of Scripture predisposed him to be open to what God might communicate in this lonely place.

Ellen White suggests that as John observed the clouds above him on that relatively small, desolate isle, he imagined that they were the same ones that had traversed the space above the Temple at Jerusalem. He noted the indentations in the volcanic surface and revealed in the omnipotence of a God who might order both that floodwaters should cover the earth and that they should recede at His command. He marveled that even on that jagged formation designated a penal colony by the emperor of Rome, divine authority could limit inundation by the waters with the command “Hitherto and no further.”

Instead of allowing himself to be cut off from his Lord, John sifted through the sensory stimuli to find indications of God’s efforts to express His presence and His love. It’s not surprising that a man whose senses were so keenly attuned to detect God’s voice was “in the spirit on the Lord’s day.” Scripture, which had been the standard of his life, now became his survival resource and consolation.

Of course, John’s hopes weren’t disappointed. That patch of land that was to be his final resting place was transformed into a virtual communication center as he received and recorded a spectacular vision of the sweep of human history. What might have been ultimate punishment became consummate joy when he was blessed to pen the Bible’s final book.

The Word revealed to John the revelator is still efficacious for God’s children who are destined to survive under situations at least as challenging. Yes, God still reaches humanity through various sensory avenues, but the primary source of His revelation continues to be the Written Word of God, the Bible.

As this planet becomes less hospitable to the children of God, and as the Holy Spirit is withdrawn, the Word will become our survival resource in a hostile environment. What a glorious privilege we have to rely on the marvelous inventory of Bible promises, which are “as sure as the dawn.” The obvious failure of societal structures to address human needs fairly chases believers to the Word. In this uncertain milieu, we must have an authoritative source of both truth and solace.

Some today seem anxious to limit the implications of the Holy Scriptures in our lives. Attaching unlimited normative authority to the Word of God troubles them, and they reduce it to just another of the world’s “great books.” If we accept that diminution, we are condemned to an exile without our greatest resource. The Word of God, as it is, remains the underpinning for all our hope.

**A Love of the Truth**

The Bible means so much to me because, like the long-lost letter from my mother, it is a precious communication from a God who loves me. And His love doesn’t leave me as it found me; Scripture builds me up, sharpening my mind and forming me into the image of Christ.

My commitment is not only to be familiar with this precious Book, but to love both the truth and the Lord of truth it reveals.

Questions for Discussion

1. How has Scripture functioned like a personal communication from God to you?
2. How have challenges to the authority of the Word of God affected your life or the lives of those close to you?

Walter L. Pearson, Jr., is the speaker/director for the Breath of Life television ministry.
Joy in the Word
Especially for those times when you’re hurting, confused, overwhelmed

I heard joy today—in the squeals of a 3-year-old chasing bubbles, in the lilting song of a sparrow, in the happy ripple of a mountain brook.

I saw joy today—in the dancing eyes of a new bride, in the wiggles of a puppy welcoming its master, in the face of a schoolgirl skipping down the street.

I felt joy today—in the warmth of sunshine, in the rhythm of a praise chorus, in the welcome embrace of the man I love.

I found joy today—in the pages of an old book, in my hour with God’s eternal Word, in the presence of Him who is the source of all joy.

In my encounter with Christ in Scriptures this morning I found “the fulness of joy”—warmth, brightness, music, laughter, sunshine and roses, and infinite possibilities. My heart sang, my eyes danced, and my voice broke out in praise. Joy was mine, captured by a moment with the Lord in His Word.

Rita Armstrong is another who found joy in the Word. She had lived on an emotional roller coaster for much of her life. She masked her unhappiness, but often felt discouraged.

Then one afternoon she spent several hours meditating on God’s Word, His power, and His love. She remembered the certainty she had had as a child that Jesus loved her, then she thought of heaven and the joy she would feel when in God’s presence at last. The words of Hebrews 13:8 came to her: “Jesus Christ the same yesterday, and to day, and for ever.”

Jesus cannot change! Rita thought. He loved me when I was a child, He will love me when I get to heaven, and He loves me now! Joy and love overwhelmed her. Suddenly she realized she was significant in God’s eyes—that she mattered to God! Jumping to her feet, she danced around the house, singing again and again, “I matter to God! I matter to God!”

“In thy presence is fulness of joy” (Ps. 16:11).

One morning I awoke to feel the stresses of life at work in my body. My back, head, and feet hurt, and I wasn’t yet out of bed! I thought of all the things that hadn’t gotten done the day before. They would now be added to my list for today. I groaned and rolled over, but finally stumbled out of bed. My heart was heavy and my spirit sagged. I felt so weak, so vulnerable.

That morning I turned to Zephaniah 3:17: “The Lord thy God in the midst of thee is mighty; he will save, he will rejoice over thee with joy; he will rest in his love, he will joy over thee with singing.” I pictured myself a little girl coming to my heavenly Father to be held in His arms, hearing Him say, “Now, Dorothy, I’ll take care of everything.” I could imagine Him holding me close as He sang a joyful love song to quiet me. I felt the warmth of His embrace. His joy filled me with new energy.

After that encounter with God’s Word I was able to breeze through my day with a light heart. I finished the 17 items on my to-do list by midafternoon. I fixed myself some cold lemonade and sat in my garden to enjoy the flowers, to bask in the sunshine of God’s love. It was a joyful day! What a difference the Word had made!

“Thy word was unto me the joy and rejoicing of mine heart” (Jer. 15:16).

Joyce Landorf Heatherley found strength and joy in the Word following her divorce. She felt forsaken by everyone, including God. Num with pain and unable to concentrate on Bible study or prayer, she seemed unable to do the simplest chores.

One morning while dusting an end table, she picked up her Bible, and it slipped through her fingers to the floor. It fell open to Romans 8. Her eyes rested on the verses at the close of the chapter: “For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord” (verses 38, 39).

Joyce carried the Bible to the piano and placed it open on the music rack. Every day after that she spent some time sitting on the piano bench reading those words again and again.
Darlene Rose was a missionary in New Guinea when World War II broke. Japanese soldiers captured her and her husband, and kept them in separate prisoner-of-war camps in the jungle. But just before she was miraculously delivered, she learned that her husband had died.

That night when the lights in the camp were out, she lay facedown on her mat, longing for a soft shoulder to lay her aching head on, for someone to put a comforting arm around her. She felt all joy had gone with the loss of her husband, and she thought she would never be able to smile again.

“Lord, are You there?” her breaking heart cried out in the silence of the tropical night. “Do You see my pain? Do You care?” Just then the Lord spoke quietly to her heart the words of Isaiah 61:1-3: “He hath sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, . . . to comfort all that mourn, . . . to give unto them beauty for ashes, the oil of joy for mourning, the garment of praise for the spirit of heaviness.”

So real did Christ’s presence seem that she quietly poured out her sorrows to His listening ear, sensing that He took note of every word she whispered. She knew He understood her oppressive sense of aloneness, the grief too deep for words. Darlene sensed that He wept with her, that He cared. A bout that night she later wrote, “I was learning to understand the comfort of the Holy Spirit. Sometime during the dark hours I slept. The sword of sorrow had pierced deep within me, but He had bathed the sword in oil.” The next morning Darlene’s face radiated the inner joy she had found in the presence of Christ through His Word.

“No long ago I went through a time of darkness. I couldn’t bear the pain of the present, but could see no hope for the future. On the outside I was smiling. Inside I felt so fragile, splitting apart at my very soul. It was then that I read Isaiah 9:2, 3: “The people who walked in darkness have seen a great light. They lived in a land of shadows, but now light is shining on them. You have given them great joy, Lord; you have made them happy” (TEV).

“Lord, come to me with the light and joy of Your presence,” I wrote in my journal.

“Lead me out of darkness into Your brightness.” “Bring your shadows to Me,” He whispered.

“The shadows in my life are many, Lord,” I began. For several minutes I wrote down my concerns for sins, failures, health problems, children, grandchildren, speaking appointments, and writing projects. I handed over these burdens to the Lord that morning.

In my journal I wrote: “Lord, You are my light, my joy, and my song! Come to me, Lord! Warm my heart, lighten my spirit. Please, Lord, I need You! Oh, how I need You!”

The sun felt as if it were shining for the first time in weeks! Infused with energy and hope, I felt able to face my day with joy, joy found in my time with God and His Word. I had discovered the truth of Ellen White’s words:

“He, created for fellowship with God, can only in such fellowship find his real life and development. Created to find in God his highest joy, he can find in nothing else that can quiet the cravings of the heart, can satisfy the hunger and thirst of the soul. He who with sincere and teachable spirit studies God’s Word, seeking to comprehend its truths, will be brought in touch with its Author” (Education, pp. 124, 125). And the Author is the source of all joy.

“You have given them great joy, Lord: you have made them happy.”

Have you discovered the secret of a Christian’s happy life? Are you spending time every day in the Word, in the presence of Him who is the source of all joy? According to John, for this purpose the Bible was written—to introduce us to joy.

“And these things we write unto you, that your joy may be full” (1 John 1:4).

Questions for Discussion

1. With which of the persons mentioned in the lesson do you identify most closely?
2. How can you improve quality time with your Lord?
3. What about this reading most impressed you? What possible new ways to witness does the reading suggest?

Dorothy Eaton Watts is the associate secretary of the Southern Asia Division in Hosur, India.
A recent book, *The Word of the Lord*, reminds us of a very basic truth. The Bible “makes the redeeming God known to us.”

How true this is! And how necessary it is for those who revere the Bible to remember that it is more than just a source of information. Of course, Scripture does impart understanding, but it is also the “living” and “powerful” Word of God (Heb. 4:12).

If we are truly to experience that power in our lives, then we must not only understand what the Bible says but also understand why it was written. As someone has said, the Bible “is given to man to enable him to enter into salvation.” This is the “why” we must never forget.

Paul understood this essential truth. The Holy Scriptures, he wrote to Timothy, “are able to make you wise for salvation” (2 Tim. 3:15). The purpose of Scripture is not merely to impart religious knowledge, but to lead to salvation. So Paul adds, “through faith which is in Christ Jesus.” The wisdom that leads ultimately to salvation is not head knowledge of the Scriptures, but an experiential knowledge of Jesus Christ, which comes by faith.

In one of His discourses with the Jews, Jesus Himself referred to the purpose for which Scripture was written. The incident appears in what is perhaps one of the most crucial passages in the Bible and reveals to us the ultimate purpose of the Written Word. To the misguided Jews Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me. But you are not willing to come to Me that you may have life” (John 5:39, 40).

These Jews were perhaps the best Bible students in the world. They continuously and meticulously read the Word and studied the text. Yet they failed totally to understand what it was all about. William Barclay comments somewhere that “water has as much chance of getting into concrete as the Word of God had of getting into their minds.” And the reason? They read the Scriptures, not to hear the Word of the redeeming God, but to find arguments to support their own positions.

Let us be reminded during this Week of Prayer, as we acknowledge again the authority and power of God’s Word, that it is possible to study Scripture for the wrong reasons. Eternal life does not come to us merely through studying and understanding the Bible. It comes through acceptance of Him on whom the Bible centers. As Barclay again says: “The function of the Scriptures is not to give life, but to point to Him who can.”

On the road to Emmaus Jesus Himself used this very principle. The Bible says that in rekindling the flagging faith of the disappointed disciples, “beginning at Moses and all the Prophets, He expounded to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning Himself” (Luke 24:27).

The result of this divine exposition of Scripture is remarkable. They said to each other, “Did not our heart burn within us... while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (verse 32). The real power of the Word of God lies in its application to Jesus and His great redemptive work. Eternal life comes from the incarnate Word, from Christ, who is the focus of all Scripture.

How It Happens

The extent of the Bible’s witness to Jesus is quite compelling. To examine it in detail would require volumes. But there are some specific emphases that illuminate the purpose of the Bible and help us to grasp again its saving message. Truly, the Scriptures “testify of Him.”

1. They testify of His person. The Bible is the main source of information regarding the existence of Jesus. While there are some casual references in nonbiblical literature, the only substantive knowledge we have of Jesus is from the Bible. The historical Jesus is the Jesus of biblical history, the Jesus who was born in the reign of Caesar Augustus, and who was crucified under Pontius Pilate.

This Jesus, this historical figure who lived and died in first-century Palestine, is none other than the divine/human Son of God. This is the unequivocal testimony of Scripture. “Emmanuel, the risen one.” He alone is the way to the Father and to the Father’s house. The parables and miracles that saturate the pages of the Gospels are the words and acts of a real Person who lived in real time, and whose coming changed the destiny of the human race forever.

Without the Bible we would know nothing of significance about Jesus.

2. They testify of His atoning death. While it is clear that Scripture testifies to the life and ministry of Jesus, it is also clear that it focuses with great detail on the final week of His life. The death of Jesus is unequivocally the focal point of the Gospels. And why so? Because Jesus’ death was different...
from any other death in human history.

The death of Jesus on the cross of Calvary was, and is, an event with profound theological and redemptive significance. He died not for Himself or on account of anything He had done. Jesus' death was a sacrificial death, a substitutionary death, an atoning death. Paul states it thus: "Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures" (1 Cor. 15:3). Jesus lived in order that He might die—"for us," as Paul says again (Rom. 5:8).

All this reminds us that Christianity, rightly understood, does not primarily offer us an example and is not principally a process of mental illumination. The Christian message deals with sinful human existence and deals with it by way of substitution and atonement. To this the Scriptures bear eloquent testimony. It is central, indispensable, and irreplaceable.

3. They testify of His righteousness.

Central and glorious as the cross of Calvary is, it is not the only provision in the divine plan for human salvation. Paul states, "For if when we were enemies we were reconciled to God through the death of His Son, much more, having been reconciled, we shall be saved by His life" (verse 10).

And the significance of Jesus' life is that it was a righteous life. The testimony of the Bible is that this righteousness, found only in Christ, is the source
T he C hristian message, which deals with sinful human existence by way of substitution and atonement, is central, indispensable, and irreplaceable.

God with a new name—"KING OF KINGS AND LORD OF LORDS" (Rev. 19:16).

Questions for Discussion

1. From the reference to the Jews in Scripture, what pitfalls do you see for modern Christians and for Seventh-day Adventists in particular?
2. Discuss the five ways in which Scripture testifies to Jesus. Which do you find most meaningful for your personal life?
3. How might we use any or all of these five points in sharing the gospel with others?

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The Unique, Impelling Power of God’s Word

No other book can possibly compete.

One of the internal evidences of the Bible’s inspiration is its impelling power. In this respect the Bible is different from all other books. In turn, it has been translated into more languages than any other book, always holding the best-seller position. The Bible is the most loved, most read, and most appreciated book in the world because of its enormous power to positively influence human beings.

No other book has had as much impact on human lives as the Word of God. Here’s why:

1. The Scriptures introduce everlasting life to perishing souls. Jesus said, “You search the Scriptures, for in them you think you have eternal life; and these are they which testify of Me” (John 5:39). In other words, the Scriptures tell sinners doomed to eternal destruction about Christ—“the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6).

Jesus Himself knew the difference firsthand. When He received the news that one of His dearest friends, Lazarus, had died, it could have meant eternal separation—if God had not prepared a plan of salvation. Jesus turned to the grieving Martha and said, “I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whosoever lives and believes in Me shall never die” (John 11:25, 26).

Millions of Christians have died believing in Christ Jesus. Now they await the resurrection morning, when they will receive immortal bodies and life from the returning Saviour—the life and the resurrection.

Sinful human beings are concerned about life and death. They think seriously about death and fear eternal separation from their loved ones. Satan has taken advantage of this human weakness, disseminating the belief in the immortality of the soul. But the Scriptures reveal that there is eternal life only in Christ. By believing in the name of Jesus, a person doomed to eternal death will receive eternal life.

2. The Scriptures transform lives. One of the purposes and functions of the Scriptures is to transform a sinful life into a godly one. Sinners are overwhelmed by the forgiving grace of God introduced in the Bible. “For the word of God is living and powerful, and sharper than any two-edged sword, piercing even to the division of soul and spirit, and of joints and marrow, and is adiscerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart” (Heb. 4:12).

Once I saw a documentary about Western missionaries working in the Philippines during the pioneering days. The missionaries were walking through a jungle in a remote area. Suddenly a group of locals appeared from the bush and blocked the way, threatening the missionaries with spears, swords, and bows and arrows. The missionaries tried to explain their work, but the language barrier simply added more troubles and misunderstanding. Finally one missionary pulled a Bible from his bag, and using body language and a picture of the Crucifixion, began explaining the sacrificial love of Christ. Somehow the Holy Spirit worked on the hearts of these people, and they began studying the Bible with the missionaries. After several days they became Christians.

The Word of God can change hearts in all conditions. Drunkards and drug addicts have been cured by it, the discouraged have been encouraged, and even wicked sinners in prison cells have become saints of God by reading it. As the two disciples on the road to Emmaus said to one another, “Did not our hearts burn within us while He talked with us on the road, and while He opened the Scriptures to us?” (Luke 24:32).

What power there is in the marvelous Word of God!

3. The Scriptures lead people to the path of righteousness. Our life journey in this sin-darkened world demands a sure guide. Human philosophies and teachings have suggested various ways of life. But none of these could possibly give satisfactory answers to the many perplexing questions about the state of life.

The Scriptures are “an infallible guide under all circumstances, even to the end of the journey of life” (Ellen G. White, in Signs of the Times, Mar. 21, 1906). The psalmist sings, “Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light to my path” (Ps. 119:105). A light brightens the road ahead, the Scriptures help us see the path we’re traveling.

The Scriptures tell us what is right and what is wrong, which way we should go and which way we shouldn’t. As long as we are faithful to the Word of God, we will never
miss the way to heaven.

4. The Scriptures guarantee eternal victory. The 6,000-year battle between good and evil will soon end. Since Satan well knows that his time is short, he brings all kinds of temptations and troubles to people. He "walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8). How can we resist Satan's temptations and be victorious over him? We must be armed with the Word of God.

The Word of God is the most powerful weapon we can use in this spiritual warfare. When Jesus was tested by Satan in the wilderness 40 days after His baptism, He did not use worldly knowledge or human philosophy. He used only one tool: "It is written." This proves that the Word of God is the most powerful, useful, and sure weapon that Christians have in the great controversy between good and evil.

In the explanation of the whole armor of God, Paul admonishes that in order "to stand against the wiles of the devil" (Eph. 6:11), we should "take ... the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (verse 17). When we lose this weapon, we become helpless and will easily fall prey to the devil.

"Satan well knows," wrote Ellen White, "that all whom he can lead to neglect prayer and the searching of the Scriptures will be overcome by his attacks. Therefore he invents every possible device to engross the mind" (The Great Controversy, p. 519).

She wrote later: "I saw that young and old neglect the Bible. They do not make that book their study and their rule of life as they should. Especially are the young guilty of this neglect. Most of them are ready, and find plenty of time, to read almost any other book. But the word that points to life, eternal life, is not perused and daily studied. ... Idle stories have been attentively read, while the Bible has been passed by neglected" (Testimonies, vol. 1, pp. 134, 135).

As the close of probation draws nearer, Satan's attack on God's people will intensify. "Only those," wrote Ellen White, "who have been diligent students of the Scriptures and who have received the love of the truth will be shielded from the powerful delusion that takes the world captive. By the Bible testimony these will detect the deceiver in his disguise" (The Great Controversy, p. 625).

Let us be armed with the Word of God until we set foot on the heavenly Canaan.

Questions for Discussion

1. Think of a time when you clearly felt the power of God's Word. What passage were you reading? What was happening in your life at that time?

2. Three times Jesus responded to Satan's wilderness temptations with "It is written ..." In what ways does Satan tempt you? With what texts can you respond?

3. Does being "people of the Book" mean doctrinal purity, regular Bible study, or both? Are Adventists still "people of the Book"?

Jairyong Lee is the director of the 100 Missionary Movement/North America.
Peter clearly contrasts light and darkness as he writes to stimulate strong faith and encourage the converted Jewish and Gentile believers in Asia and the surrounding regions.

“And we have the prophetic word made more sure,” he assures them as he begins his second letter. “You will do well to pay attention to this as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the morning star rises in your hearts” (2 Peter 1:19, RSV).

Whenever I think of darkness, I remember a dramatic experience I had working as a missionary among the Campas Indians in the Amazonian region of my home country. The day had been exhausting. I had left home very early, and although it was already 5:00 in the afternoon, I had not reached my final destination. Soon the darkness of the night surrounded me, and I was unable to see anything. I was left to the mercy of the dangers of an unknown jungle. It was cold, and I began to feel insecure.

“Pastor,” the Indians had told me, “if you ever have to spend the night in the jungle, build a fire. The blaze will warm you and keep the wild animals and insects away from you.”

Darkness intimidates, scares, causes panic, and many times leads to desperation and craziness. Darkness is a symbol of confusion and death. By contrasting light and darkness, Peter is calling the attention of the church to the danger of losing the light by rejecting or disdaining it.

The message of our text was written by a simple man without much culture but filled by the Holy Spirit to a church that was becoming firmly established in the truth. It was a young church living its first century of existence, with false teachers seeking to introduce heresies in its midst.

The early church, in its first love, was being persecuted because of a firm faith in Christ, but the persecution resulted only in the believers trusting the Lord more than ever. Some were humiliated and misunderstood, some were thrown to the wild beasts in the Roman arena, and others were burned alive. In the midst of pain and suffering the church continued to grow as its members shared the gospel throughout the known world.

Undoubtedly, the enemy of God was being driven crazy by his hatred toward the faithful pioneers of the Christian faith. What could he do to destroy them? Could he make the gospel ineffective by destroying the value of the redemptive work of Christ in the life of the individual?

It was then that the enemy decided to change his strategy. He would continue to persecute and kill Christians, but at the same time he would attack them in the sensitive terrain of faith and doctrine. Consequently, a strange form of libertine Gnosticism began to invade the church. The Gnostics believed that the worldly system had as one of its purposes the “destruction” of the body. The body was equated with sin because it was material, and according to them, matter was inherently evil. This led them to conclude that Christians could cooperate with the worldly system by “destroying” the body through punishment or degradation.

Spiritual Mischief

The type of Gnosticism that attacked the church at Colossae argued for the destruction of the body through punishment. In the days of Peter, however, another type of Gnosticism surfaced, teaching that the body could be destroyed through a licentious lifestyle. The church was now introduced to “the lust of defiling passion” (2 Peter 2:10, RSV). Individuals appeared having their “eyes full of adultery, insatiable for sin,” enticing unsteady souls, and with hearts “trained in greed” (verse 14, RSV).

Darkness. Thick moral darkness was beginning to engulf the church even in the days of Peter. This church that had resisted persecution and suffering was, perhaps, unaware of it. They seemed undecided as they considered the heresies that the enemy was introducing. It was this situation that moved Peter to write his second letter to the church. This historical context will make it easier for us to understand the message of our text: “We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to this as a lamp shining in a dark place, until the day dawns and the
morning star rises in your hearts.”

The Word of God is our only safeguard in this dark world. Today, as he has done so often in the past, the enemy will do anything to destroy the church of God. As we face the final moments of human history, when an eternal day is about to dawn and the glorious morning star is about to rise, the enemy will attack the church as never before. He will attempt to destabilize good doctrine by introducing teachings of human origin. It is at this moment that the Lord points us to the “prophetic word” as our only safeguard.

Beloved, do not doubt it. Today men and women will rise among us, doubting the Word of God, assigning levels of inspiration, attempting to rationalize clear biblical principles and teachings, and working very hard in order that truth may give in to social and cultural pressures. Long ago the servant of the Lord prophesied it: “Men arise who think they find something to criticize in God’s Word. They lay it bare before others as evidence of superior wisdom. These men are, many of them, smart men, learned men, they have eloquence and talent, the whole lifework [of whom] is to unsettle minds in regard to the inspiration of the Scriptures. They influence many to see as they do” (Selected Messages, book 1, p. 17).

We need wisdom not to be influenced by the liberalism that marches under the standard of historical criticism and to avoid at the same time the radicalism of the right that is trying also to destabilize the church as an organized body. Where can we find assistance for this task?

Peter’s advice is that we should pay attention to the “prophetic word.” This means to believe in the revealed Word and to defend it as fully inspired and trustworthy, and as the only rule of faith and practice.

What would happen to you if during a dark night the lamp that lit your way began to go out? And what would happen to the church if, in a world of moral and spiritual darkness, the Word of God began to lose its authority? The Word is the only lamp to lighten our way; the lighthouse that will take us safely to our glorious destiny.

If for any reason we were persuaded that the Bible is not inspired, as it claims to be (2 Tim. 3:16), and if we let social or cultural pressures justify the violation of biblical principles and teachings, we would be opening the door to the complete disintegration of the unity of the church. Is not the world trying to justify free love, homosexuality, and indiscriminate abortion? What is the point of reference for our church? Peter answers, “We have the prophetic word made more sure. You will do well to pay attention to it.”

This text contains a message not only for the church but also for you and me. Are you living in the darkness of suffering and pain in this world? Is there darkness all around you? Do you have an urgent decision to make but do not know how to make it? Open the Inspired Word. Kneel down and ask God for answers. The Word is your light, and as long as you make it the norm of your life, you will not stumble, but will walk safely through the valley of shadow and death. It will always shine on your way, and in its pages you will find the hope and assurance that you will never walk alone.

That night in the jungle I lit the fire and felt secure. There was darkness around me, and it was cold and dangerous. There were many insects emitting strange sounds. But I was secure. Jesus was with me, and I had light. Darkness has no power when confronted with the light. We invite you to go back home today, trusting the Word of God more than ever before. Would you like to accept it again as trustworthy, as fully inspired, and as the only authorized rule for each one of your beliefs?

Questions for Discussion
1. What is the meaning of the “prophetic word” (2 Peter 1:19, RSV)?
2. What teachings of human origin has Satan used to destabilize good doctrine today?
3. If Peter were to write a letter to the Seventh-day Adventist Church in 1998, what warnings would he give?

Alejandro Bullon is the ministerial secretary of the South American Division.
The truths contained in the Word of God must not be received merely as a theory. Through the reception of Christ as our personal Saviour, the precious truths which that Word contains will become as threads of gold to bind us to Christ and to one another. As the penetrating power of the leaven produces an entire change in the meal, so the power of the Word of God, through His grace, will work a transformation in the soul.

But the question arises, why are there so many, claiming to believe God's Word, in whom we do not see a reform in words, in spirit, and in character? Why are there so many who cannot bear opposition to their purposes and plans, who manifest an unholy temper, and whose words are harsh, overbearing, and passionate?

The answer is, they are not converted. They need to be born again. The Word of God has not had the opportunity of doing its work upon the heart. The sunshine of Christ's righteousness has not been permitted to shine into the soul temple. Their natural and cultivated tendencies to evil have not been worked upon by the transforming power of the truth, and as the result, preconceived opinions are retained. All this reveals the absence of the grace of Christ, and a disbelief in His power to transform the character.

The truths of the Word of God meet in one grand practical necessity—the conversion of the soul through faith. When the believer is united with Christ, that faith is manifested in holiness of character, in consistent obedience to every word that proceedeth out of the mouth of God. The grand principles of the Word of God are not to be thought too pure and holy to be brought into the daily life. The truths of the Word of God are truths which reach to heaven and compass eternity; and yet their vital influence is to be woven into the human life. The influence of the Word of God is to have a sanctifying effect on our speech, our actions, our associations with every member of the human family. It must bring under its control the temper and the voice. The apostle exhorts us: "A s he which hath called you is holy, so be ye holy in all manner of conversation; because it is written, Be ye holy; for I am holy."

It is a mistake for any to suppose that they can with safety pass by the little things with indifference. In the home and in the church there are matters which are looked upon as "little things." But it is these "little things" that have the great results. It is the "little things" that discipline the soul, and prepare men to act with lowly-mindedness under large responsibilities. The leaven of truth is a living principle. This principle is to be practiced in the little things, and exert an influence over the daily life. The large and small things are always linked together. It is because the "little things" are not always seen and linked with those of higher interest that so many professed Christians fail. Many whose characters are now being weighed in the balances of the sanctuary are pronounced wanting, because they do not bring the truth into the practical life.

Why Aren't We Different?

As members of the royal family, we are in solemn covenant with God to promote piety in the home and in the church. But many act as if the truths of God's Word did not exist. The same love of self, the same selfish indulgence, the same temper and hasty speech are seen in their lives as in the life of the worldling. The same sensitive pride, the same yielding to natural inclination, the same perversities of character, are seen as if the truth were totally unknown to them. They close the windows of the soul and shut out the righteousness of Christ, and then complain that they have no joy, no assurance and happiness in believing the truth.

But the sin lies at their own door; for they have not hidden the leaven of truth in the heart. When the waters of life flow in pure, sweet currents to the parched soil of the
heart, there will be a development of fruit to the glory of God. Then the truth will not be brought into disrepute by the perverse disposition, the defective hereditary and cultivated tendencies now revealed in word and action.

The leaven of truth must have life in itself, or it will not work out of the heart the deadly errors that are there. The Word of God enjoins upon believers: “Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things. Those things which ye have both learned, and received, and heard, . . . do; and the God of peace shall be with you.”

Should not the consideration of these matters arouse every Christian to the solemn resolution to be more faithful? The words of inspiration should have weight with us: “Gird up the loins of your mind, be sober, and hope to the end for the grace that is to be brought unto you at the revelation of Jesus Christ.” This scripture is given to us to heed and to practice. As men and women who profess godliness, we need to ask ourselves, Are we obeying the Word of God? Is the leaven of truth hidden in the heart, working in the character, and conforming the entire being to the will and ways of God? We need the converting power of God. The leaven of evil which works in disobedience and denial of the truth must be eradicated, and the leaven of the Word of God implanted in the heart, to work with its vital properties to restore the lost image of God in man.

And, the transformation having taken place through the leaven of truth, a work is entrusted to us. Christ commissions us: “All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth. Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost; teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you; and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world” (Signs of the Times, Oct. 27, 1898).

It is God’s plan that old and young shall study His Word. This is necessary for intellectual and spiritual growth. Christ has given us the Scriptures as our rule of life. This book contains His teaching, and is worthy of the closest study. “The words that I speak unto you,” He declared, “they are spirit, and they are life.” These words, falling from the lips of Christ with divine authority, were to the disciples as a new revelation. They were not new, but they seemed so to the disciples,
because their eyes were opened to see wonderful things in God's Word.

One Greater Than Gabriel
Should the angel Gabriel or one of the seraphs be sent to this world to take upon himself human nature, and to teach men the mysteries of science and the knowledge of God, how eagerly men would listen to his instruction! Supposing that he were able to set us a perfect example of purity and holiness, sympathizing with us in all our sorrows, bereavements, and afflictions, and suffering the punishment of our sins, how eagerly we would follow him! What exaltation he would receive! Men would desire to place him on the throne of David, and gather the nations under his banner.

If, when the heavenly being returned to his home, he left behind a book containing the history of his mission, with revelations regarding the history and destiny of the world, how anxiously would its seal be broken! How anxiously would men seek to obtain a copy! Thinking men would grasp the precious instruction, for the benefit of future generations. Thousands from all parts of the world would copy the words of this book. With intense interest they would read and reread its pages. For a time all other interests would be subordinated to this.

But One surpassing all that supposition can present came to this world. Nearly two thousand years ago a voice of strange and mysterious import was heard from the throne of God: "Sacrifice and offering thou wouldest not, but a body hast thou prepared me. . . . Lo, I come (in the volume of the book it is written of me), to do thy will, O God."

Christ reproached His disciples with their slowness of comprehension. They were influenced by maxims and traditional lore, so that the truths spoken by the greatest Teacher the world has ever known were often lost truths to them. Christ led them to realize that He had put them in possession of truth of which they little suspected the value. After His resurrection, as He was walking to Emmaus with two of the disciples, He opened their understanding, that they might understand the Scriptures, so explaining the Old Testament to them that they saw in its teaching a meaning that the writers themselves had not seen.

Christ's words are represented as being bread from heaven. As the disciples ate the words of Christ, their understanding was quickened. As they diligently sought for the truth as for hidden treasure, they understood better the value of the grace and righteousness of Christ. In their comprehension of His teaching, they stepped from the obscurity of dawn to the radiance of noon.

The work of no human author is perfect. The depth of human intellect may be measured. The richest mines of human production are not inexhaustible. But the highest, deepest, broadest flight of the imagination cannot find out God. There is infinity beyond all that we in our own strength can comprehend; the Holy Spirit must reveal Him to us. Many are too well satisfied with the surface truths of revelation. Precious gems of truth are passed by because their value is not seen. Let the Bible student tax his mind as he studies God's Word; for the meaning often lies hidden beneath the surface. The knowledge thus gained will be like heavenly seed planted by the divine Sower.—Signs of the Times, Dec. 22, 1898. ■

Questions for Discussion
1. What reason does the author give for the lack of difference between the lives of Christians and that of people in the world in general? How can this problem be corrected?
2. The author cites the name of Gabriel in an intriguing illustration that indicts us for the way we treat the Bible. How did that comparison impact you? Can you cite other areas where we show a lack of appreciation for the blessings God has given?
3. What is the one aspect of the present reading that impresses you most? Why?

Ellen G. White was one of the pioneers of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Her work continues to be a prophetic voice among Adventists.
Experience the Power of His Word

BY CHARLES MILLS

A Note to Parents and Teachers

The Bible sits on the shelves of more homes than any other book. Yet we seldom experience its power. Why? Because Scripture isn’t understood or appreciated for what it is—the unchanging, lifesaving, mind-altering Word of God.

The following readings attempt to introduce the Bible to children not only as God speaking to all the people of the world, but as God speaking directly to them. It’s my prayer that our heavenly Father will also whisper in your ear as you lead young minds to a better understanding of this beautiful book.

Here are a few activities you and your children can enjoy together this week.

Start a family history page in each child’s Bible.
Find and maintain a special place for everyone’s Bible in your home or classroom.
Read aloud from the International Children’s Bible (Word Publishing).
Make Bible reading a scheduled part of each day. You could light candles or play sacred music softly in the background to create a worshipful mood.
Include time to translate what you’ve read into practical advice and real-world guidance.

SABBATH

Love Letters

Memory Gem
Hebrews 4:12: “The word of God is living and active” (NIV).

Visual Aid
Gather some letters that you’ve recently received from family and friends, and place them within the pages of your Bible. Show the children what you’ve done, then say, “The Bible is like a collection of letters from people you know and love. It also teaches me about Jesus and keeps me from worrying too much. When I know what’s happening in my family, I feel better. The Bible helps me understand what’s happening in the world. These letters and my Bible bring me happiness by reminding me that someone loves me and is thinking about me.”

Next, share a few prepared (underlined) examples from your letters, then read a couple of your favorite uplifting and hopeful texts from the Bible. End by saying, “This week we’re going to see what love messages God has put in the Bible for every boy and girl in this room.”

Story

When I was a little boy, I lived in a country far from where I am now. A matter of fact, there was a whole ocean and a couple seas between my grandmother, aunts, uncles, and cousins and where my family set up housekeeping. The country where we lived was Singapore. My relatives lived in the United States.

I loved Singapore. It had jungles filled with chattering monkeys and trees loaded with coconuts. We would visit beautiful flower gardens and attend strange festivals at which people played mysterious music and sang and danced to the rhythm of beating drums.

Almost every week we’d get a letter from someone in faraway America. I’d never met the writers, but they all seemed to care about me. “This is from your grandmother and grandfather in North Carolina,” my mom would say as she held up an envelope. “And this one is from your uncle and aunt in New York,” she’d announce with great expectation.

I almost every week we’d get a letter from someone in faraway America. I’d never met the writers, but they all seemed to care about me. “This is from your grandmother and grandfather in North Carolina,” my mom would say as she held up an envelope. “And this one is from your uncle and aunt in New York,” she’d announce with great expectation.

Then she’d read that my cousin had the chicken pox, or my uncle got a new job, or my grandmother fell down and hurt her elbow. Without fail every writer would say, “And how is little Charlie? Be sure to tell him that we love him very much.”

Who were these people? I wondered.

One fine day my family and I got on a big boat and sailed for weeks and weeks across the ocean. “Soon you’ll...
meet all the people who wrote the letters," Dad told me. "Your cousins, your uncles, your aunts—even your grandmother—will be at the dock when we arrive at the New York harbor." And they were! So much hugging and laughing and crying I’d never seen.

It seemed strange that even though I’d never met any of those hugging, laughing, and crying people, I felt as if I knew them. Why? Because of their letters. Even though we lived on opposite sides of the world, we felt close because we took time to write to each other and share what was happening in our lives.

That’s the power of letters. That’s also the power of God’s most wonderful letter to us—the Bible. Even though oceans of space separate us, we can be friends. We can feel that we know Jesus even though we’ve never seen His face.

Application
If God talks to us through the Bible, how do we talk to Him? That’s right. By prayer. Prayer and the Bible go together, don’t they? Why don’t you decide right now to use God’s Word to get to know Jesus better by having someone read it to you every day? Then allow Jesus to get to know you better by talking to Him often through prayer.

Discussion
What’s your favorite letter that you have received? What did it say? In what ways do people usually communicate with each other today? (E-mail, telephone, videotape, etc.) How would Jesus use these communication tools to reach us if He came to this world in person right now?

Activity
Ask the adult who takes care of you to help you write a letter or send an E-mail to someone you know. Tell him or her exactly what to say. You can share a short story or just express your love. That’s exactly what God did when He inspired people to write the Bible.

SUNDAY

Leap of Faith

Memory Gem
Romans 10:17: “Faith comes from hearing the message, and the message is heard through the word of Christ” (NIV).

Visual Aid
Show a model airplane and a toy boat to the children and ask them if anybody knows how an airplane flies or how a boat floats. Let them handle the items. Then ask, “Even though most people don’t know how airplanes fly or boats float, they happily climb on board real airplanes and real boats to go visit grandma or a friend who lives far away. That’s faith. They have faith that the men and women who built the airplane or the boat knew a lot about flying and floating. Faith is very important when we read the Bible too. We must believe that what Jesus said is true, that He’ll keep His promises, and that He’ll come again.”

Story
One day a tall apartment building in a big city caught on fire. People screamed and ran to get out of the building. Black smoke rushed down the hallways, and hot flames crept up the stairs. Loud alarms clanged and warbled everywhere.

Fire trucks arrived. Men and women shouted instructions as firefighters stretched hoses from water mains and aimed them at the burning building. Spray arched up from the street and washed over the bricks and mortar, over the flower boxes and air-conditioners, over the laundry hanging outside the windows, and the metal fire escapes jammed with frightened people.

Soon everyone in the building escaped except one little girl. She stood at the broken window of her room, screaming through the thick smoke boiling all about her. Why didn’t she run with the other people? Why hadn’t she left her apartment and found someone to help her escape? Because she had been too scared to know what to do. And she was blind.

“Daddy! Daddy!” she screamed again and again. Her father had gone to the store and didn’t know about the fire.

“Little girl!” the firemen shouted from far below. “We’ve got a net spread out with strong people holding on to it. Jump. Jump!”

The blind girl ignored the firefighters’ pleas. She just stood there crying and screaming for her father as the fire crept closer and closer. A heavy bed was burning, and in a few moments the curtains over her head would ignite.

“Daddy! Daddy!” she called out, tears streaming from her sightless eyes.

Just then a man ran around the corner and dropped his bags of groceries. He saw the fire trucks and the men and women trying to control the raging inferno. He saw the black smoke pouring out of the windows. He saw the flames crackling and burning inside the building. And he saw his little daughter clinging to the windowsill, her face pale and tear-stained.

That moment he noticed the big net being held by the strong people at the base of the building. Looking up at the girl, he shouted, “Sweetheart, this is Daddy. You’ve got to jump. You’ve got to jump right now!”

Suddenly the little girl grew calm. Her screaming stopped as a smile spread across her face. “OK, Daddy,” she called.
With that she stepped out into space and fell. So relaxed was she, so confident that her father would never let her get hurt, that she tumbled into the net without breaking a bone or even straining a muscle in her four-story drop. She trusted her father completely. When she heard his voice, she did exactly what he told her to do. That trust, that faith, saved her life.

I don’t know about you, but sometimes I feel as if I am blind. I don’t mean that I can’t see anything. I mean that I don’t understand a lot of stuff. I find myself asking “why” a lot. Why did my friend die? Why did that man lose his job? Why is there so much sickness in this world? Why can’t I do all the things I want to do?

Then I read my Bible and find that again and again God says to me, “Charles. This is your heavenly Father. Everything will be all right if you’ll just have faith in Me. I’ll take care of you if you’ll listen to My voice and follow My instructions.” Suddenly my fear and uncertainty go away. That’s God talking to me. He never lets anybody down. So I relax and fall into His strong arms of love.

Application

The next time you feel afraid, the next time you don’t know what to do, ask your mom, dad, teacher, or the adult who takes care of you to grab his or her Bible. Tell them, “I think I need a text or two that will help me not be afraid” or “Read to me something that will give me courage” or “How ‘bout finding a story of someone who was sad and then became glad.”

The adult may have to do a little searching, but be patient. God longs to speak to you through His Holy Word. Listen, and let Him help you every day.

Discussion

What are some of the things that make you afraid or angry or sad?

Can you think of anyone in the Bible who was afraid? (Daniel in the lions’ den.) Angry? (Saul before he became Paul.) Sad? (The disciples when Jesus went up to heaven.) How did God help them?

Activity

Draw a “before” and “after” picture of a Bible character who was helped when God spoke to him or her. For instance, you could draw Jonah being swallowed by the whale (before) and then thanking God on the beach for keeping him alive (after). Or how about people crying by a graveside (before) and then joyously greeting loved ones at Jesus’ second coming (after)? When ever you face a problem, remember, God is there helping you before and after.

MONDAY

Wonderful Words of Life

Memory Gem

Romans 1:16: “I am not ashamed of the gospel, because it is the power of God for the salvation of everyone who believes” (NIV).

Visual Aid

Show one of your old high school or college annuals and share how much you enjoy looking at the pictures of the buildings and classmates. Perhaps include a short story about a person or place that’s represented in the book. Then say, “The Bible is like this book. In it I find stories and places that mean something important to my eternal life. It reminds me that Jesus is my friend and that He’s preparing a wonderful new home for me in heaven with others who chose to love and obey God.”

Mention that some of your friends have changed physically since school. Then share the fact that in heaven we won’t grow old or get wrinkles or fight diseases. We’ll be strong and healthy. How do you know that? Because the Bible says so!

Story

Down in my basement there’s a big plastic box with my name on it. Inside the box are all kinds of treasures. No, I don’t mean gold and silver trinkets worth a lot of money. No one would be interested in buying what’s in my box. But those things are very special to me.

Would you like to see some of my personal treasures? Well, let me get the top off and we’ll take a look.

The first thing I see is a bunch of love letters from my wife. She wrote them to me before we got married. She says mushy stuff like “I love you” and “I miss you.” Today, whenever she sees me reading them, she gets all embarrassed and leaves the room. I like those letters because they make me feel that I’m somebody important to her.

H’mmmm, here are some interesting treasures. These are my old Pathfinder Honor badges. I wore these colorful little patches on my uniform, showing everyone that I learned how to take pictures, how to care for cats, know the names of animals, cook nutritious food, bake yummy bread, and identify different types of birds and trees. There’s even my old necktie that I wore with my Pathfinder uniform.

Over here is a cracked and faded collar that fit around the neck of my dog Toodles. A milk truck killed him. All I have left is this old collar, some pictures, and lots of wonderful memories.

In this corner I find a large silver-plated drinking cup. It used to belong
to a man who was a priest for another religion. When he became a Seventh-day Adventist Christian, he gave me this cup to show that he'd changed. He no longer feeds people wine and wafers when they come to his church. Now he tells them about Jesus and that we're going to live in heaven someday.

Let's see what else is in here. There are a couple cars from my old train set and some phonograph records filled with music from Japan, where I was a student missionary. In this envelope is a collection of pictures showing some of the blind kids I met at summer camps when working for Christian Record Services.

There's also a really neat head-dress I used to wear while living in Beirut, Lebanon, copies of the first stories that I ever wrote, and a duck puppet I call Donald.

See? Nothing really exciting to you, huh? But to me these are bona fide, one-of-a-kind, worth-more-than-money treasures.

Why are these simple things so important? Because they help me remember things that happened a long time ago. I enjoyed getting those mushy love letters from my wife-to-be. I worked and studied hard to earn those little Pathfinder badges. The ex-priest who gave me the cup cried when he told me the story of how he had learned about Jesus and His love.

I remember seeing my train set for the first time chugging around the base of a long-forgotten Christmas tree. The lovely music of Japan reminds me of the beautiful countryside and sun-sparkled seashore where I used to spend my Sabbath afternoons.

The Bible is a treasure box too. It's full of stories that my mom read to me when I was a little boy. Most wonderful of all, in the pages of the Bible I find Jesus, my very best friend, walking the dusty paths of this earth, healing sick people, playing with little kids, caring for His mother, and dying on a cruel cross so my sins can be forgiven.

When I open my Bible and look inside, I find many, many treasures. I learn that Jesus loves me. That's worth more than all the gold and silver in the world!

Application
Do you have any treasures? Why not add the Bible to your list? Get to know the stories hidden inside its pages. Discover how much Jesus loves you and what He did to make it possible for you and your family to go to heaven someday.

Activity
Find a container and label it "treasure box." Place in it special toys, letters, cards, and gifts that you want to keep. Open your box every once in a while and remember what fun those things brought you.

If something in the Bible teaches you an important lesson, draw a picture of what you learned and put it in your treasure box. Have fun!

TUESDAY
Happiness Overflowing

Memory Gem
Psalm 119:105: "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (NIV).

Visual Aid
Hold up a newspaper and read several carefully selected disturbing or scary headlines. Ask the children if that's good news or bad news and why.

Then read several that are more positive. Ask the group if these represent good news or bad news and why.

Try to come up with a formula for good news or bad news (e.g. it's bad news if the story...or it's good news if the story...).

Tell your listeners that the Bible brims with good news and bad news. Remind them that there's lots of good news for those who love Jesus and tons of bad news for those who choose to obey Satan. Bible readers should learn to recognize the difference.

Story
Several years ago my father had to have a serious operation. A cancer was growing inside of him, and the doctors said it must come out right now!

I got scared, because sometimes operations can be dangerous. I didn't want any bad thing to happen to my father, because I loved him very much.

The day before the surgery I called him on the telephone. "Please tell Mama to call me the minute you wake up from the operation," I told him.

"OK," he said. "I will."

I held the phone close to my ear. "I love you, Daddy," I said.

"I love you too, Charlie Boy," he responded.

The next day, at exactly the time I knew my father was being wheeled into the operating room, I left my home office and walked up the hill behind our house. Finding a cool, comfortable spot under a tall tree, I sat down and waited. I didn't feel like writing any books. I didn't feel like taking any pictures with my camera. I didn't feel like doing anything until I knew that my daddy was all right.

While I was sitting there, I heard something above my head. It was a soft, trilling song sung by one of my father's favorite birds. I looked up and, through my tears, saw a little bluebird sitting on a limb, warbling into the warm summer air. Many times Dad and I had gone for long walks together and
seen bluebirds feeding their young or sitting on a fence post announcing their territory to all the other birds.

“Did you come to keep me company?” I asked. The little bird continued to sing, filling my breaking heart with hope. I figured if God could make a bluebird sing so beautifully, He could certainly whisper into the ears of the doctors and nurses who were right then trying to make my daddy well. I hoped they’d all listen to the still small voice of Jesus, just as I was listening to the song above my head.

After a while I went back to my house and waited for the phone to ring. I waited and waited. Then rrriiiinngggg!

“Hello?” I said.

“Daddy’s just fine,” my mother announced with happiness lifting her words. “The doctors said he’s going to be OK.”

“Hurray!” I shouted. “Thank You, Jesus, for helping those doctors and nurses do a good job. Oh, thank You, Jesus!”

That phone call was good news. No, it was better than that. It was great news, stupendous news, and outrageously wonderful news. I glanced out the window and saw the tree rising above the hilltop. I knew that somewhere within its branches was a bluebird singing its song to the world. Now I had a song to sing too. My father was going to be all right.

Sometimes when I read the Bible I feel like standing on a mountaintop and singing out its good news. “Hey, everybody,” I want to shout, “Jesus has forgiven my sins. He’s building a new home for me in a place where daddies don’t get sick and sons don’t have to worry for one minute . . . ever. Best of all, this same Jesus is coming back to this old world to take those who’ve chosen to love and obey Him up through the clouds to that land beyond the rainbow where every song will be glad and every voice will sing with joy.”

Application

Don’t let anyone tell you that the Bible is bad news. It’s not! For anyone who wants to invite Jesus into their heart, the Bible bubbles over with hope, encouragement, and excitement. Determine today to learn more about this beautiful Book and discover how it can make your life happier with the joy that’s hiding within its pages.

Discussion

Share a time when you received good news. How did it make you feel? What did you want to do when you heard that good news? What happens when you share happiness with others?

Activity

Have someone read the following texts. Think about the joy that the words bring into your heart and talk about how you can share this joy with others.

- John 3:16
- 1 John 1:9
- 2 Corinthians 5:17

**WEDNESDAY**

**Jesus in the Pages**

Memory Gem

Psalm 119:129, 130: “Your statutes [laws] are wonderful; therefore I obey them. The unfolding of your words gives light; it gives understanding to the simple” (NIV).

Visual Aid

Bring several pictures of people you know (family members, friends, etc.) and show them to the children. Say, “What do these pictures tell you about this person? [tall, short, male, female, Black, White, Indian, Hispanic, etc.] Pictures can help you recognize a person if you saw him or her later in a crowd. They also help you get to know him or her better. The more pictures you have [working, playing, going to church, helping someone, praying at a sick person’s bedside, etc.], the more it helps you understand what that person is like.”

Story

The first picture I ever took with my first camera was of my best friend. He had a handsome smile, intelligent eyes, and a waggy tail. I guess you probably know by now that my best friend wasn’t a person, although I think he sometimes thought he was. No. He was a dog named Toodles.

Toodles became the most photographed dog around. I took pictures of him sitting in the grass, jumping over a fence, swimming in a river, barking at a cat, sleeping in my bed with his head on my pillow, drinking water, sniffing at a flower, and yawning. He didn’t mind. I think maybe he thought he was a movie star.

Toodles could leap great distances just like a gazelle. I’ve got snapshots of him sailing high over a pile of leaves just before he crashes into them and disappears, only to burst out again, barking and yapping with delight. He and I used to build snow forts, and he’d stand guard at the very top of the wall, watching for invading armies or the neighbor boys, whoever showed up first.

Whenever we were about to go somewhere in our car, Toodles would jump in through the window and try to hide on the floor of the back seat. He didn’t want to be left behind.

Sometimes Toodles would run down a rabbit in an open field. Of course, once he’d caught it, he’d have no idea what to do with it, so he’d let it go.
Toodles enjoyed sniffing flowers. Yup. He'd stop during one of our many walks in the woods near our house and sniff, sniff, sniff. Then he'd look at me as if to say, “What a delightful odor. You gotta smell this!”

In the wintertime my dog would hop onto the sled with me, and swish, down the hills we'd fly, laughing and barking all the way to the bottom.

Today Toodles is gone. He died many years ago. All I have are memories and lots of pictures hiding in my picture book. Often I'll sit and gaze at those fading images and remember what fun we had together exploring the world and discovering its secrets. I can't sled down a hill without hearing a distant bark or enjoy the sight of a pile of leaves without expecting my Toodles to burst out in a colorful flurry. The pictures bring it all back to me every time.

I've got more pictures in my book too. I see nephews and nieces, homes I've lived in, and people I've known. There are lots of images of my best friend—my wife, Dorinda.

Perhaps you have a book in your home filled with pictures of people and places. Take good care of it, because someday that book will be very important to you.

I know one picture book we all have. It's called the Bible.

“Wait!” I hear you say. “The Bible isn't a picture book. It has mostly words in it.” You're right, but those words help our minds form a mental picture, a thought picture of Someone very important.

Listen to these beautiful words and see if they don't create a word picture in your mind.

“The Lord is my shepherd. I have everything I need. He gives me rest in green pastures. He leads me to calm water. He gives me new strength. For the good of his name, he leads me on paths that are right. Even if I walk through a very dark valley, I will not be afraid because you are with me. Your rod and your walking stick comfort me. You prepare a meal for me in front of my enemies. You pour oil on my head. You give me more than I can hold. Surely your goodness and love will be with me all my life. And I will live in the house of the Lord forever” (Ps. 23:1-6, ICB).

See what I mean? Do those words paint a picture of a bad person, an angry person, a mean person? No. They form an image of Someone whose heart overflows with love and tenderness. That's the picture of God the shepherd boy David wanted us to see.

As a matter of fact, all the Bible writers wanted us to see word images. Scripture is like a big picture book filled with snapshots of best friends from long ago. The most beautiful picture is Jesus.

Application
From this moment on, every boy and girl should be looking for those pictures in the Bible that they hear in stories or the memory verses. And as you get older, those images will become sweeter and sweeter, filling your heart with joy and bringing a new excitement for your heavenly home to come.

Discussion
What type of pictures do you like to see? A nimal snapshots, pictures of the beach, the mountains, the wide-open prairies? If your life were a picture, would people enjoy looking at it? Would they see an image of Jesus in the way you talk, act, or play?

Activity
Create a picture book of your own by drawing some scenes from your life that bring you happiness. Add lots of color. It might be Christmas morning, a birthday, a fun vacation spot, or even a quiet corner of your room. Then whenever you see your drawing, you can remember the good times you enjoyed there.

THURSDAY

Get Busy for Jesus

Memory Gem
1 Peter 2:2, 3: “Like newborn babies, crave pure spiritual milk, so that by it you may grow up in your salvation, now that you have tasted that the Lord is good” (NIV).

Visual Aid
Have the children close their eyes. Then pass a bottle of sweet-smelling perfume near their noses. Ask, “What do you smell?” Do the same with a freshly sliced orange, an open package of peanuts, and a pinecone. Add other items as time allows.

Then have them feel different objects, such as a shoe, a comb, a pencil, and a doll.

After everyone has identified the “mystery objects” say, “How did you know what these things were? You couldn’t see them.” Then suggest, “We can get to know Jesus by the sights, sounds, smells, and touches mentioned in the Bible. And people can discover a lot about Jesus by listening to us talk, eating our food, seeing how we live, and even smelling our breath. Would you like to know how?”

Story
A minister was holding some singing and preaching meetings in Pasadena, California. The people loved to hear him speak, so they came night after night to listen to his stories and hear the wonderful, encouraging messages he presented.

One afternoon the man decided to
visit a rose garden in that city. He spent several hours enjoying the beauty of the garden—the expertly tended plants. He saw roses of every imaginable color: red, blue, pink, yellow, violet, white, even melon. And the smell! He sniffed and sniffed, filling his lungs with the fragrant air of the wonderful garden.

When he returned to the revival meeting, a number of people asked, “So, Pastor, how did you enjoy the roses?”

The man knew he hadn’t told anyone where he was going. “How did you know I went to the rose garden?” he gasped.

The people smiled. “Pastor, you have brought the fragrance of the flowers back with you.”

I like that story, don’t you? Those men and women knew where the visiting pastor had spent his afternoon because they could smell the odor of a thousand roses lingering in his clothes, hair, and skin.

When I was young, my sister-in-law had a little pillow she always kept on the end table by the bed. “What’s that for?” I asked. “It’s too small to put your head on when you sleep. It’s too tiny to put on the couch, and certainly it’s not big enough to sit on when you want a softer chair.”

She laughed. “That’s not a pillow for sleeping or sitting. It’s for remembering.”

“Remembering?” I frowned. “Remembering what?”

She picked up the little pillow and held it close to her nose. “Inside are pine needles from Maine. Now even though I live a long way from Maine I can smell the scent of the forest and remember how much fun it was to be there in my home state.”

You see, God has given us our noses and ears and fingers and tongues as important tools for remembering, learning, growing, and even sharing our faith.

When visitors stop by a Christian’s home, do they see videos of someone hurting someone else or shouting mean and angry words? No. They watch sweet stories of love and caring.

When they look in the cupboard, do they find things that hurt our bodies and make our minds sick, such as unclean meats, lots of sugar, and tons of greasy food? No. They find bunches of fruits, grains, nuts, and beans—the diet that Jesus created in the Garden of Eden.

When they watch us play with our friends, do they see us get into a lot of fights? Do they see us keeping our toys to ourselves? No. They see us learning to share and trying to accept how other people want to play.

When someone smells our breath, do they catch a hint of alcohol, tobacco, or some other health-destroying drug? No. Even our breath announces that we care about our bodies.

You see, when we read the Bible and discover how Jesus wants us to live, we make important changes in our lives. The apostle Paul says we put away our old sinful habits and begin living like a new person. We sound different, we look different, we act different, and yes, we even smell different. When people meet us, it doesn’t take them long to realize that we’re not like other folks. If they ask us why, we simply point to our Bibles and say, “In this book we met Jesus, and He changed us from what we were to what we are. We’re getting ready to go to heaven. Would you like Jesus to help change you so you can come too?”

Listen to this beautiful little poem by Paul Gilbert. He understood that when we meet Jesus, we can’t help sharing His love with others. The word “gospel” means “book about Jesus.”

You are writing a gospel,
A chapter each day,
By deeds that you do,
By words that you say.
Men read what you write,
Whether faithless or true;
Say! What is the gospel
According to you?

Application
What kind of message are you sharing with your friends and relatives about Jesus? Do they see His sweet spirit in your heart? Do they hear His voice in your voice, feel His touch in your touch, and see His love in your actions? Determine right now to share the wonderful fragrance of God’s spirit in everything you do.

Discussion
When someone is mean to you, whose “fragrance” are they spreading? What are some good ways to share Jesus’ love with other people? How did Jesus show others that He cared about them?

Activity
Draw a picture of Jesus helping a sick person. Then, using lots of colors, paint flowers around the scene. Whenever you see your picture, you’ll remember what you learned today.

FRIDAY
Living God’s Way

Memory Gem
2 Timothy 3:15: “From infancy you have known the holy Scriptures, which are able to make you wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus” (NIV).

Visual Aid
Show the children a collection of bowls, each filled with a different ingredient. Include dirt, rocks, grass, water, a banana, and an old shoe. Then say, “I’d like to bake some bread. Do I have all the right ingredients?”

After their comments, suggest that maybe you should use a recipe book...
instead of just guessing what to put into the mix. Produce the required volume and read off the proper ingredients. Then say, “I shouldn’t try to guess what’s in a loaf of bread. By following what this book suggests, I’ll make much tastier food, don’t you think? I have another recipe book here for making happy kids and happy homes.” Show them your Bible.

Story

Young Daniel felt nervous standing before the king. After all, this king was the same guy who’d taken an army before the king. After all, this king had already taken the city, and carried off the beautiful candles and golden furnishings of the Temple of God. He’d also carried off a lot of God’s people, including Daniel.

“Sir,” the young man said after clearing his throat, “I really appreciate your offering me and my friends all the food we need to eat. But . . .”

King Nebuchadnezzar’s eyebrows rose slightly. “But?”

“You see, sir,” Daniel continued, “the God whom we serve has told us that we should eat only certain foods: fruits, grains, nuts, beans, pasta—basically a vegetarian diet.”

“Are you saying that my food isn’t good enough for you?” the king bellowed.

Daniel swallowed hard. Sometimes obeying God wasn’t the most popular thing to do. “All I’m saying, sir, is that your food won’t make us as strong, wise, or healthy as we want to be. If it please the king, I’d like for you to test us for 10 days.”

“Test?” Nebuchadnezzar asked.

“What kind of test?”

Daniel and his friends Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah spent 10 days checking out the local produce markets, gathering up carrots, string beans, ripe red tomatoes, and big fat potatoes, while the king’s chosen young men gorged themselves on prime rib, macaroni and cheese, omelets, and hot-fudge sundaes.

On the tenth day Daniel and his buddies jogged over to the palace and met with King Nebuchadnezzar and his somewhat bulky team of eaters. “Let’s do some push-ups,” Daniel suggested. He and his friends pumped up and down with ease. The other young men huffed and puffed and could barely lift themselves off the floor six times.

“Let’s run a race,” the vegetarians suggested. Off they went in a flash. The other young men stumbled around the palace almost completely out of breath.

“Wow ‘bout those new buildings going up by the city gate?” Nebuchadnezzar asked. “If they’re building a wall 100 feet long and 20 feet high and each brick is eight inches by three inches, how many bricks will they need?”

Daniel and his buddies came up with the answer while the other guys were still trying to figure out how many inches make a foot.

“How can we grow better crops in our land?” the king asked. The four captives from Jerusalem suggested better watering systems and improved fertilizer production. The other young men just shook their heads.

“Daniel and his friends are 10 times wiser, faster, and healthier than those who ate at my own table,” Nebuchadnezzar gasped. “As a matter of fact, they’re smarter than my best magicians and enchanters in my whole kingdom!”

Application

Obeying what God says in the Bible makes people healthier, smarter, and stronger. If we follow what the Bible teaches, we might even someday impress a king! At least we’ll be able to show our friends a better, safer, healthier way to live. Determine today to live your life exactly the way God wants you to live.

Discussion

What are some good foods to eat today? What are some foods that can hurt your body? Why do you think God put rules for living in the Bible?

Activity

Draw a picture of some healthy foods (fruits, grains, nuts, vegetables) and put it on your refrigerator door at home to remind your family of the good things God created for us to eat.

SECOND SABBATH

God’s Saving Book

Memory Gem

Revelation 1:3: “Blessed is the one who reads the words of this prophecy, and blessed are those who hear it and take to heart what is written in it, because the time is near” (NIV).

Visual Aid

Bring to class several “lifesaving” items, such as a flotation device from a swimming pool, a rope, a compass, a flashlight, a bottle of medicine, a map, and a CB radio or walkie-talkie. Discuss how each can be used to save someone (or you) in certain circumstances.

Then hold up your Bible. Say, “This is a lifesaving tool also. When we read and believe what it says inside, God can save us from sin. It can also teach us how to save others.”
One day a 3-year-old girl fell into a deep well. She didn’t do it on purpose. She was playing at the top of the pit and slipped. Next thing she knew, she was struggling in six feet of water far down in the darkness of the well.

The girl’s mother heard her scream as she fell and rushed to help, but she got there too late. Peering into the inky blackness, she could hear a splashing sound. She knew her little daughter didn’t know how to swim. What could she do?

That’s when she noticed her young son playing nearby. He didn’t know that his sister had fallen into the well. “Come here quickly,” she ordered. “We’ve got to save your sister.”

Obediently the boy climbed up onto the wellhead and placed himself, feet first, into the bucket that the family used to collect water from far below. Holding on tightly to the strong rope attached to the bucket, he felt himself being lowered down, down, down into the darkness. A bove him, his mother turned the big wooden handle, slowly spinning the spool around which the long rope had been wound. “Be careful,” she called, barely able to speak because of her fear. “I don’t want to lose both my children.”

The boy felt scared. The well was dark and kind of chilly. But he could hear the splashing far below and knew that his sister was in danger. He had to save her!

Finally, in the darkness he felt the bucket settle onto the water. “Stop,” he called up to his mom. Immediately the container paused.

The little girl was choking and sputtering nearby. Her brother grabbed her arm, then realized he had a problem. The bucket was too small to hold both him and his sister. So this brave boy jumped into the cold water and lifted his little sister into the bucket. “Pull it up!” He shouted.

Within seconds he was alone at the bottom of the well, shivering in the icy water, surrounded by darkness and strange echoes. He waited, holding on to the rough stones at the side of the well. In a few minutes he heard the creak, creak, creak of the handle being turned and the clatter, clatter, clatter of the bucket coming back down the deep shaft. As soon as it plopped onto the surface of the water, he reached out and grabbed the rope. After clambering aboard, he called up to his mother. “O.K, pull me up.” And the proud and joyous mother did just that.

That brave brother loved his sister. He was willing to put himself in danger to save her. Listen to this beautiful Bible text. “Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends” (John 15:13, NIV).

There’s a story in God’s Holy Book about a man who was willing to die for someone we all know. His name was Daniel.

“You must stop praying to that God of yours and pray to me instead,” King Darius ordered. Daniel shook his head. “I’m sorry, but I can’t pray to a person, only to God.”

Don’t you know what will happen to you if you disobey me?” the king shouted.

“Yes. But my God has said I should have no other gods before Him. I would never disobey.”

The king shook his head. “Then I have no other choice. Into the lions’ den you must go.”

Now, this particular den had many hungry lions in it. They hadn’t eaten for days, and were famished. Plop. Down came nice, tasty Daniel. “May your God be with you,” the king called from the opening. He liked Daniel and was sad to lose such a kind, gentle friend.

All night long the king couldn’t sleep. What was happening in that den? Were the hungry lions rippling poor Daniel into bite-sized snacks? Were they licking their chops and filling their tummies?

Early the next morning King Darius hurried to the den. “Daniel? Daniel?” he called. “Did your God save you?”

The answer came quickly. “My God sent his angel and shut the lions’ mouths. They haven’t hurt me.”

A little boy at the bottom of a well and Daniel in the lions’ den—two people who loved so much that they were willing to die for others.

Application

The Bible teaches us many things. It shows us how to live healthy, helpful lives. It also teaches us how to love other people the same way Jesus loved us. He was willing to die for our sins so that we could live forever in heaven with Him. Aren’t you glad you have the Bible with all its wonderful stories and lessons? Let’s thank God right now for His wonderful Book.

Discussion

What are some things you can do when the Bible asks you to be kind, helpful, forgiving, gentle, and happy? Can you think of times when Jesus was kind, helpful, forgiving, gentle, and happy?

Activity

Practice telling the story of Daniel in the lions’ den. Then share it with a friend or neighbor. Invite them to find a Bible of their own so that they can hear many more exciting stories of adventure and love and learn how to live happily on this earth while waiting for Jesus to return.

Charles Mills writes from Berkeley Springs, West Virginia, where he and his wife, Dorinda, operate Christian Communications, a media production company. He is the author of more than 30 adults’ and children’s books, including the Shadow Creek Ranch and Professor Appleby series.
Making the Bible Central Again

A Message From the President

Our flight from Moldova to Moscow was scheduled to be only two hours. But winter weather closed the Moscow airport, and we flew to an airport in Siberia to wait... and wait... and wait. During the many hours we sat in the cramped airliner, watching several inches of ice accumulate on the wings, I was impressed by a group of Orthodox rabbis who were on the same flight. One was seated close by, so when his time for prayer arrived, I watched him carefully.

Ignoring the plane filled with people, most of whom were undoubtedly atheists, he took out three little boxes, each with a strap attached. Each contained a portion of Scripture. One of these he placed on his forehead and wrapped the strap around his head to keep it in place. A second box he placed on his upper arm, and the third he wrapped around his hand. Then wrapping a prayer shawl around his shoulders, he began to pray. I have to commend the rabbi for his dedication.

The day the newscast told the world about the tragic assassination of Israel’s prime minister Yitzhak Rabin, my mind flashed back to the rabbi. What effect did such mechanical use of Scripture have on the young zealot who rationalized his murderous act as the will of God? Are there parallels to this within the remnant movement? Some of the most savage letters I get come from those who seem to consider themselves holy enough to justify destructively unchristian conduct.

Adventist Review editor Bill Johnsson quotes George Barna when he says: “America appears to be drowning in a sea of relativistic, nonbiblical theology. We are living amid the dilution of traditional, Bible-based Christian faith. Millions of Americans are comfortable calling themselves Christian even though their beliefs suggest otherwise. At the same time, our rejection of orthodox Christian beliefs, coupled with a relativistic culture, has led millions of adults to embrace a world view totally at odds with the faith they allegedly embrace. The irony is that most of the individuals who are caught up in their own contradictions are completely unaware of those conflicts” (Adventist Review, August 1997, p. 111).

At Independence Hall in Philadelphia, guides show visitors a printed copy of the Declaration of Independence and suggest they see the original at the archives in Washington, D.C., because, as one explained, “the ink is fading and there is nothing anyone can do about it.”

What about the church—you and me? Are the principles, values, and beliefs of the Word of God fading from our day-to-day experience? There may be nothing scientists can do about the fading ink of the Declaration of Independence except to try to retard the process. But there is still something Christians can do to get the word of God out from between the covers of our Bibles and into our hearts. Each issue of the Adventist Review, the medium through which these readings come to you, is committed to encouraging us to do just that.*

Let’s ask the Holy Spirit to “put [His] laws in [our] minds and write them on [our] hearts” (Heb. 8:10, NIV). We still do not live by bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord (Matt. 4:4). The Scriptures still are able to make us wise unto salvation (2 Tim. 3:15).

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* For information on how to subscribe, see the ad on page 15.