The Salvation of Sam McKee

Fix Us, Jesus, Fix Us

The Mother of All Humiliations

Candles in the Wind
BRINGING YOU THE REVIEW: Standing, left to right: Bill Tymes (designer), Myrna Tetz, Alan Forquer (design assistant), Chitra Barnabas, Carlos Medley, Jean Sequeira, William Johnsson, Ella Rydzewski, Bill Knott, Mary Maxon, and Stephanie Kaping (desktop production).
Kneeling, left to right: Andy Nash, Steve Chavez, Roy Adams.

Season’s Greetings
Using God’s Name
The question put to Deirdre Martin about people using God’s name irreverently (see The X-Change, Oct. 16) reminded me of an experience I had while employed in a prison facility. Two inmates were standing at the infirmary door using profanity. I tried going to different areas to shut it out, but wasn’t able to do so. Finally I walked over to the men and said gently, “Do you know Jesus? I do, and I don’t like to hear His name used like that.” They apologized profusely and left the area. I feel that the Holy Spirit led me to witness in that situation. In fact, unknown to me at the time, another inmate observed the scene and came to me the next day to request that I help him know Jesus as a friend. What a mission field!

—Wayne R. Vail
VIA E-MAIL

Generation X
Many thanks for Michael Neil Jackson’s “Talkin’ ’Bout My Generation,” in the October 16 Cutting Edge Edition. This article was very refreshing, very accurate, most insightful, and greatly needed. May we have more of the same in the future.

—John Loor
HENDERSONVILLE, NORTH CAROLINA

The Court of Public Opinion
Stephen Chavez’s news commentary (“The Court of Public Opinion,” Oct. 16) really struck a chord with us. Right after World War I the League of Nations attempted to use world public opinion to prevent future wars, but it failed. Public opinion can turn so quickly, and the press sometimes can “spin” news cleverly to make sin look tame.

—Marland Hansen, M.D.
MARIPOSA, CALIFORNIA

Illegal Lefts and Liberty
Regarding Clifford Goldstein’s “Illegal Lefts and Liberty” (Oct. 23), virtually all of us have experienced that lack of sensitivity to secular law (traffic, tax, civil, etc.), and when we get away with breaking the law, we brag about it.

It is our mind-set that is of concern. We are glib in promoting Christ’s instruction of giving unto God what is God’s, but fail in giving unto Caesar what is Caesar’s. And we attribute this selectivity to liberty. Herein is the basis of our confusion: the difference between rights and privileges, between liberty and tolerance.

Many years ago a very astute elementary school teacher explained liberty in this succinct way. When Robinson Crusoe was marooned on an island, he had the liberty to throw rocks in any direction. When Friday arrived, Crusoe lost his liberty of throwing rocks, but he had the privilege of throwing rocks in any direction except Friday’s. So it is with us today. Our true liberties are few, but fortunately our privileges are many.

—Reuben A. Baybars
OAK HARBOR, WASHINGTON
"Behold, I come quickly..."

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Vol. 174, No. 51
“For thou wilt light my candle: the Lord my God will enlighten my darkness” (Ps. 18:28).

We’d returned from Edinburgh (my wife and I) late Saturday night, and it was already past midnight before we hit the sack. Any other time we should have been sleeping in Sunday morning. But it was the last day of our London vacation; no time to squander in “lay activities.”

As we rolled out of bed that August morning, however, we as yet had no idea of the tragic developments that had taken place during the night while we slept. Bed-and-breakfast owner Mrs. Doris Masters would soon drop the bombshell.

“She’s dead,” said Masters, her face solemn with the ghastly news as we entered the dining room.

“Who’s dead?” I asked anxiously, bracing myself.

“Princess Diana,” she said, pointing to the BBC report she’d been watching. “Killed in a car crash in Paris.”

My hands went up and rested on my head, my mind reeling from the shock and incongruity of it all.

Two hours later, as we arrived outside the grounds of Kensington Palace, the home of the late princess, the big television broadcasting stations had already staked out vantage spots, their huge van-mounted satellite dishes transforming the landscape along High Street Kensington on London’s east end. We’d gone there to feel the pulse, to sense the mood, to share the shock, to express our grief.

Swelled to thousands before we left, the crowd moved slowly in almost total silence. “People walking all around the now ‘empty’ palace,” I scribbled in the notepad I was carrying, “gazing as if expecting somehow to see the princess appear at one of the open windows in the house. I can sense a mood of anger, of disappointment, of sorrow, of helplessness. I see women crying, grown men weeping. But most of the crowd just somber—shoulders drooping, heads hung down, quiet.”

Each of us at Kensington Gardens that first Sunday, if only for the sheer joy it would give the rest of us, would gladly have brought the princess back to life—if we could only! But all of us together, with our united grief and longing, could never make her live again.

That one fact is the thing that grabs me still as I look back on that painful morning the end of August. And as I reflect upon the stark reality of our sheer and utter helplessness in the face of death, the dim light of an ancient manger comes to mind. That mysterious birth 2,000 years ago would plunge the gates of hell into panic and retreat. That holy Child would forever break the recurring death cycle that has bedeviled us 6,000 years and more.

That’s what Christmas candles mean to me. Real candles now—not the electric substitutes that stand their ground through storms and tempests. Fragile candles, flickering in the wind—that’s what we are. Candles shining with borrowed light from the original flame that blazed over Bethlehem as the angels sang, sparks from that shining star that guided sages to the doorsteps of the newborn King.

Diana’s tragic death describes the precarious tentativeness of our lives, as Elton John sang so poignantly at her funeral, his words a perfect fit for a life so bright, so fickle, so vulnerable—much like ours, a candle in the wind.

As we celebrate this Christmas, we look back on a passing year in which precious candles, buffeted by winds too strong for them, flickered unsteadily, then went out. Hundreds of letters reached us here at the Adventist Review office, letters filled with heart-rending prayer requests—for friends and loved ones in distress, for colleagues stricken with disease and facing death.

And I think of two teenage boys somewhere in England, whose mother will never come home again, and who, though blessed with royal wealth and privilege, probably still are lonely and confused, grieving for the one who gave them birth. Yes, there is deep hurt this Christmas—and every Christmas. Excruciating loneliness and pain. We’re all like candles in the wind, candles that in time—whether dim or bright—will go out.

But is that where it ends? Thank God, no. That manger Baby whose coming brought hope to sage and shepherd, king and pauper both, will one day rekindle all these dead candles with an eternal flame.
What to do with Willow Creek?

Fact: America’s most attended church, a noncharismatic nondenominational in suburban Chicago, continues to shape not only its immediate community but, more notably, the 2,200 member churches from 70 denominations participating in the Willow Creek Association. WCA endeavors to “help churches turn irreligious people into fully devoted followers of Christ.”

Fact: Adventists, both pastors and laypeople, consistently make up one of the largest groups at Willow Creek’s half-dozen annual seminars—including church leadership conferences in May and October and a leadership summit in August.

Fact: The three latest Adventist churches to divide or depart—Oregon’s Sunnyside, Maryland’s Damascus, and Colorado’s Christ Advent Fellowship—were clearly influenced by Willow Creek’s ministry hallmarks (small groups, spiritual gifts discovery, friendship evangelism, contemporary worship), if not its congregational status.

Fact: Many Adventists who haven’t been to Willow Creek are sick of hearing about it from Adventists who have been to Willow Creek. In some cases local members have divided over how “seeker-sensitive” their church services should be.

What to do with Willow Creek?

Some personal background. I’m not a pilgrim of Willow Creek. I don’t, like many Adventists, journey there for every conference, every summit. I’ve attended portions of only two conferences and while a student at nearby Andrews University several of their Saturday night seeker services.

Yet I’m grateful for Willow Creek. It was there that my former academy church, Forest Lake, got intentional about worship; that Adventist friends and relatives recognized their natural abilities—from drama to maintenance—as natural ministries; that hundreds of Adventists, young and old, became passionate about reaching the lost.

Indeed, apart from wishing Willow Creek would embrace the Sabbath, I’ve never exited the $34.3 million complex without positive thoughts.

From this perspective I offer these sentiments:

1. Adventists should give Willow Creek a fair shake. As a people often prejudged, we should avoid prejudging others. Some of the strongest, most biting comments about Willow Creek come from those who have never visited. To these people I say: Voice your opinion, but make sure it’s educated. If God is, in fact, using Willow Creek, deeming it “not of God” is dangerous (see Acts 5:38, 39).

2. Adventists should continue gleaning from Willow Creek. Selective borrowing is an important part of our history. That a person or church has different beliefs doesn’t mean they can’t teach us something. As one religion professor put it, Willow Creek has its place in prophecy too. Granted, it’s a different place. But we can learn from each other.

3. Gleaning from Willow Creek’s message doesn’t mean forfeiting our message. I join those disappointed to see some Willow Creek-influenced churches blushing at our distinctive beliefs, avoiding the word “Adventist” in print and from the pulpit, begging separation from the world body, planning short-term only. This behavior isn’t necessary. I think of Mountain View church in Las Vegas; of the freshly planted New Community in Atlanta; of my home church, New Hope, in Laurel, Maryland; and of other churches mature enough to incorporate Willow Creek principles without giving up their Adventist identity. Reaching the unchurched and being openly Adventist aren’t mutually exclusive.

People have misused Willow Creek—but we shouldn’t blacklist it. As dozens of stagnant, if not dying, Adventist churches demonstrate, we haven’t exactly arrived in our efforts to share Jesus Christ with the world. Until our church offers comparable training, Adventists can benefit from outreach specialists such as Willow Creek.

Still, of a church that aims to be “culturally relevant while remaining doctrinally pure,” we must keep asking: How long will they ignore the seventh-day Sabbath and other doctrines so purely biblical?

We can learn from each other.

* Up to 6,000 adults attend the midweek believer service; up to 17,000 attend weekend seeker services, including Axis, a new service targeting Gen Xers. The church, begun in 1975 in the nearby Willow Creek Theater, has a roller-coaster story that, unfortunately, can’t be told in this space.
ADVENTIST LIFE

In our small church we have been discussing how to attract back those members who no longer attend. I was reminded of the portrayal of the church as a hospital for sinners to get well. When ill, we choose a hospital or clinic based not on how ill or well the other patients are, but on whether we believe the physician will heal us. In the church setting, however, we sometimes use the excuse of the other members’ patients’ illnesses as a reason for avoiding church.

In sharing my observations with another church member, I met this response: “Well, in most hospitals the patients don’t walk around with their own clipboards diagnosing one another’s problems and prescribing what they think is the best medication.”

—Maurine Wahlen, Bozeman, Montana

On a Sabbath during the Christmas holiday, we’d just come from church, where the service had ended with a lengthy altar call, during which a hymn had been sung.

As my 7-year-old daughter, Heidi, was setting the table, she was softly singing the words “ice and reindeer whole.” I then realized that she hadn’t quite understood the words of the hymn we had sung earlier—“I Surrender All.”

—Burton (Frances) Ammundsen, San Diego, California

READING EXCHANGE

In this feature Adventists request correspondence with other Adventists on specific topics. Send correspondence directly to the writer, not to the Adventist Review.

END-TIME PROPHECY: I am a 22-year-old Adventist who would like to correspond with other young (or older) Adventists deeply interested in end-time prophecy.

—Julio Acevedo, 258 Harvard St., No. 300, Brookline, Massachusetts 02146

EVANGELISM: I lead a 30-person lay team and am very interested in evangelistic work. I shall be very grateful to anyone who can share ideas, literature, sermon cassettes, slides, and other evangelistic materials.

—J. C. Tawiah, Seventh-day Adventist Church, P.O. Box 33, Chichiso-Manso Amenfi, Western Region, Ghana, West Africa

WE NEED YOU

Send Give & Take submissions to . . .
Give & Take, Adventist Review, 12501 Old Columbia Pike, Silver Spring, MD 20904; Fax: 301-680-6638; E-mail: 74532.2564@CompuServe.com. Please include phone number. Submissions will not be returned.

ADVENTIST QUOTES

“Prayer lets Satan know where you stand.”

—Pastor Dennis Farley, to the Modesto Central Church, Modesto, California

“Adventistly.”

—five-year-old Lisa Ferguson, on her way to play with a non-Adventist neighbor girl when her mother, Myrna, asked, “How are you going to play?”

GOD SPEED

FIRST THINGS FIRST:

Before their ski show, staff members at the MiVoden youth camp in Idaho pray to One who really did walk on water. Photo by Dick Duerksen.
I was hopeless; he was homeless.

The Salvation

BY SAM MCKEE

ONE ENCOUNTER WITH A homeless man revolutionized my view of the Christmas story.

The 2,000-year-old story of the shepherds and Wise Men coming to marvel at a homeless Child who happened to be the Creator of the universe seemed a little far-fetched to me as an American teenager.

As a child, my wonderful Roman Catholic mother taught me how to say the “Our Father” and the “Hail Mary.” She told me that everything I ever needed could be found in God.

I took her at her word and prayed all the time. I prayed when I lost my homework, when my cat was sick, and especially when I was in the principal’s office (some of my most fervent prayers took place there).

But as I went through junior high and high school, I started to feel as though something was missing in my life. Looking around, I figured I’d be happy if I was popular enough to go to all the parties—and if I had a beautiful girlfriend.

By my junior year my friends and I were party central. People would call us to find out where the seniors, the stoners, and the jocks would be on the weekends. I was amazed at how almost every weekend as many as 200 teenagers would buy a couple kegs of beer and gather in houses, fields, and barns to laugh, dance, and mingle. I had always longed for this kind of community.

But as I rubbed up against reality, the varnish and gloss began to wear off. Most of the parties ended either in a brawl, an unexpected visit from the police, or an angry parent coming home to find the house in shambles. And many of the friendships and romances were short-lived and dependent on an altered state of mind. The same buzz that brought smiles and friendliness also stripped away some protective inhibitions. People did things that made them hang their heads on Monday morning as the rumors and gossip echoed down those high school halls. Some of the mistakes would linger on for the rest of their lives.

I began to grow tired of the same old smoky basement parties. But I still believed that somewhere out there a real party was growing in peace, swelling with excitement, and filling the world with love. I just needed to find it.

During my senior year of high school one of the most beau-
Beautiful girls in the school started liking me. I felt as if I had won the lottery. She was beautiful and popular, but I was so nervous about losing her that I was overwhelmed with jealousy. I would get upset if a guy even looked at her shoes. She had the same problem, and we argued constantly.

Even with a beautiful girl and all those parties, I still wasn't happy. As “I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind” (Eccl. 2:11, NIV). Something told me that I needed to dig deeper, that it was time for a change. Something told me that I was on the verge of a miracle.

Wanting Something Real

I started attending the Catholic church more often and reading my Bible. I also volunteered at a homeless shelter once a week because I always felt close to God when I was near the poor.

As a freshman in college I took a philosophy course that delved into religion. I knew there was more to life than working, sweating, and dying. But I didn’t want to inherit my parents’ faith blindly or create a religion simply to fit my needs and my liberal philosophy. I wanted something that was real and true.

One spring night I knelt down in my room and said, “God, I don’t know who You are, but I know that You’ve helped me out. Now, I just want You to guide me to the truth. I don’t care what it is. If You want me to become a Muslim, I’ll become a Muslim. If You want me to become a Christian, I’ll become a Christian. I just want something that’s real.”

An odd message began running through my mind, almost like a song you can’t get out of your head. My ears didn’t hear it, but my mind did. The message said, There’s someone you have to meet. Go outside and call out the name Simeon.

At this point I thought that all the beer I had drunk in high school had finally caught up with me. But I wasn’t ready to give up, so I tried to clear my mind again. Still, the message kept going through my head: There’s someone you have to meet. Go outside and call out the name Simeon.

BAPTISM: Pastor Baldwin Barnes lowers Sam into the Shalem church baptismal tank one year after Sam met the homeless man, Maurice Wingate (left), who attended the baptism along with Sam’s dad, Bob (center).
I thought I was crazy, but I went outside anyway. I whispered the name once, then a little louder. Finally I yelled it, expecting some guy to come walking down the street and tell me everything I needed to know about the universe. I stood there for a few minutes, then decided I was just nuts.

The next morning I went to school and work, and then drove to the homeless shelter. There I passed out clothing and talked with some guests, still thinking I was crazy about the whole “Simeon” thing.

In the corner of the room I saw a homeless African-American man reading a thick book that looked like an adventure novel. I walked over to him and said, “Hey, whatcha reading?”

He told me it was a narrative about the life of Jesus (The Desire of Ages). I told him that it looked like a cool book. He said, “I want to read you something,” then paused as he spun through the pages until he reached his bookmark. Then this homeless man named Maurice said, “I want to read you a story about a man named Simeon.”

As Maurice read, I struggled to put words together. Finally I stopped him and told him about the night before. He was shocked. Taking hold of my hand, Maurice asked if he could say a brief prayer. Closing his eyes, he said, “Lord, just guide us to do whatever You brought us together to do.”

Then he said, “I just came up here a few months ago from North Carolina.
Four Ways to Draw Closer to God

BY SAM MCKEE

1. Take a walk every day. The Wise Men had to journey a long way to find the Christ child. As you walk, share your thoughts with God, admire His creation, and ask Him to renew your spirit with each breath of fresh air.

2. Look for God to teach you things through even the lowliest people you meet. The homeless man taught me more than anyone else ever has. Look for a lesson in every person.

3. Be prepared to tell your faith story. Don’t be afraid if it’s ordinary. People are touched by ordinary stories. As you share your faith story, you’ll realize and appreciate God’s goodness in a fresh new way. (The Bible is full of these remembrances; see Ps. 136.)

4. Try to be like Job or Joseph, striving for that blind faith in the worst circumstances. View trials as an opportunity to show God that you love Him because of who He is. When you see miracles, faith is almost expected. What really touches the heart of God is when people love Him and trust Him even if He never parts the Red Sea for them. Jesus didn’t say “Blessed are they who have an incredible testimony, who fell out of a plane and lived, or met a homeless man with a Desire of Ages in his hand.” Instead, Jesus said, “Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed” (John 20:29, NIV).

I don’t have any money; I don’t have any place to stay; but I found this really special church, and I want you to come with me this Saturday.”

I couldn’t argue with him. I asked him to write down the time, date, and place. After he finished writing, I looked at the paper and thought, Boy, I wonder why these people go to church on the wrong day.

Guest of Honor

That Saturday morning I drove 40 minutes to the Shalem Seventh-day Adventist Church in Waukegan, Illinois. There I didn’t find a towering structure of silver and gold and expensive brick, as I had been used to. Instead, the church was a single-story building that used to be a machine shop garage.

A line of African-Americans was entering the building. As I walked up the steps I felt incredibly nervous, but once I walked through the door I knew I was home. I told the congregation my unusual story. And like the prodigal’s father running out to greet his son, an elderly Black woman ran up to me, gave me a bear hug, kissed me on the cheek, and called me “Brother Samuel.” Then everybody started hugging me and calling me Brother Samuel.

After church they invited me, their guest of honor, home for dinner. They didn’t slaughter a fatted calf, but they did have some choice casseroles and collard greens.

This African-American congregation loved me into a radical, life-changing relationship with Jesus. In that little church I found a God who says I’m worth bleeding for, no matter where I’ve been. I found a God who says I’m worth dying for, just as I am. And I found a radical Christian movement—some people call it the Seventh-day Adventist Church—that calls people to fall in love with God so deeply that His love and grace flow in their veins.

Just as the homeless Child split time into B.C. and A.D., so the homeless man’s arrival divided the history of my life. Since that evening I’ve never been the same.

Sam McKee is a seminary student at Andrews University, where he also edits Giraffe News, a publication for Adventist youth leaders.
UNTIL MY FORTY-FIRST birthday, I thought I knew about life. I had worked for corporate America and international organizations. I subscribed to Time and Newsweek. I even read the New York Times. Confident and aware, I felt quite certain that the “real world” had very little to teach me.

When preachers spoke about the “things of this world,” I assumed they were referring to dancing, wild parties, jewelry, eating unclean foods, smoking, alcohol, promiscuous sex—you know, all of Adventism’s no-no’s. New Yorkers are notoriously streetwise. And since I live in New York City, I believed myself to be a typical, knowledgeable New York City Adventist.

From the third grade through college I had attended only Adventist schools. As a child I could repeat, on the last Sabbath of the year, the memory verses for each of the previous 52 weeks. For a short time my parents were overseas missionaries. More than most, I was, and still am, active in church activities. I play the organ, lead out in various departments, and help out whenever possible. I’ve sung in the choir, never drank, never smoked, and tried my best to not consciously break any of the Ten Commandments. As the chorus says, “I have the good old Seventh-day Adventist message down in my heart.”

But in the middle of my forty-first year my views changed forever.

I had decided to take a few evening classes at a local school. I was the oldest in my class; most of my classmates—all women—were half my age, and most of them had little or no education beyond high school. The class was mixed evenly along racial lines. Most claimed no religious background, some said they were Roman Catholic, and others spoke of their Protestant traditions in terms of distant memories; none of them seemed at the present to be adhering to any religious tenets. They had never heard of Seventh-day Adventists, although several lived in communities in which three of our churches were within walking distance of their homes.

Seventy-five percent of the women in my class had children, although only 15 percent had ever been married. None of them were married at the time. Most had begun having children in their teens, and 30 percent of them had more than one child. Fifty percent were smokers; I was the only “teetotaler.”

Somehow these statistics didn’t surprise me. What alarmed me was the comfort that these women felt about their lifestyles. They seemed to accept their lifestyles as being completely normal. Some examples:

These women not only massacred the English language, but each and every sentence was peppered with four-letter
words. A simple statement, “It’s hot in here,” would come out “It be @$%&* hot up in this @$%&* place.” And while my Adventist sensibilities were constantly offended, it became apparent that even professors used “colorful” language to express themselves.

Most of the class socialized together outside of the classroom, getting together on Friday and Saturday nights. Their favorite pastime? Going to a male strip club. The stories they told on Monday caused my ears to tingle.

Other forms of entertainment included dance clubs, the kind at which one is frisked after passing through a metal detector and searched before the “action” begins—about midnight. Those under 23 years of age had numerous fake IDs, and most had been drinking, smoking, and partying since they were in their early teens. One of my unmarried classmates took a home pregnancy test every week.

These women survived on fast food and junk food. Some hadn’t eaten a vegetable since Mom stopped feeding them strained vegetables when they were babies. Most didn’t eat with a knife and fork; few drank water, but they all maintained that they couldn’t survive without their wake-up cups of coffee.

In spite of all these traits, these women had no criminal records; they weren’t using drugs. In fact, all of them lived in middle- and upper-class neighborhoods. They were mainstream Americans—no inner-city products here.

Why do I want you to know this? Well, I realized after a few weeks in class that I had never seen this side of America. And what gradually came into focus was that as an Adventist, after being urged for so many years to be separate from the world, I found it impossible to relate to, and therefore witness to, individuals like these.

Then it occurred to me that I had not seen many of these types of people joining the church. Most of the converts from my experience were already living in the somewhat sterile environment of Christianity. Their lives didn’t need drastic change; they merely adjusted their day of worship, eliminated a few baubles, and altered some culinary habits.

I now see the need for us to address those in this country who live Christ-starved lives every day and are comfortable doing so. Only by accident would many of these tune to our radio or television programs. Most wouldn’t sit through a NET ’96 program. They don’t read (except for TV Guide), or patronize health food stores, or send their children to Vacation Bible Schools, or attend gospel concerts.

The people I met in my class are not concerned with, or impressed by, Adventism’s extensive medical work, or that we have one of the largest Protestant educational systems in the world. They aren’t part of the inner city, so they rarely see our medical vans or receive a holiday food basket. They don’t know about ADRA, for they aren’t survivors of a natural disaster.

These people pass our churches every day, and they don’t even know who worships there. I have one friend who lives across the street from the Ephesus Adventist Church in Harlem—membership 2,000. And even though he has relatives who attend there, he had no idea what the church members believed or how they worshiped until I took him there one Sabbath.

These people are not interested in religion. They don’t view their lives as empty. They’re just interested in living day to day.

And after all my years as a Seventh-day Adventist, I had no clue about how to approach these people about God’s love and what He could do in their lives. We’re taught the 27 fundamental beliefs, including the Sabbath, the heavenly sanctuary, the gifts of the Spirit, etc., but how do we relate to people who aren’t interested in spiritual things—especially if they believe the life they have is just fine? How do we convince mainstream America (or mainstream anywhere) that money and influence are not the most important goals in life?

I’m concerned that Adventists are not reaching the majority of the people who live in North America. We have less than 1 million members in this division, even though there are close to 300 million people living here. Several other world divisions are growing more rapidly than ours, and compounding our predicament is that some of our middle-class members are leaving the church.

How do we fix this? How can we reach those who don’t believe they need to be “reached”?

I pray, I hand out literature, I initiate conversations that touch on spiritual things, yet for all these efforts there seems to be little or no interest generated as a result. I thank the Lord for this awakening, for now I realize that I have not been fulfilling the gospel commission.

I’m frustrated. I’m befuddled. I’m perplexed.

O God, help me. Show me how to bring Your plan of salvation to those who need it most and know it not. Lord, show all of us how we can reach the unreachable, those who believe their lives are full and yet are empty because they don’t know You. Instill in us a desire to do Your perfect will, and help us to show it to those who are apathetic.

This is the kind of problem that only You can handle, O Lord. You’re the Great Potter; we’re only flawed jars of clay. Use us, Lord. Show us how we can fix Your people. And while You’re at it, fix us, too. Amen.

Rosalie van Putten is an educational and financial aid consultant who lives in New York City.
Heirs of the Reformation:
The Story of Seventh-day Adventists in Europe

This book, a “popular survey of the history of the Seventh-day Adventist Church in Europe,” is the product of 40 writers, editors, and consultants. The basic premise is that the Seventh-day Adventist Church is the consummation of the Reformation. Accordingly, some chapters sketch the religious history of the country under discussion, with emphasis on the Reformation. However, the entries follow no prescribed format. Each writer approaches his or her subject individually. The book deals with every European country except Andorra, Liechtenstein, and Monaco, where presumably we have no work except radio.

Each contributor to this collection is an Adventist national, well acquainted with the history of the church in his or her own land. Most are pastors or teachers.

The articles focus on the forces involved in developing the church’s mission in Europe. This includes the forms of evangelism that have made the work grow in each country and hindrances to growth, such as wars, political policies, and religious and societal influences. Also described are the roles of the church’s medical and educational institutions, ADRA, radio and television ministries, and notable persons who have advanced the work. Sprinkled with chronological information and charts on membership growth, this material will aid researchers. Some chapters also include a bibliographical list.

While the book bears witness to the unity of the Adventist message and mission in Europe, it reveals how much autonomy and distinctive flavor the church has in each country. This demonstrates Adventism, not as a stereotyped system or a national religion, but as a global movement adaptable to all cultures without losing its purpose.

The brevity of the work, with its wide range of data, permits only mentioning stories that would form a latter-day book of Acts. Articles on fascinating events and a few profiles of Adventist Europeans enrich the book.

Heirs of the Reformation provides a quick history of our work in Europe. It also serves as a resource for evangelists and missionaries who need information about European Adventism.

Just Published


Leonard Brand shows us a creationist can be an effective research scientist. A published biologist and paleontologist, the author brings to this well-illustrated book a rich assortment of scientific examples. In the foreword, Kurt Wise, of Bryan College, says “it is the first creationist work to accurately explain to the nonscientist what science is about.”

Brand treats those who hold differing views with respect, a refreshing change from most creationist books. Because of their negative connotations among scientists, Brand avoids creationist terms.

This volume makes an excellent learning text for both classrooms and individuals with an interest in evolution and “interventionism” (creationism).

What We’re Reading

Two Adventist publishers share their top five best-sellers as 1997 draws to a close.

Pacific Press Publishing Association

1. The Coming Great Calamity, Marvin Moore
2. Stand at the Cross, Lonnie Melashenko and John McLarty
3. Miracle From the Streets, Cheri Peters
4. Parables of Jesus, Lyndelle Chiomenti
5. Children of the Promise, Clifford Goldstein

Review and Herald Publishing Association

1. The Incredible Power of Prayer, Roger Morneau
2. Christmas in My Heart, book 6, Joe Wheeler
3. Ready or Not …, Ed Reid
4. Incredible Facts From Your Amazing Bible, Marvin Hunt
5. Beware of Angels, Roger Morneau
HAVE YOU EVER BEEN HUMILIATED? really humiliated?

Five-year-old Helen had been assigned a poem to memorize and recite at the Thirteenth Sabbath program. She took her assignment seriously, believing that the poem had a serious message. She projected her voice so that every word could be heard and maintained what she felt was an appropriately serious facial expression.

The speaker in the poem was a little seed who imagined all the wonderful things it might become when it sprouted and grew up. A vegetable? A flower? A mighty tree? The poem ended with the seed sprouting and growing up to be not a flower, vegetable, or tree—but a weed.

When Helen finished the poem, the congregation burst into laughter. Helen was humiliated. She thought they were laughing at her—the weed with straight hair and plain clothes standing next to girls with curly hair and frilly dresses.

It was years later before she realized that she had no cause for humiliation. The congregation was laughing not at her, but with her at the unexpected twist at the end of the poem.

On his first day of first grade, the boy sitting at the desk in front of him turned and asked him his name. “Lynn,” he answered. “Lynn?” exclaimed the boy with a sneer. “Lynn? That’s the name of a woman movie star!” Humiliation was a boy having a woman’s name.

When the family moved to a different state, he gave his other name at the new school—Richard. He liked Richard, until the class studied about Richard the Lionhearted and all the kids turned and looked at him with a snicker. When the family moved again, he was Dick, and remained so until he entered college.

Then he returned to Lynn, the
name all his relatives called him. He realized how false his pride had been.

Dr. Woby (not his real name) was one of the most brilliant professors at the college we attended. He was also one of the most serious and dignified. The story is frequently told of his humiliation. The faculty had just completed a meeting prior to driving to the city to hear an internationally famous speaker. After they walked out of the meeting, Dr. Starnes (not his real name), who was known for his fast and sometimes reckless driving, invited Woby to ride with him.

"Never" was Woby’s reply, spoken loud enough for a group of the faculty standing nearby to hear. “I would never ride anywhere with you. Never.”

Then Woby walked with dignity and rapidity to his car, got in, and started the engine. But instead of backing out of his parking space, he accelerated forward by mistake and went over the steep bank and down the slanting lawn as Starnes, forcing back a smile, and the others looked on.

Ly an also suffered humiliation at that college when he was a freshman. It was the time of the fall reception. He called for his date at the women’s dorm. The lobby was crowded with other college men and women in formal attire. As his date reached the bottom of the stairs, he handed her a corsage and said, “What a beautiful nightgown you are wearing!” As those around him looked their way and grinned, he saw Helen turn red with embarrassment, and realized he had meant to say “evening gown”—not “night gown.”

Humiliation is Abigail apologizing for her husband Nabal’s rudeness to David’s men.

It is David listening to the prophet Nathan reveal to all in the royal court David’s adultery with Bathsheba and his responsibility for the death of her husband Uriah.

Humiliation is coming to the wedding feast, sitting down in the place of honor, and then being asked by the host to give someone else your place as you are directed to the lowest room.

Humiliation is the Advent believers returning home through the fields after the night of the great disappointment of 1844 and listening to the laughter and taunts of their neighbors.

A major humiliation that we might suffer is the opposite of what we are the most proud of. When retirees are asked what accomplishments they are most proud of, the usual answer is not “being president of a company,” “coming out of poverty and becoming a multimillionaire,” or “earning a Ph.D.” Nearly all would like to be able to say that their most satisfying accomplishments are having a good marriage, having children who turned out well, and...
having loyal friends.

One of the most difficult humiliations is the opposite—your spouse being unfaithful, your children bringing you grief, or your friends turning against you.

Kathie Lee Gifford, of the talk show Live With Regis and Kathie Lee, is now facing every woman’s worst nightmare. Not only does she have to live with the hurt of her husband’s unfaithfulness, but the humiliation of the details and pictures of that unfaithfulness published for the world to know and see—after she had spoken frequently on the talk show about her ideal marriage and wonderful husband. Camille Cosby, Bill Cosby’s wife of 33 years, has had to suffer that humiliation. And Dick Morris’s wife. And Gary Hart’s wife. Men suffer the same kind of humiliation when their wives run off with other men.

And what humiliation and sorrow must the parents of Andrew Cunanan be suffering now! The parents of Timothy McVeigh, of Theodore Kazinsky (the Unabomber suspect), and of David Koresh. And what of the thousands of other parents whose children disgraced the family by departing from its values?

God’s humiliation is worse than the humiliation of a husband whose spouse is unfaithful. It is worse than that of a mother whose children have turned against her. When a man or woman is humiliated by the unfaithfulness of a spouse, others either keep quiet, suffering vicariously with them or commiserating with them. When parents are humiliated and hurt by their children, their acquaintances and friends either avoid discussing the problem or offer comfort and support. But when we turn against God, Satan exults. “Look what these miserable creatures of Yours do to You after You have given everything for them,” he says to God. “They are serving me, not You. They are mine, not Yours.”

When we who “have tasted the good word of God, and the powers of the world to come” fall away and turn back to a life of sin, we crucify “the Son of God afresh, and put him to an open shame” (Heb. 6:5, 6). We bring on Jesus the great humiliation.

But this does not need to happen. God’s grace is sufficient to keep us from falling. We can come again to the cross, not to crucify Jesus afresh, but to accept His marvelous gift of salvation. Though we have often failed Him in the past, He will take away our shame. He suffered the humiliation we deserve that we might share in His joy and glory.

But the great humiliation is even worse. Jesus, “who, being in the form of God,” writes Paul, “made himself of no reputation, and took upon him the form of a servant, and was made in the likeness of men: and being found in fashion as a man, he humbled himself, and became obedient unto death, even the death of the cross” (Phil. 2:6-8).

Is not this the great humiliation? God’s humiliation is worse than the humiliation of a husband whose spouse is unfaithful.

R. Lynn and Helen E. Sands write from Naples, Florida.
They sat in a meeting room of a Keddy’s Hotel in Dartmouth, Nova Scotia, eyes full of inquiry, the tension in their bodies communicating anxiety to get on with the mission adventure they had worked so hard to experience. There were 50 all told, a group comprised of women and teenagers predominantly, and five men who had come to support their families—or simply to serve.

I’d never seen a missionary group quite like this one. The stereotypical missionary is often a young person or retiree consumed with a passion to take the gospel to unentered territories. This was a motley crew ranging in age from 2 to 72, many with no frame of reference as to how a mission project was organized. Some members even struggled over their Christian experience.

This group came to Nova Scotia in response to an invitation from Pastor Lloyd Steeves and his wife, Sandra. Participants were from Adventist churches in Fort Wayne, Indianapolis, and Martinsville, Indiana; and Berrien Springs, Michigan. Twenty had traveled by air and 30 by chartered bus. The group would conduct Vacation Bible Schools in the Dartmouth, Tantallon, and Fox Point churches; assist with construction activity at the Tantallon Community Center; and organize health fairs with cooking classes at two of the sites.

The youth would do face painting at the fairs, run a basketball clinic for the youth, and perform at a fundraising play on the weekend. They also provided assistance with the other programs as needed.

The idea of organizing this mission trip had originated a year earlier when I came to Nova Scotia as a women’s retreat speaker. I had learned that Nova Scotia is one of the most economically strapped provinces in Canada, with skyrocketing unemployment and taxes close to 40 percent in some areas.

The Vacation Bible Schools served approximately 80 children, most of them from non-Adventist homes. There were many heartwarming stories to tell—the Jewish family who attended the VBS Sabbath program at the Tantallon church (where their children participated) before going on to their synagogue, and the woman who wept throughout the Fox Point church service because she was so happy to see her children involved and learning about Jesus.

Invitations were issued at all three churches in the hope that visiting parents would continue to bring their children to church on subsequent Sabbaths.

Another surprise came from the health fairs. Programs at both the Dartmouth and Tantallon churches attracted very few participants. This was somewhat discouraging at first. A Dartmouth church member had the bright idea of approaching the man-
The Columbia Union College (CUC) board voted November 13 not to accept an offer from Salem Communications to purchase the campus radio station for $10 million. WGTS-FM broadcasts from CUC’s campus in Takoma Park, Maryland, but operates as a separate organization, relying on contributions for most of its funding.

The decision comes after considerable discussion in the Adventist community of WGTS’s role and function for outreach and communication of the church’s beliefs. A number of open meetings were called by Columbia Union leaders as a mechanism to permit the airing of views and to facilitate reaction to the proposed sale.

“We are very pleased that CUC and WGTS are moving into a new era of cooperative ministry to the people of the Washington, D.C., area. The music, talk, concerts, and other activities of the radio station can do much to augment the effectiveness of Adventist outreach in this area,” says Dick Duerksen, vice president for creative ministry.

“WGTS has an irreplaceable presence in the capital of this nation. The mission potential of this communication presence should never be underestimated,” says Ray Dabrowski, General Conference communication director.

“One of the most significant outcomes of the debate is that the Adventist community is now motivated to make a far better use of our own media in the city where we should have more to contribute.”

The financial needs of CUC, which led to the proposal being considered, remain a major issue for the college administration. Funding is needed to raise salaries to the denominational policy level, as well as to provide ongoing operational costs. The decision not to sell WGTS means that these challenges still need to be addressed.

The station changed from classical programming to a “contemporary Christian” format in August and has experienced significant increase in listenership. On November 12 the station completed a record-setting fund-raising drive that brought in more than $216,000.

—Adventist News Network.

New President and Secretary Elected for the South Pacific

In a transoceanic telephone and video conference linking General Conference leaders from six countries on four continents, the General Conference Executive Committee elected Laurie Evans, South Pacific Division secretary, as division president, replacing Bryan W. Ball, who retired.

The committee also elected Barry Oliver, a lecturer...
Religion in America

Senate Confirms Vatican Envoy

The United States Senate has approved the nomination of former congresswoman Lindy Boggs, of Louisiana, as ambassador to the Vatican.

Boggs, 81, was nominated in September. She succeeds former Boston mayor Raymond Flynn.

The Vatican post, a liaison between the Clinton administration and the Roman Catholic Church, has assumed broader political dimensions as Pope John Paul II expands the Vatican's role in world affairs.—Religion News Service.

Christian Groups Protest ABC Show Nothing Sacred

The American Family Association and the Catholic League for Religious and Civil Rights, two religious groups, are urging their supporters to voice concern to advertisers over the new ABC series Nothing Sacred, which depicts a Catholic priest's struggles with temptation.

AFA and the Catholic League have called for a boycott of the show's sponsors, and several sponsors have already dropped ads from the controversial show.

For Your Good Health

Smoke Gets in Your Eyes

Most homeowners never test their smoke detectors, and studies show that up to half of all smoke detectors are not in working order. Test the battery every year, and replace it regularly. Replace any smoke detector that's more than 10 years old. State-of-the-art battery-powered smoke detectors cost as little as $10.—UC Berkeley Wellness Letter.

Happy, Happy Home

Teenagers who sit down together for meals with adult family members at least five times per week are less likely to use drugs or suffer from depression than teens who eat with their parents only three times per week. They also do better in school and have better relationships with other youths.—Tufts University.

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

NEWSBREAK

Adventists Dedicate First Church Building in St. Petersburg

The first Seventh-day Adventist church building in St. Petersburg, Russia, was dedicated in a special worship service on November 8. Though Adventists have worked in Russia since the late 1880s, this is the first building to be built and owned by the denomination in the city.

More than 900 people attended the ceremony, including a delegation from the Loma Linda University church in California, which helped to fund the project.

Construction was completed under the supervision of Nikolas Ruminsky, an experienced bilingual specialist from Australia. Several building teams from the Ukraine and Moldova, as well as local people, took part in the project.—Adventist News Network.

What's Upcoming

Dec. 27 Thirteenth Sabbath Offering for projects in Northern Asia-Pacific Division and the Middle East Union
Jan.  3 Soul-winning Commitment Sabbath
Jan. 24 Health Ministries Day
During the last few months of attending medical school, I began dating a woman who happened to be my upstairs neighbor. Our first “real” date was in February. Well, wouldn't you know it, when Match Day (the day medical students find out their options for residencies) rolled around in March, I ended up matching back East! We continued to date, despite the fact that I would be leaving the West Coast.

To make a long story short, we’ve put together quite a phone bill—along with several airplane flights! It’s a long-distance relationship that neither of us would have imagined the first time we met. Presently, we’re still “seeing” each other and have grown quite close. In fact, the issue of marriage has entered our conversations quite a bit.

We’ve heard of “marital counseling” that many couples go through before the actual marriage. From our viewpoint, this counseling frequently takes place after the fact—I mean after the engagement—along with fitting the dresses, picking out the centerpieces, and folding the programs. The counseling may actually be a part of the whole wedding machine.

We think counseling comes a little too late. We’re contemplating marriage. Can we get “counseling” before anything else happens, i.e., before getting engaged? If there are any issues that should be addressed, both she and I are in agreement that these need to be aired before we take the next step.

We’d like to talk things over seriously with someone who offers advice with spiritual guidance. Getting married actually feels right at this stage in life, but it really is a huge thing, and objective input would be extremely helpful. Would you help us with your perspective on this?

Deirdre and Allan reply:

It’s admirable that both of you are carefully considering each step of the process in your relationship. Long-distance relationships can be very taxing, but for couples who are diligent to keep in touch, we’ve found that it can be a time during which the “heart grows fonder.”

As you two have considered counseling, we concur that it’s a wise step for you to seek preengagement counseling. What a wonderful proactive approach to the whole process of deciding on marriage! And you’re right—oftentimes when premarital counseling occurs, the wheels of the wedding plans have already been turning, making it difficult or awkward to stop or change directions should counseling reveal significant issues to be resolved. We support the two of you in your desire to have preengagement counseling, and believe that doing it at this stage, before announcing an engagement, is a good thing.

In selecting a counselor, we recommend that you speak with a pastor you both feel comfortable with and trust. Weekly or biweekly sessions often provide couples with a doable schedule of appointments and give you time to think and talk through what occurs in your counseling sessions. There are also marriage and family counselors and psychologists who can provide you with counseling, respecting and including your desire for spiritual guidance. We recommend that you diligently “shop around” to find a counselor you both agree will be beneficial to you.

We’ve found that selecting premarital counseling that is both therapeutic and educational is ideal to help you learn more about the growing intimacy between you and the challenges of married life. And given that you’re approaching this prior to engagement, this counseling can also serve to support you both through the stressors that often come with planning a wedding. Know that our prayers and hopes are with you both as you carefully and prayerfully consider the adventure of a life together.
THE SHOEMAKER AND HIS WIFE “LIVED in a small house so far from the other houses that their road seemed the last road in the world . . .”

That’s how readers of Nancy Willard’s children’s book Simple Pictures Are Best are introduced to the story’s two main characters. As the whimsical tale unfolds, we discover that the couple are commemorating their wedding anniversary by having a photographer snap their portrait. But as the picture is about to be taken, the shoemaker’s wife decides their prize Hubbard squash should be added to the scene, thus opening the floodgates to include as props everything from hats to a fiddle, and even a pie. All the while the photographer warns, “Simple pictures are best.”

In the end, with the myriad props finally arranged, the shutter is snapped—just as an angry bull crashes onto the set! When the film is developed, filling the entire frame is the raging bull.

The photographer packs his gear and walks away, muttering once again, “Simple pictures are best.”

The story of the shoemaker and his wife was written to
bring smiles to children’s faces. But pondered from a more mature perspective, it contains an important message for adults. How many of us have jammed our personal scene full of added “props”—from worthwhile and time-wasting activities alike to high-tech toys—that detract from what we really want the photograph of our lives to look like? In the process we reprioritize our existence, making secondary the simple, vital disciplines that make us strong in faith.

Making Time

Perhaps it’s merely a matter of time. We conclude that if we had a means of controlling the precious stuff, we’d surely be able to fit everything in. Apparently not. As far back as 200 B.C. the philosopher Plautus penned this diatribe against the sundial:

“The gods confound the man who first found out
How to distinguish hours!
Confound him too,
Who in this place set up a sundial,
To cut and hack my days so wretchedly
Into small portions.”

Les Waas, who was president of the Procrastinators Club of America, shared his philosophy that appeared to beat the demand for more time.

“People who rush around and never relax and get all worried about being on time are people who die early. Then they are referred to as the ‘late Mr. so-and-so.’ Why not be late while you’re alive?”

Here in America most people do not share that view, and so the quest to create more time has continued. There have been periods when victory seemed within our grasp. In his book Margin Dr. Richard Swenson recalls, “Thirty years ago, futurists peering into their crystal balls predicted that one of the biggest problems for coming generations would be what to do with their abundant spare time. . . . In 1967, testimony before a Senate subcommittee claimed that by 1985 people would be working just 22 hours a week or 27 weeks a year or could retire at age 38! Exactly when they stopped talking this way I am not sure, but they did stop. No one sits around today trying to figure out how to spend free time. In fact, according to a Harris Survey, the amount of leisure time enjoyed by the average American has decreased 37 percent since 1973.”

If your life is not becoming more compressed and complex, your lifestyle is rare and to be cherished.

Whatcha Been Doin’?

Just how do Americans spend their time? If you are “average,” among other things, in your lifetime you will spend

- six months sitting at traffic lights
- one year searching through your desk clutter looking for misplaced objects
- eight months opening junk mail
- two years trying to call people who aren’t in or whose line is busy
- five years waiting in lines
- three years in meetings
- eight years watching TV
- two and a half years reading newspapers

You will also learn how to operate 20,000 different things, from soda machines to can openers to digital radio controls.

Add to the above all the Internet options and other asides, and we’ve simply got too much to do and too little time to do it in. But if finding more time is the solution, history suggests we’ll never get there. The web of time consumption and complexity continues to spin, and we will be caught in it unless we’ve chosen a better, simpler way.

Of course, much of what today’s world has to offer is good. Media, technology, books, sports—they can enrich our lives and sometimes literally lengthen our days. Yet as Swenson points out: “At the beginning of every day we are given assignments that have eternal significance—to serve, to love, to obey, to pray. Instead, we squander much of this time on things that very soon will leave us forever.”

Without a consistent heavenly reference point, slowly but surely the things that glitter will replace the things that really matter.

Are You Hungry?

A woman bought a parrot to keep her company, but returned it the next day. “This bird doesn’t talk,” she told the owner.

“Does he have a mirror in his cage?” he asked. “Parrots love mirrors. They see their reflection and start a conversation.” The woman bought a mirror and left.

The next day she returned; the bird still wasn’t talking. “How about a ladder?” the shop owner suggested. “Parrots love ladders. A happy parrot is a talkative parrot.” The woman bought a ladder and left.

But the next day she was back again! This time the shop owner said, “Does your parrot have a swing? No? Well, that’s the problem. Once he starts swinging, he’ll talk up a storm.”

The woman reluctantly bought a swing and left.

When she walked into the store the next day, her countenance was more downcast than ever. “The parrot died,” she said. Shocked, the pet store owner said, “I’m so sorry. Tell me, did he ever say a word?”

“Yes, right before he died,” the woman replied. “In a weak voice, he asked me, ‘Don’t they sell any food at that pet store?’”

Today we have many time and activity options from which to choose. But it’s food we need most: the Bread of Life and the Living Water! In a complex society we have a great deal of what we want. But as the great preacher Peter Marshall said, “What we need most these days is the God of the humdrum, the commonplace, the everyday.”

Complexity shows up in unexpected places. The U.S. Constitution, the “operating manual,” as it were, for a nation of 260 million people, is a mere 21 pages long. But the operation manual of a Toyota Camry, which seats only five, is 222 pages long!

How do we stay focused, paring down the extraneous elements in our lives so
that the basics of our faith are not lost in the shuffle? Scripture shares a poignant, simple picture that can help.

**In a Word . . .**

On a hillside near the Sea of Galilee, Jesus shared a simple key for maintaining a focused, balanced lifestyle: "Seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and [all the things you really need] will be given to you as well" (Matt. 6:33, NIV).

Many things have changed since those words were first spoken, but at least this much remains: in this world busyness, complexity, and distorted priorities will continue to encroach into our lives. Thankfully, through His teaching and example, Christ helps us understand that it is possible to convert from world-weary, dizzy disciples to sensibly paced, spiritually anchored, heaven-dependent persons. Pursuing the peace of Christ and His way of life is the bedrock for creating spiritual and, in turn, physical and emotional, breathing space. Purposely charting a course away from busyness and complexity toward godly simplicity is a necessary first step. This does not mean arbitrarily rejecting technology and other potentially helpful advances. Rather it calls for mastery over modern amenities instead of enslavement to them.

Ellen White has written, “So many are full of busy plans, always active; and there is no time or place for the precious Jesus to be a close, dear companion.” A simpler lifestyle can help change that busy picture.

Getting there may mean saying no to a committee so you can say yes to your kids. Today parents in America, for example, average spending between 37 seconds and five minutes each day with their children! Are we as Seventh-day Adventist parents beating those statistics?

The best choice in today’s whirlwind world may be skipping a video-viewing session with your friends so you can spin closer to Christ through Scripture and prayer.

A simpler, godlier picture may demand that you beach your Internet surfboard once in a while. The truth is, even though this is the age of information, you don’t have to know everything. But if you someday want to check out the surf on the sea of glass, you have to know the Son of God.

(One astute person has identified the “information zucchini paradox”—the tendency of an information system to produce more information than you can possibly use.)

One of the greatest benefits of choosing simplicity is that it makes you more available for ministry to a wide range of individuals. These may include such diverse persons as aging parents or disenfranchised church service drop-ins, those who right now need your helping hand or listening heart.
The simple truth is that being where God needs you to be each day demands seeking first His kingdom and the kinds of things that will make your life photograph one of classic, Christlike composition.

Back to Basics

Once upon a time there was a man who lived with his wife, his two small children, and his elderly parents in a small hut. He tried to be patient and gracious, but the noise and crowded conditions were wearing him down. In desperation he consulted the village wise man.

“Do you have a rooster?” asked the wise man.

“Yes,” he replied.

“Keep the rooster in the hut with your family, and come see me again next week.”

The following week the man returned and told the wise elder that living conditions were worse than ever, with the rooster crowing and making a mess in the hut.

“Do you have a cow?” asked the wise elder.

The man nodded fearfully.

“Take your cow into the hut as well, and come see me again next week.”

The next several weeks the man—on the advice of the wise elder—made room for a goat, two dogs, and his brother’s children.

Finally he could take no more and in a fit of anger kicked out all the animals and guests, leaving only his wife, his children, and his parents. The home suddenly became spacious . . . and quieter, and everyone lived happily ever after.14

What you had before you got everything you didn’t need was likely very good indeed.

All of which reminds us that . . . a simple picture is best.  

Simple Ways to Simplify Your Life

BY RANDY FISHELL

■ Live by priorities, not applause. Through the guidance of the Holy Spirit, accept first only those opportunities that contribute to your faith and family goals. Developing a flexible but focused life plan will help you choose wisely.

■ Seek what you need; wait for what you want. Rejecting the seduction of the unnecessary will leave more time for the simple and fulfilling essentials of life.

■ Give things away. Donate usable items to appropriate organizations working with needy individuals. Also, you will be amazed what people will take off your hands as you place a variety of unessential items at curbside marked “Free.”

■ Trade time. Make “time-sharing” deals with those whose services can provide you with occasional “downtime.” This might include baby-sitting, home-schooling, tutoring, parents’ night out, elderly home care relief, etc.

■ Tune out. Too much media often leaves one’s soul in a state of frenzy. Choose what you need—and nothing more—from TV, radio, computers, and other media.

Randy Fishell is associate editor of Guide magazine and writes from Hagerstown, Maryland.

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I certify that my statements above are correct and complete.

Gilbert Anderson
Vice President, Operations, Review and Herald Publishing Association
I can think of no worse fate than losing a child. To be separated from the very life you created and nurtured, loved and scolded, carried and cradled. The wound cuts to the heart, never fully healing, always there—a presence, a sentence, a weight, a sorrow, the curse of sin. “The man has now become like one of us, knowing good and evil,”¹ pronounced the Father on that fateful day in Eden, and ever since humankind has known firsthand the meaning of pain.

“Why did Adam and Eve have to eat that stupid apple?” my son lamented a decade ago as an indignant cradle roller. I am still trying to answer his question.

The curse of sin. Pain. Suffering so intense that it cannot be described. The loss of a child. A knowledge, an understanding, an experience that none would covet. Yet for some Review readers, groping through dark days and interminable nights, a reality refusing to go away.

The bond between parent and child was never meant to be broken. Something within the heart of a child is inextricably woven into the heart of a mother, a father. That something transcends all of the inconvenience, annoyances, and difficulties that might arise. Late-night cries, defiance, temper tantrums, fathers’ cars backed into mothers’ bumpers by hasty teenagers. None of it matters in the larger scheme of things. The bond is all that matters. The bond that was never meant to be severed.

Solomon Northrup, in his book Twelve Years a Slave,² describes a scene in which a mother fights with everything in her being so that she might not lose a son being auctioned to a planter from Baton Rouge in 1841.

“All the time the trade was going on, Eliza was crying aloud, and wringing her hands. She besought the man not to buy him, unless he also bought herself and Emily. She promised to be the most faithful slave that ever lived. The man answered that he could not afford it, and then Eliza burst into a paroxysm of grief, weeping plaintively. Freeman turned round to her, savagely, with his whip in his uplifted hand, ordering her to stop her noise, or he would flog her. . . . Eliza shrank before him, and tried to wipe away her tears, but it was all in vain. She wanted to be with her children, she said, the little time she had to live. All the frowns and threats of Freeman could not wholly silence the afflicted mother. She kept on begging and beseeching them, most piteously, not to separate the three. Over and over again she told them how she loved her boy; how very faithful and obedient she would be; how hard she would labor day and night, to the last moment of her life; if he would only buy them all together. But it was of no avail. Randall must go alone. Then Eliza ran to him; embraced him passionately; kissed him again and again; told him to remember her—all the while her tears falling in the boy's face like rain. 'Don't cry, Mama. I will be a good boy. Don't cry,' said Randall, looking back, as they passed out of the door. 'Don't cry.'”

The bond between parent and child was never meant to be broken.

The Father, looking down from His throne, knows what it means to lose a child. Through His loss, we face the promise of a brighter day.

“Amid the reeling of the earth, the flash of lightning, and the roar of thunder, the voice of the Son of God calls forth the sleeping saints. He looks upon the graves of the righteous, then, raising His hands to heaven, He cries: ‘Awake, awake, awake, ye that sleep in the dust, and arise!’ Through the length and breadth of the earth the dead shall hear that voice, and they that hear shall live. And the whole earth shall ring with the tread of the exceeding great army of every nation, kindred, tongue, and people. From the prison house of death they come, clothed with immortal glory, crying: ‘O death, where is thy sting? O grave, where is thy victory?’ . . . Little children are borne by holy angels to their mothers’ arms. Friends long separated by death are united, nevermore to part, and with songs of gladness ascend together to the City of God.”³

And the bond will never again be broken.

¹ Gen. 3:22, NIV.
² Solomon Northrup, Twelve Years a Slave, in Milton Meltzer, In Their Own Words (New York: Thomas Crowell Co., 1964), pp. 84-88.
³ The Great Controversy, pp. 644, 645.

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Christmas Is Coming

ROSY TETZ

Have you been getting ready for Christmas? There’s lots to do. Maybe you got a Christmas tree. Maybe you baked cookies, or bought some presents, or helped decorate the house with candles or wreaths or Christmas stockings.

Some people hang lights on the outside of their houses. I’m glad. Isn’t it amazing how happy it can make you just to ride around in the car and see lights on houses at Christmastime?

Many people started getting ready for Christmas at the beginning of December. Some people started even earlier. A lot of the fun of Christmas is the getting-ready part. While we are wrapping presents or hanging ornaments on the tree, we can think about the happiness that is coming, and we will be happy just thinking about it.

Of course, you know why we have Christmas. We are celebrating Jesus’ birth. It is the happiest story there ever was. We are so glad Jesus came to earth to save us from sin. So every year we get ready for Christmas, and every year we remember Him especially.

Christmas is a good time to remember the first time Jesus came to our world. It also is a good time to remember that He is coming back. Just as we get ready for Christmas, we also need to get ready for Jesus to come again. How do we do that? We get to know Jesus. We choose to follow Him. We take care of each other.

Getting ready for Jesus can be even more wonderful than getting ready for Christmas. While we are learning more about Jesus and learning to love each other, we can think about the happiness that is coming, and we will be happy just thinking about it.

Jesus promised, “I will come back. Then I will take you to be with me so that you may be where I am” (John 14:3, ICB). Christmas is coming. Jesus is coming. Isn’t it wonderful? Let’s get ready.
It was probably the worst Christmas of my life. A nasty problem arose over the list Mom asked each of us kids to make of what presents we wanted. Each year our wish list had to be legible, prioritized, and submitted at least two weeks in advance of the big day. For some inexplicable reason, at age 9 I suddenly became indignant at this small annual chore and foolishly announced, “I’m sick of making these silly lists. It’s a waste of my time, and I’m not gonna do it! And you can’t make me!” At first Mom gently coaxed, then urged, then threw up her hands and declared, “This is not a great time to go on strike, young man!”

Once the rumble of parental protests subsided, I felt rather proud of my newfound freedom from stupid list making. I also relished the tingle of such risky, defiant living. I had lived on the edge before. One memorable day in church I had launched a spitball right during the worship service. I probably aimed it at the fading fake fruit on Mrs. Hendrickson’s oversized straw hat.

Various important family traditions had developed over the years to preserve the continuity of the holiday experience. When we kids rose before dawn to retrieve our bulging stockings from the old handcrafted front door at the foot of the stairs, tradition dictated that we never peek over at the Christmas tree itself. I took that rule seriously and loved the mystery of it. When everyone finally got up, tradition said that the children couldn’t go back downstairs until Dad surveyed the living room and yelled up, “Well, I guess there’s nothing here for anyone this year!” That was our signal to rush headlong and tear into the festive packages. The “list” that I chose to ridicule had always taken its rightful place among these unwritten, sacred family rituals.

As this ninth Christmas neared, I could feel the old excitement building, the bug-eyed anticipation. I had an electric candle in my bedroom that tinted the darkness with an eerie yet welcome yellow-orange holiday glow. With that installed, I knew the season was upon us in earnest. My countdown began: first days, then hours.

Finally, after Dad gave the familiar signal, I ripped into packages, tossing ribbon and wrapping like confetti at a wedding. As I examined the first present, I could see immediately that it was going in the “Why on earth did they give me this thing?” pile by the couch. I treated the pile like broccoli at dinnertime. Eager to uncover the hot gifts, real kid stuff like trains and games and model planes, I tore into the remaining boxes. To my dismay, however, I never got to the good stuff. Most things kept winding up in the broccoli pile.

When the flurry of activity eventually cooled, I surveyed the year’s loot and became outraged. Nothing I really wanted! How could it happen? I felt betrayed. Turning to my parents, I scowled right at them and, with the air of an injured party in a lawsuit, announced, “This is the worst Christmas any kid ever had! I hate it all!” With that I turned and stormed tearfully back up to my room.

Oh, if only I knew then what I know now! Little did I appreciate the fact that Dad worked two jobs all during the month of December to add a few extra dollars to an otherwise small budget so his kids could have gifts. For weeks he left the house at 7:00 a.m. for his regular full-time job, came home at suppertime for a nap, then labored at the post office most of the night. Neither did I appreciate how Mom herself went without during the year, scrimping and saving so we could be happy on the morning of gifts. In spite of my arrogant refusal to make a list, Mom and Dad had nonetheless given their contrary son presents they hoped would be both useful and fun. List-less, they had done the best they could.

Over the years, as I raised my own family, I occasionally reflected on that long-ago Christmas with a sense of self-recrimination. How my thoughtless words must have stung. About a year before Mom’s death from cancer, I recounted that holiday during a visit with my aging parents. To my surprise, after listening to me intently, Mom replied, “Why, Kim, to be honest, I don’t recall that happening at all.”

Today I look back on that simple yet profound holiday experience with an entirely new perspective. God has used it to give me two treasured insights into the nature of His grace—the giving of undeserved gifts to a rebellious child and the forgetfulness of love.

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