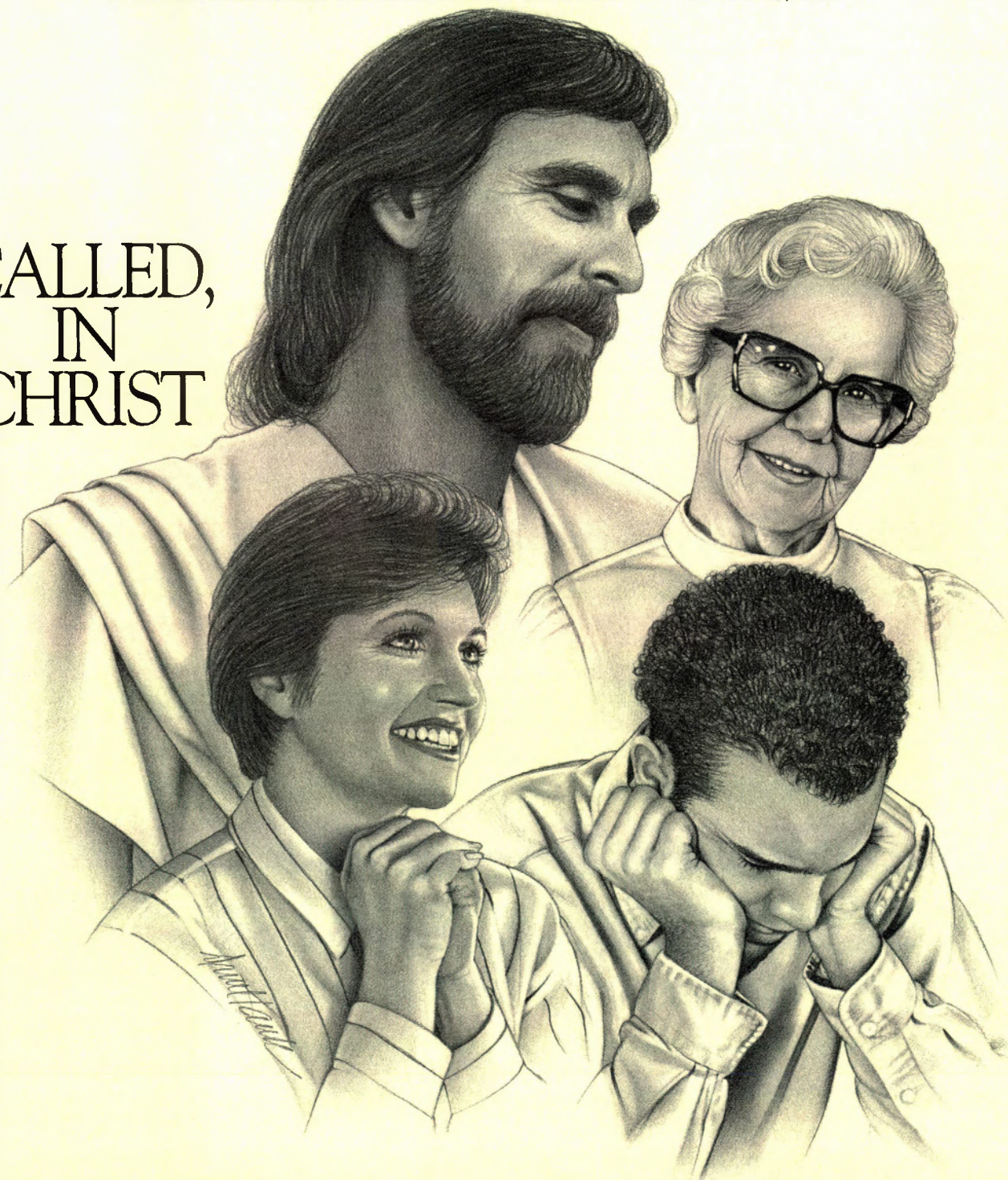


ADVENTIST REVIEW

WEEKLY NEWS AND INSPIRATION FOR SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS

OCTOBER 28, 1993

CALLED,
IN
CHRIST



Called, in Christ

Our privileges and opportunities as God's children

God calls *us*—what a wonderful thought! He calls *us* to be His own, to walk with Him, to know Him, to serve Him, to represent Him, to grow into His likeness. As once Jesus walked by the Sea of Galilee and challenged Peter, James, and John, “Follow me” (Matt. 4:19), so we hear His voice in our times. Like the fishermen of old, will we rise and follow Him, forsaking all?

Dear friend, will you join me in earnest prayer this week? Will you pray for yourself, that you may follow God's call to you? Will you pray for those of us who have been called to leadership, that we may serve in the spirit of the Master? Will you pray for the church, that we all may “press together, press together,” in love, unity, and heart searching for a closer walk with God?

This year the readings for the Week of Prayer were assigned to me. I have labored for many hours in preparation of the material, for I want these articles to be a blessing to all. And I would urge you to keep one vital point in mind as you study each article: every call is *in Christ*. Only in Christ can we repent, find assurance, be victorious and compassionate, witness, await His coming, be revived, and triumph. Only in Christ—never in ourselves.

“In Christ” is a precious truth that occurs many times in the Scriptures. The Bible sets forth two people who in themselves sum up and comprehend all those who have ever lived on earth—Adam and Christ. “For as in Adam all die, so in Christ all will be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22, NIV). We are all *in Adam* by reason of our birth—in him in sin and death. But the glorious truth of the gospel is that Jesus died for us all: we were *in Him* on the cross! So in Christ we have righteousness and life.

So long as we choose Him, we remain in Him. And He is mighty to save and mighty to keep!

I also commend to you the *Adventist Review*. This paper, the organ for Adventists worldwide, brings you not only the Week of Prayer readings, but news and inspiration every week. Every family should have access to it on a regular basis.

May this special week draw us all closer to heaven and closer to one another.



Robert S. Folkenberg

Robert S. Folkenberg is president of the General Conference.

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CALLED TO REPENTANCE— IN CHRIST

Biblical repentance never goes out of style.

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

Repent!" cries the preacher on the street corner to passing students and shoppers. "Repent or be damned!" But the passing crowds barely look up at him out of curiosity. The street corner preacher with his battery-operated public-address system adds to the din of the city. His message falls on the stony ears of people who prefer more palatable ideas, like "Live up to your human potential!" "Don't let anybody make you feel guilty." "There are no sins, only lifestyle choices."

Repent? The only thing some think they need to repent of is for having ever felt guilty. Repentance is definitely out of fashion.

Old Testament prophets didn't think repentance was out of style. They talked a lot about repentance. "Therefore say to the house of Israel," God told Ezekiel, "'This is what the Sovereign Lord says: Repent! Turn from your idols and renounce all your detestable practices!'" (Eze. 14:6).*

Some might say, "I know the Old Testament is full of calls for repentance, but the New Testament introduces the era of grace." But grace with no repentance is, as Dietrich Bonhoeffer says, "cheap grace." Grace with no repentance is no grace at all, but rather a cheap white-wash. In fact, the message of the New

Testament, the message of the gospel, is also a message of repentance.

- ❑ This was the message of John the Baptist:
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 3:2).
- ❑ This was the message of Jesus:
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is near" (Matt. 4:17).
- ❑ This was the message of the disciples:
"They went out and preached that people should repent" (Mark 6:12).
- ❑ This was the message of Peter on Pentecost:
"Repent and be baptized, every one of you, in the name of Jesus Christ for the forgiveness of your sins" (Acts 2:38).
- ❑ This was the message of Peter to Simeon:
"Repent of this wickedness and pray to the Lord" (Acts 8:22).
- ❑ This was the message of Paul:
"First to those in Damascus, then to those in Jerusalem and in all Judea, and to the Gentiles also, I preached that they should repent and turn to God and prove their repentance by their deeds" (Acts 26:20).
- ❑ This was the message of Jesus through John to the Laodicean church:

"Those whom I love I rebuke and discipline. So be earnest, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

Indeed, from Genesis 3 to Malachi 4, from Matthew 1 to Revelation 22, God's message to man is "Repent!"

Noah's message to the scoffers from the steps leading to the ark was not "Something good is going to happen to you!" Amos was not told by King Jeroboam to get out of town for proclaiming "God is in His heaven, and all is right with the world!" Jeremiah was not put into the pit for preaching "I'm OK, you're OK!" Daniel was not put into the lions' den for telling people "Possibility thinking will move mountains!" John the Baptist was not beheaded because he preached "Smile, God loves you!" Instead, the message of all these men of God can be summed up in one word: "Repent!"

Peter says the Lord doesn't want "anyone to perish, but everyone to come to repentance" (2 Peter 3:9). The options are clear: repent or perish! The street preacher had an important point, though his technique could use some refining: "Repent or be damned!" Through his sin Adam infected us with sinful natures, condemned us to a state of rebellion against God, and thrust upon us the inevitable sentence of eternal death. No good deeds or evil habits conquered can alter the inexorable fact that we are in rebellion against the Majesty of heaven and therefore eternally lost.

Repentance Is Good News!

Of course, when this is expressed coarsely by the street preacher it sounds like a threat. It can give the impression of a vengeful God. But "God did not send his Son into the world to condemn the world, but to save the world through him" (John 3:17). The message of repentance in the Bible is good news, not bad news. Jesus said, "The time has come. . . . The kingdom of God is near. Repent and believe the good news!" (Mark 1:15). Repentance is part of the gospel, the good news. Repentance is good news because it calls us to recognize that we are sinners.

But why is it good news to recognize that we are sinners? Because this is the only way we will recognize our need of

a Saviour, the only way to understand our world. If we don't believe that humanity has fallen from grace and is in sin, how can we understand the condition of the world? How can we make sense out of what we see on the news-casts and read in the papers? If our depraved conduct is "normal," it is obvious that humanity will eventually self-destruct and disappear into a black hole.

The good news of repentance is that God has the solution! The good news is that admitting our problem is the first step to discovering God's solution. All the power of heaven becomes available to those who choose God's side in this great conflict of the ages.

When those who seven short weeks before had joined the rabble in crying "Crucify Him, crucify Him!" heard Peter tell the story of the cross, they cried out in anguished conviction: "What shall we do?" "Repent" was the answer (Acts 2:37, 38).

Common pride is the reason our world ignores calls to repentance. Few admit, even to themselves, they need to change. "Rich and increased with goods and in need of nothing" describes too many within and without the church. It is far more comfortable to blame a parent, blame heredity, blame the system, blame a junk-food diet, blame anyone or anything, but never blame ourselves. Society teaches us that we are not responsible as long as we can find someone or something to blame. You see, pride rejects repentance as unnecessary and demeaning to self-esteem, instead of Christ's prescription for peace. Thomas Carlyle said, "Of all acts of man, repentance is the most divine. The greatest of all faults is to be conscious of none."

Have you ever argued with a friend over some issue, certain that you were right, only to discover later that you were wrong? Have you ever had to say "I am sorry; I was wrong, you were right"? How did it feel? I have lost my patience with my children, spoken harsh words to a colleague, said something unkind to my wife, and I have needed to say "I am sorry; I was wrong." That is a very hard thing to do. The degree of difficulty that we feel in repenting is a

measure of our pride. Our pride restrains us from admitting we are wrong.

At times expediency may wring from us a reluctant or false repentance that is really no repentance at all. Such a false repentance was forced from Pharaoh's proud heart: "Then Pharaoh summoned Moses and Aaron. 'This time I have sinned,' he said to them. 'The Lord is in the right, and I and my people are in the wrong'" (Ex. 9:27).

From Judas: "'I have sinned,' he said, 'for I have betrayed innocent blood'" (Matt. 27:4).

From Achan: "Achan replied, 'It is true! I have sinned against the Lord, the God of Israel'" (Joshua 7:20). Re-

*God wills our entire life
to be one of repentance.*

garding Achan's confession, Ellen White writes:

"There is a vast difference between admitting facts after they have been proved and confessing sins known only to ourselves and to God. Achan would not have confessed had he not hoped by so doing to avert the consequences of his crime. But his confession only served to show that his punishment was just. *There was no genuine repentance for sin, no contrition, no change of purpose, no abhorrence of evil*" (*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 498; italics supplied).

These all said, "I have sinned." But they weren't truly repentant, because they had no change of heart. They regretted only that they had been caught. They are like people who get speeding tickets, pay the fines, then buy radar detectors. They are sorry they got caught, and they want to make sure that they don't get caught again, but they are not sorry for speeding.

God-given repentance truly sees the magnitude of our sin. How many parents try to teach their children repentance by simply instructing them to say "I'm sorry" when they do something wrong? Too often they command, "OK, now tell your brother you are sorry!" Such a confession is coerced by the

authority of the parent rather than resulting from a heartfelt conviction of sin. How different is the "I'm sorry" growled through clenched teeth from the sincere "I'm sorry" said with tears in the eyes and voice. There will be no change in the life if the sorrow is forced by the fear of consequences to us rather than the consequences to our Lord. Ambrose of Milan said, "True repentance is to cease from sin." Ellen White also noted the results of true repentance. "That repentance which is produced by the influence of divine grace upon the heart will lead to confession and forsaking of sin" (*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 324).

The problem in sensing the sinfulness of sin is that we live in a society that not only condones sin, but glorifies it. We live in a culture that has grown so accustomed to the dark that it doesn't even realize the lights are out.

Television presents a parade of people who have lost the power of astonishment at their own actions, who have lost any sense of propriety, who, rather than repenting of sins, flaunt their sins under the label of "alternative lifestyles." We are living in a new Dark Age. There is no sense of the sinfulness of sin and consequently no inclination to repent.

Where then does a desire to repent come from as we live in a world so mired in sin? Repentance is a precious gift of Jesus. "We can no more repent without the Spirit of Christ to awaken the conscience than we can be pardoned without Christ" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 26).

Repentance follows a sense of God's presence and a realization that He provides the only solution to our problems. Jesus said, "But I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). We have all felt His call. Ellen White wrote: "The sinner may resist this love, may refuse to be drawn to Christ; but if he does not resist he will be drawn to Jesus" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 27). As Paul declared to the legalistic Jews: "Or do you show contempt for the riches of his kindness, tolerance and patience, not realizing that God's kindness leads you toward repentance?" (Rom. 2:4). The drawing power of the Holy Spirit is one of God's greatest

gifts. As we respond we become more sensitive to His power and presence.

Repentance is not a new behavior to add to a list of the good things that Christians do. It is the outgrowth of a heart open to the promptings of God's Spirit. "As [the sinner] beholds the Lamb of God on the cross of Calvary, the mysteries of redemption begin to unfold to his mind, and the goodness of God leads him to repentance" (*Review and Herald*, Apr. 1, 1890).

Marjorie Camper illustrates this principle in an experience she shared with her 6-year-old son. One spring day as the two of them were out in the garden, Mrs. Camper was absorbed in her gardening while the little boy explored the miracle of growing things exploding everywhere. All at once he picked a daffodil bud, sat down on the ground, and studied it. Then with his two little hands he tried to force it open into full blossom, only to see it come to pieces in his hands. Frustrated, he cried out, "Mommy, look! How does God open it into a pretty flower?" And before his mother could give an answer, he made his own discovery: "Oh, I know! God works from the inside."

Repentance is a seed that grows in the heart's soil that is warmed by the presence of Jesus. It isn't a mask to cover our sins. It is a willingness to abandon them through the power of Jesus. Any repentance motivated by fear of punishment or a desire for reward is not biblical repentance and will not produce a real change of heart.

Restitution is the natural and essential outgrowth of heartfelt repentance:

"If we have sinned against the Lord, we shall never have peace and restoration to His favor without full confession and reformation in regard to the very things in which we have been remiss. Not until we have used every means in our power to repair the evil, can God approve and bless us. The path of confession is humiliating, but it is the only way by which we can receive strength to overcome" (*ibid.*, May 22, 1888).

Have you ever been guilty of kneeling by your bed at night and making a blanket confession? "Dear Father, if I made any mistakes today, forgive me."

Such ritual prayers exhibit no sorrow and give no evidence of what our sins cost heaven. When our prayers become hypocritical formalities rather than the cry of our broken hearts, eventually we will cease praying. Such formality was typical in the time of Martin Luther, when sin was seen by many people as entries on a balance sheet that God kept in heaven that you could influence by the purchase of indulgences. But Luther put sin in the context of a relationship. The first of the 95 theses he nailed to the Wittenberg church door read: "When our Lord and Master Jesus Christ said 'repent,' He willed that the entire life of believers be one of repentance."

Through God's Eyes

"But," said Christ, "I, when I am lifted up from the earth, will draw all men to myself" (John 12:32). Our fundamental problem is that we see the world through our eyes rather than through God's eyes. Without a sense of sin, we feel no need for repentance. When our perspective on life's values is shaped more by merchants of vice than by Jesus, when our view of life is shaped more by the secular world than heaven's values, when everything is lifted up except Jesus, then the heavenly becomes common and the eternal loses its appeal.

We will realize the sinfulness of sin only when we spend time with Jesus, really getting to know Him and comprehending something of the depths of His love for us and His sorrow when we remove ourselves from Him. Our reaction to our own failings will be "How can I break the heart of One who loves me so?" We will see that nothing that breaks our relationship with Jesus can be called "only a little sin." Our greatest delight will be to live in harmony with Him.

One of the classic biblical stories of repentance is the story Jesus told of the Pharisee and the tax collector in Luke 18. Jesus told this parable for those who were confident of their own righteousness and looked down on everybody else:

"Two men," He noted, "went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. The Pharisee stood up and prayed thus with himself,

'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God be merciful to me a sinner!' I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be abased, and he who humbles himself will be exalted" (Luke 18:10-14, NKJV).

The part of the story I like best is this: he "went home justified." There are answers to the problems we face. There is forgiveness. There is new life. There is a new start. He "went home justified."

The servant of the Lord, commenting on this story, wrote: "Tell the enemy that you know your garments are stained with sin, but that by faith you claim the righteousness of Christ. Turn to Jesus, and tell Him all your trouble. Christ sees all your circumstances, and knows all your temptations and sorrows" (*Signs of the Times*, Apr. 11, 1892).

Would you like to go home justified today? The poor, deluded Pharisee wanted to remind God of all his good points and assure himself that all was well. The Pharisee went home with his problems whitewashed, with a thin veneer of external, man-made righteousness. If we hide behind a pharisaical veneer, it will eventually crack. All who attempt a life of self-dependence, recognizing no need for repentance and seeking to live apart from God, remove themselves from God, the source of life.

So the Pharisee went home deluded and self-deceived. The tax collector went home too, but his problems were dealt with. His heart was as light as a feather. How would you like to go home today? Take a moment just now to tell Jesus how you would like to go home.

Let us go home with light hearts, joyful because the Lord has been merciful and has forgiven us. We can live in full assurance of salvation, our topic for tomorrow's study.

* Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

CALLED TO ASSURANCE— IN CHRIST

How to be certain of salvation

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

I took off from Guatemala City at 2:00 a.m. in the mission's Piper Aztec, headed for Sacramento, California. The shortest route to the first stop in Acapulco, Mexico, was directly across 600 miles of ocean. On approaching Tapachula, the coastal town that was to be my last land check-point for several hours, I could see it was covered by a towering thunderstorm. I bypassed it to the west and struck out across the Gulf of Tehuantepec. Just beyond this first storm was a second storm, which was followed by a solid line of storms. I found out later that the storms were the tail of a hurricane that I had not been told about during my preflight weather briefing! The line of storms was headed toward Hawaii, and I didn't have enough fuel to go there! Off my right wing were those menacing, 50,000-foot clouds spewing lightning, and I was afraid I would eventually have to fly through them.

When my radio indicated I was over the Pacific, directly west of Acapulco, I had no option but to fly right through that storm front. I chose an area in the clouds that had not flashed for a while, and flew into the blackness. My vertical rate-of-speed indicator was pinned in updrafts exceeding 6,000 feet per

minute (60 miles/100 kilometers per hour), followed immediately by downdrafts of the same intensity. The lightning finally burst in such brilliance that I was blinded and couldn't see the instruments. For a few minutes I had to depend on the sound of the engines to control the aircraft. What a relief when about 15 minutes later I flew into the clear on the other side of the storm.

Feeling physically insecure is bad enough, but to feel spiritual insecurity is worse. David felt spiritually insecure after his adultery with Bathsheba. So did Saul as he searched out the witch of Endor. Sometimes we feel it as a result of a specific sin, but more often it is a vague anxiety that causes us to worry about whether we are going to make it to God's kingdom.

Have you ever heard the phrase "blanket insurance policy"? Such a policy covers everything—like a blanket. Rather than a blanket insurance policy, we need a "blanket assurance policy." We need to sense that in Christ we have complete assurance coverage.

Yesterday we reflected on repentance as the sincere and heartfelt response of those who, under the influence of the Holy Spirit, recognize that the consequences of their sinful condition is eternal isolation from God yet by faith

accept God's unconditional love and forgiveness. Such repentance, coming from a heart filled with the love of Jesus, brings spiritual assurance into a person's life.

God wants His people to feel secure in His love. When people don't experience the assurance of salvation, they are confronted with anxiety and guilt. Jesus offers us a "blanket assurance policy." "My sheep," He said, "listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand" (John 10:27, 28).*

That is heavenly security: "No one can snatch them out of my hand." Perhaps some Seventh-day Adventists have shied away from using this text because there are those who use it to teach "once saved, always saved"—that once people are saved, it is impossible for them to be lost. While it is true that no one can snatch believers from the security that they find in Christ, they certainly can choose to remove themselves from that security. Jesus is assuring us that no power in heaven or on earth can remove us from security in Him as long as we choose Him. We may choose to leave Him, but no one can force us to leave Him. As long as we choose to stay in Christ, we are secure.

Persevering Faith

The righteousness that qualifies us for heaven, now and in the judgment, is always in Christ, and that Satan cannot touch. "Both our title to heaven and our fitness for it are found in the righteousness of Christ" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 300). But the faith that makes that righteousness effective is in us, not in heaven. It is that faith or trust in God that Satan will attempt to destroy. As long as our faith perseveres, our assurance in Christ is guaranteed. That is why Jesus said only those whose faith endures unto the end will be saved (Matt. 10:22).

One pitch-black, starless night my son, Bobby, and I stepped out of a thatched house on the tiny San Blas island of Pidertupo to walk the narrow trail to our little hut. As Bobby reached up and put his little hand into mine, he

whispered, "Daddy, I'm scared. I can't see." Then, his hand securely in mine, I heard him say softly to himself, "There, now I can see." Bobby lost his fear when he felt secure.

It is not God's will that we walk on an insecure tightrope balancing our way to heaven, unsure of whether He will open the door when we arrive. Does God invite us to "approach the throne of grace with confidence" (Heb. 4:16) and then leave us to worry about whether He accepts us? Does Jesus say "Whoever comes to me I will never drive away" (John 6:37) and then, when we come, leave us troubled about whether we will be turned away? Did God inspire John to say "I write these things to you who believe in the name of the Son of God so that you may know that you have eternal life" (1 John 5:13), only to pull that security like a rug out from under us?

Some might say, "We know God is faithful, but our insecurity is not based on what Jesus said, but rather on what we do! The real source of our insecurity is not Jesus, but our sin! We know that when we receive Christ, salvation is a gift, but what about the mistakes we make afterward?"

Musical Chairs

This is the problem that arises when the gospel is understood as conditional good news. Such thinking reminds me of a game of tag. If we are "it" when the game is over, we lose. If we slip when the curtain falls, if we are down when probation closes, then we may very well be lost. Thus, the game of life seems to be like a game of musical chairs. What is most important is to be close to a chair when the music stops, to have our last sin confessed before we die. Such an approach to salvation keeps us on a tightrope of insecurity, never sure of our standing with God.

When we die, be it by car or cancer, our salvation will be determined more by our life and its direction than by a single mistake or sin. For if salvation

depends only on avoiding certain behaviors, then we will find security only as we perfectly avoid those behaviors. And the list of behaviors can grow long, as witnessed by the endless laws of the Jewish Talmud. But if sin is more than just behavior, if it is losing faith in God, then our security comes from getting into a right relationship with God. That



relationship will provide the spiritual direction to our life. That relationship and direction provide assurance in Christ. Ellen White wrote: "The character is revealed, not by occasional good deeds and occasional misdeeds, but by the tendency of the habitual words and acts" (*Steps to Christ*, pp. 57, 58).

The gospel is simple. We come to Jesus, confess our sins to Him, and ask Him for power to live for Him every day and for faith to accept His promise that He accepts us. He covers us with His righteousness and assures us that He will complete the work of grace He has begun in us. When during the day we fall, immediately we turn back to Him,

and He forgives us and gives us peace.

One day a man was driving in his truck when he saw some boys hiking along the road, carrying heavy backpacks. He decided he would give them a lift, so he stopped and asked if they would like a ride. They gratefully climbed into the back of the truck, and the driver started off. In a few moments the driver noticed that the boys were still wearing their packs, so he stopped and told them that they could take the heavy packs off and be more comfortable. One boy responded, "No, you have done enough. The least we can do is carry our own packs." The foolish boys thought that they were doing the truck driver a favor by carrying their own backpacks.

How many of us think like that when it comes to the gift of eternal life? Jesus gives us eternal life, but we still insist on carrying our own packs. We get into the truck, the church, but we never lay our burdens of guilt, sin, and uncertainty at the foot of the cross. The good news is that Jesus gives us eternal life—today. We uplift Christ and His righteousness by trusting Him right now.

The Spirit of Prophecy says: "A life in Christ is a life of restfulness. There may be no ecstasy of feeling, but there should be an abiding, peaceful trust. Your hope is not in yourself; it is in Christ. Your weakness is united to His strength, your ignorance to His wisdom, your frailty to His enduring might" (*ibid.*, p. 70).

Throughout history people have had opposite approaches to assurance. One group has emphasized obedience as our part in the salvation experience. They fear that to talk of the "security of salvation" or "assurance in Christ" will lead to "cheap grace" and an inappropriate tolerance of ongoing sinful behavior. The other group has emphasized God's part in salvation. They fear that to talk of obedience and victorious Christian living will lead to insecurity, no assurance of salvation, and no peace of mind.

Ellen White had counsel for both groups. On the one hand she wrote: "Those who accept the Saviour, however sincere their conversion, should never be taught to say or to feel that they are saved. This is misleading" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 155).

On the other hand, she wrote: "We should not make self the center and indulge anxiety and fear as to whether we shall be saved" (*Steps to Christ*, p. 72). Again she penned: "The sinner who comes to Christ in faith is joined soul to soul with his Redeemer, united in holy bonds with Jesus. . . . Through faith and experience he has confidence that Jesus not only will but does save him to the uttermost. This confidence brings to his soul an abiding trust, a peace, a joy, that passeth understanding" (*Signs of the Times*, Aug. 3, 1891).

The answer to our concerns about assurance of our salvation is found in keeping both positions in focus.

The idea that no one can snatch the saved from the hand of Jesus should be of great comfort to each one of us: "My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand" (John 10:29). This is a picture of God sheltering us in His hands. That should give us assurance of our salvation. God wants us to know where we stand with Him. Like Bobby in the dark of the night, we all need to feel secure.

But it would be an aberration of truth for God's children, while claiming assurance in Christ, to persist in sin knowingly. Or, even more dangerous, to rationalize their way into a lifestyle contradictory to God's expectations and personal spiritual development. Assurance in Christ must never become license for either licentiousness or spiritual lethargy. "Righteousness is right doing, and it is by their deeds that all will be judged. Our characters are revealed by what we do. The works show whether the faith is genuine" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312).

In some ways our salvation experience is like a marriage. Certainly in a marriage relationship everything is not always perfect, but if someone asks if we are married, we don't respond "I hope so" or "I am working on it" or "I

try to be." We are married to Christ, and when we are asked if we are secure in that relationship, we don't say "I think so" or "I am working on it." Insecurity discounts God's gift of righteousness.

Let me ask you: Are we given salvation because of our good deeds? Was the prodigal son welcomed home because of his good deeds? The answer is no. Salvation is based on grace, not on good deeds. We were reconciled to God by the death of His Son while we were, as Paul wrote, "powerless," "ungodly," "sinners," and His "enemies" (Rom. 5:6-10). We come to God "just as we are."

*As we cling to God's
promises, we are as safe
as though inside
the city of God.*

Now, if we don't receive salvation by our good deeds, do we lose it by our bad deeds? The answer is both yes and no. Sinful acts are both the *inevitable result* and *evidence* of a broken relationship with God. The plain truth is that we lose salvation when we lose faith in our Saviour. As Paul says: "Everything that does not come from faith is sin" (Rom. 14:23). Salvation is not behavior-dependent, but faith-dependent. Sinful acts are symptoms of a broken faith relationship with Jesus. Sinful behavior is the symptom of the disease of sin.

Does God condone or approve sinful conduct? On the contrary, He provides the forces of heaven to give us victory over sin. However, the disease of sin must be cured by a faith relationship with Jesus. When our relationship with Him is the most important matter in our lives, then, through the power of the indwelling Spirit, obedience, overcoming sin, and a Christlike life are the result.

Please understand, I am not suggesting that behavior is unimportant. The spots from the disease of measles are

very important. They tell us that something is wrong and that it's time to go to our physician. Likewise, bad actions tell us that something is wrong that needs fixing by Jesus. When we, drawn by the Holy Spirit, go to Jesus with hearts broken in repentance, He forgives us and provides us power to overcome.

Preventive Medicine

The best news is that we don't have to wait until we fall into sin before we go to Jesus. He offers preventive medicine of a daily relationship with Him. Remember John 10:27-29: "My sheep listen to my voice; I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they shall never perish; no one can snatch them out of my hand. My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all; no one can snatch them out of my Father's hand."

Ellen White said: "The message from God to me for us is 'Him that cometh unto me, I will in no wise cast out' (John 6:37). If you have nothing else to plead before God but this one promise from your Lord and Saviour, you have the assurance that you will never, never be turned away. It may seem to you that you are hanging upon a single promise, but appropriate that one promise, and it will open to you the whole treasure house of the riches of the grace of Christ. Cling to that promise and you are safe. 'Him that cometh unto me I will in no wise cast out.' *Present this assurance to Jesus, and you are as safe as though inside the city of God*" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 10, p. 175; italics supplied).

Could we have a promise more wonderful? We are "as safe as though inside the city of God" as we cling to the promises of Jesus.

A parable is told about a father who had twin sons. They were the pride of their father's life. Wanting to provide for them, the father established a trust fund in his will so they would have money when they needed it as they started their own families.

Within that trust fund was the provision that when the boys turned 21 they would each be given a new car. They were to go to the local Mercedes-Benz dealer and pick out a car of their choice.

The father died before his sons turned 21.

On the day he turned 21, one son, Tom, went to the lawyer who administered the will and the trust agreement and asked if it was true that he could get a car of his choice at the Mercedes-Benz dealership. The lawyer assured him it was true.

He then went to the local bar association to obtain references on the lawyer who was handling the trust account. He learned that his lawyer was a member in good and regular standing of the bar.

Not satisfied, the son went to the public library to study wills and trusts. He found many cases in which relatives had contested wills and trusts and had them nullified. This information worried the son, and he studied even more deeply. He studied for weeks and months about the problem children had with parents' wills.

He soon became an authority on contested wills and trusts. He found out many ways they could be voided, and he became more and more insecure about whether he would ever get his own Mercedes-Benz. He called the lawyer again and asked him a series of questions.

Was the will properly witnessed? Was the will notarized? Did the father sign all the pages of the will? Were any pages missing? He received satisfactory answers to all his questions, and so he asked if any other relatives had contested the will or sought to delay its execution. "None," the lawyer replied. Were the resources in the trust fund adequate to cover the cost of a new Mercedes-Benz? "Easily," the lawyer responded. Tom hung up the phone and wondered about whether he should take the risk and go to the car dealership. Several more months went by.

He walked out of his house one evening in turmoil. It had been one year since he turned 21, and he still didn't have a new Mercedes-Benz. As he was walking along the street he saw his brother, Bill, whom he had not seen since his father had died. Bill was driving a beautiful Mercedes-Benz.

"Where did you get that?" Tom asked.

"Why, the trust fund! Didn't you

know? Didn't the lawyer tell you?"

"Yes," Tom replied, "but I was never too sure about it. A lot of wills are contested in court, you know."

"Listen," Bill said. "Dad instructed the lawyer in the will that the offer for the new car was good for only one year. It's too late now. The year is over."

"I knew that it wouldn't work out," Tom said. "I just knew something would go wrong."

The promise is there, my friends. Don't wait another moment. Won't you take advantage of God's promise now?

MONDAY

CALLED TO VICTORY— IN CHRIST

Complete in Him

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

John struggles with lustful thoughts. He has prayed frequently for God to deliver him, but he still struggles. God doesn't seem to answer his prayer for victory over his thoughts. What should he do?

Sally struggles with her appetite. She is overweight and has asked God to take away her appetite, but without success. It seems that every time she is tempted she falls, and temptation seems to be just at arm's length! She is getting more and more discouraged and concludes that her inability to overcome her appetite means that God has given up on her too.

Fred has this sense that he is not good

We uplift Christ and His righteousness by claiming Him, His promises, and the assurance He provides for each of us. Then we will "rejoice in the Lord alway: and again I say, rejoice" (Phil. 4:4, KJV).

So the Christian walk begins with repentance, and repentance leads to assurance in Christ. With that assurance comes a life of victory. We will learn more about that tomorrow.

* Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

enough. No matter how much he does for the church, no matter how much money he gives, he just doesn't have the peace that he thinks other people have. He attends church regularly, but still feels that God will not accept him.

These illustrations portray dilemmas we all face, to one extent or another. We are even perplexed by the Bible. On the one hand, God's will for us is expressed in Matthew 5:48: "Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."* On the other hand, we identify with Paul: "We know that the law is spiritual; but I am unspiritual, sold as a slave to sin. I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I

hate I do" (Rom. 7:14, 15).

We think we know what we ought to do, but we seem powerless to do it. Whether it is troubling behavior that we can't overcome or good behavior we want to bring into our lives, we seem powerless. Victory escapes us. The discouraging cycle finally leads us to conclude that there are two possible reasons for our continual defeats. Either (1) we are not sincere enough when we ask for victory—it is our fault! Or (2) God is not willing to give us the victory—it is God's fault!

We can't really blame God, so we draw the only other possible conclusion. We are not sincere enough when we ask for victory! It is our fault. So now, besides having the original problem to struggle with, we now have the additional problem of not having enough faith to rid ourselves of the problem.

The issues of justification and sanctification have been the theme of many books throughout Christian history. I will suggest that by defining a couple words, we can get closer to finding victory in our lives. The words are "sin" and "righteousness."

What is sin? The Bible tells us: "Who-soever committeth sin transgresseth also the law: for sin is the transgression of the law" (1 John 3:4, KJV). What is the law? Most of us think right away of the Ten Commandments.

Our conclusion, then, is that to avoid sin, or transgression of the law, we must not do certain specific sinful acts. We define victory over sins as avoiding particular evil deeds: "Don't steal, murder, commit adultery, covet, or give false testimony."

If this is our understanding of sin and we are to "be perfect" as our "heavenly Father is perfect" (Matt. 5:48), then

clearly the only solution is to stop committing these sinful acts. The strategy we use to accomplish that objective is to make a list of sins and check them off as we quit doing them. The more things we quit doing, the more perfect we are, until we finally have stopped committing all sinful acts—and presto, we are sanctified.

This approach defines goodness as avoiding badness. Furthermore, it encourages a picture of goodness by

we need. Eventually we will be so perfect that we will need no more grace and will be ready for translation.

Instead of that approach, I suggest that "sins" are not the problem. *Sin* is the problem. The solution is not simply to stop sinning. Yes, that's right, I said the solution is not simply to stop committing sinful acts, but rather to get at the root of *sin*.

Our sinful acts are only a symptom of the problem. The real sin problem resides in our nature. As Paul describes it: "But I see another law in my members, warring against the law of my mind, and bringing me into captivity to the law of sin which is in my members" (Rom. 7:23, KJV). It is this that led him to cry out, "O wretched man that I am! who shall deliver me from the body of this death?" (verse 24, KJV). Clearly our sin problem is far more serious than sinful acts.

To empty a room of darkness, we don't grab handfuls of darkness and throw them out of the room. We light a candle. The solution to sin in the life is to light the candle, not to focus on the darkness. Focusing on the sinful acts leaves us in Jeremiah's predicament: "Can the Ethiopian change his skin or the leopard its spots? Neither can you do good who are accustomed to doing evil" (Jer. 13:23).

When we approach the need for victorious living by seeking to stop committing certain sins, one of two things happens. Either we are successful or we are not. If we are successful, at least when we think we are, we become modern Pharisees. If we are not successful, like Jim, Sally, and Fred, then we get lost in hopelessness and despair. You see, *sin* is not simply a list of deeds that we must avoid. It is a condition. It is a condition of our sinful, rebellious nature



pointing out badness in others. What we need to realize is that while specific actions are sinful, the problem of sin is far more serious than a list of evil deeds. Sin, understood simply as sinful acts, paints an incomplete picture that does not result in confident Christians rejoicing in victorious living.

A strategy of avoiding sins to be victorious results in our imagining that the more sins we conquer, the more perfect we are, and it is logical to conclude that the more perfect we are, the less grace

that results in sinful deeds. Paul says we are by nature dead in trespasses and sins and are children of wrath (Eph. 2:1-3).

Sin is rooted in the deepest core of our being—our hearts. That fact is evident throughout the Old Testament. As Jeremiah also says: “The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?” (Jer. 17:9, KJV). Every one of us, if we look deep into our hearts, will see evil thoughts and motives and find a condition that we can’t change any more than the leopard can change its spots. This is not simply a past evil deed that we would hide from the prying eyes of the world and from God, but evidence that our very nature is so sinful that we don’t even recognize the gravity of our problem. *Sin* is not an accumulation of deeds that we can fix one sin at a time. *Sin* is a condition of our hearts that is made evident through our sinful behavior.

What is sin? It is not an accumulation of barnacles that we scrape off of the hull of our basically good selves. Sin in our lives is more like the skin of an onion. After all, removing the layers of an onion doesn’t work, because the onion is nothing but layers. Peeling off one sin at a time just leaves another sin to contend with.

Like Measles

Dealing with sin is like dealing with a case of the measles. If our concern with the disease is our appearance, we can apply cover-up makeup and look as though we don’t have measles at all. We would look perfectly healthy, even though we still have the infection.

If, on the other hand, we want to deal with the infection, then the spots would not concern us so much as the disease itself. We would not be so concerned about using makeup to cover the spots as we would about taking medicine to stop the course of the disease.

If sin is just an action or a behavior, then we try to fix it one behavior at a time. But if sin is a disease, we must attack the infection. *Sin* is at the core of our nature and must be cured by a heart transplant rather than makeup. Victory over *sin* must come first. That leads to victory over sinful behavior.

The second word that needs defining

is “righteousness.” In the same way that we tend to think of sin as mistakes we make or bad deeds that we need to eliminate, so we think of righteousness as either good deeds to be added or the absence of bad deeds.

We have a tendency to think like the rich young ruler about righteousness. “A certain ruler asked him, ‘Good teacher, what must I do to inherit eternal life?’” (Luke 18:18). He was saying to Jesus, “I have done a lot of good already, but there must be at least one more thing. You can think of that I can add to my lengthy list of good deeds.”

But even as *sin* is not just an accumulation of sinful acts, so *righteousness* is

Sanctification begins

with an organ transplant,

not a repair job.

not an accumulation of righteous deeds or a listing of bad deeds overcome. Sanctification is not a repair job, not a little tinkering with some broken attitudes, not the addition of some good deeds or the subtraction of some bad deeds. Sanctification begins with an organ transplant in which our corrupt, stony hearts are replaced with new, born-again hearts.

Victory over sin is not like the discovery of some tool that will help us make character adjustments. It is not like going to a chiropractor for a back adjustment. Nor is victory over sin the discovery of some new tool to scrape the barnacles off the hull of our essentially good self. God is after something totally new, not tinkering with our lives. Where is the victory? Not in simply stopping sinful behavior or in adding righteous deeds. Victory is found in the transplanted heart. God promises: “A new heart also will I give you, and a new spirit will I put within you: and I will take away the stony heart out of your flesh, and I will give you an heart of flesh” (Eze. 36:26, KJV). This new heart is filled with faith in God rather than

rebellion against God. Paul says: “Everything that does not come from faith is sin” (Rom. 14:23). If it doesn’t come from faith, if it doesn’t come from the transformed heart, it is sin.

Our focus should not be simply to get rid of sinful behavior or on adding righteous deeds, but on building a faith relationship with Jesus. As Ellen White says: “All true obedience comes from the heart. It was heart work with Christ. And if we consent, He will so identify Himself with our thoughts and aims, so blend our hearts and minds into conformity to His will, that when obeying Him we shall be but carrying out our own impulses. The will, refined and sanctified, will find its highest delight in doing His service. When we know God as it is our privilege to know Him, our life will be a life of continual obedience. Through an appreciation of the character of Christ, through communion with God, sin will become hateful to us. As Christ lived the law in humanity, so we may do if we will take hold of the Strong for strength” (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 668).

Paul told us that Christ is *both* our righteousness and our sanctification when he wrote: “He is the source of your life in Christ Jesus, whom God made our wisdom, our righteousness and sanctification and redemption” (1 Cor. 1:30, RSV).

A Promise to Memorize

We should memorize this inspired promise: “May the God of peace himself sanctify you wholly; and may your spirit and soul and body be kept sound and blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful, and he will do it” (1 Thess. 5:23, 24, RSV).

God has called each of His sons and daughters to live a sanctified life, and He promises to “do it” in us day by day, through the power of the Holy Spirit. Our part is to invite Him into our lives every moment of every day. Let us cultivate the habit of praying without ceasing. When we wake up in the morning our first thought should be of Him. Let us thank Him that we are alive and conscious, and then invite Him to enter into our lives by His Spirit to take charge of

our thoughts and words and feelings and deeds for the day.

"It is not enough for us to believe that Jesus is not an impostor, and that the religion of the Bible is no cunningly devised fable. We may believe that the name of Jesus is the only name under heaven whereby man may be saved, and yet we may not through faith make Him our personal Saviour. It is not enough to believe the theory of truth. It is not enough to make a profession of faith in Christ and have our names registered on the church roll. 'He that keepeth his commandments dwelleth in him, and he in him. And hereby we know that he abideth in us, by the Spirit which he hath given us.' 'Hereby we do know that we know him if we keep his commandments' (1 John 3:24; 2:3). This is the genuine evidence of conversion. Whatever our profession, it amounts to nothing unless Christ is revealed in works of righteousness" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, pp. 312, 313).

Each morning as we read His Word, let us review His promises: "To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy" (Jude 24) and "But the Lord is faithful; he will strengthen you and guard you from evil" (2 Thess. 3:3, RSV). Underline these texts that reveal the scope of our High Priest's ministry through the Holy Spirit in our lives.

Ask Jesus!

But you say, "I know I should do all these things, but I don't. I should wake up early and pray and study, but I don't. I should keep my eyes on Jesus, but I don't. What can I do?" Ask Him! Ask Him to awaken you. Ask Him to make you want to follow Him. Ask Him to make you willing to keep your thoughts on Him. Listen to this promise penned by Ellen White: "These divine heights the true believer may reach. All who will may see the mystery of godliness. But it is only through a correct understanding of Christ's mission and work that the possibility of being complete in Him, accepted in the Beloved, is brought within our reach. His long human arm embraces the human family;

His divine arm grasps the throne of the Infinite, that man may have the benefit of the infinite sacrifice made in his behalf. And to as many as receive Him, He gives the power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on His name" (*Review and Herald*, July 18, 1899; italics supplied).

Once a woman wanted a clean house, so she went to a store and bought all kinds of cleaning supplies. She bought dish soap, laundry soap, bathroom cleaners, brushes, towels, brooms, mops, and every disinfectant she could find.

*Only a soul full of Jesus
and clothed with the
robe of His righteousness
can be victorious.*

She cleaned, disinfected, soaked, and scrubbed everything in the house. The house was as clean as she could make it. And she felt good, until one day her son came home from school with a huge magnifying glass that he had borrowed from a friend. "Look at this, Mommy!" As he held it up to the wall, she saw that what looked clean to the naked eye was not so clean after all.

So she redoubled her efforts and scrubbed some areas so thoroughly that she had to buy a can of paint to repaint the walls. After that it looked so nice and clean. And she felt good, until one day her son came home from school with a microscope he had borrowed from the science lab. He brought into focus some of the dust he had discovered in a corner under the bed.

"Hey, Mom, look at this!"

She looked and saw on the microscopic slide thousands of dust mites.

"Where did you get that?" she cried.

"Under your bed," the child responded innocently.

How could she keep the house clean

if dust hid under the furniture? So she sold all the furniture in her house. Again with bleach and disinfectant she covered every corner of the house. The house was clean, as clean as she could make it, and it smelled like a hospital. Of course, it was also empty, because the family couldn't live there without furniture. They had to move into an apartment down the street. The house sat there, untouched but clean.

At least she thought it was clean, until one day she stuck her head in just to feel what it was like to be in a clean house, and discovered that dust and dirt know no barriers. The house, sitting empty, had accumulated dust and dirt, and was more filthy than it had ever been.

That story reminds me of one of Jesus' parables. "When an evil spirit comes out of a man, it goes through arid places seeking rest and does not find it. Then it says, 'I will return to the house I left.' When it arrives, it finds the house unoccupied, swept clean and put in order. Then it goes and takes with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there. And the final condition of that man is worse than the first" (Matt. 12:43-45).

Only a soul full of Jesus and clothed with the robe of His righteousness can be victorious. "When we submit ourselves to Christ, the heart is united with His heart, the will is merged in His will, the mind becomes one with His mind, the thoughts are brought into captivity to Him; we live His life. This is what it means to be clothed with the garment of His righteousness. Then as the Lord looks upon us He sees, not the fig-leaf garment, not the nakedness and deformity of sin, but His own robe of righteousness, which is perfect obedience to the law of Jehovah" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 312).

Repentance, assurance, victory—what a glorious progression the Lord has provided for us. But all are only in Christ—never in ourselves. Tomorrow we take another "in Christ" step as we hear God's call to compassion.

* Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

CALLED TO COMPASSION— IN CHRIST

"Hurting with" others

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

We're shocked by the news on television:

❑ In the Middle East, as Kurdish women wait in line for safe drinking water, a reporter says, "At one time 1,000 children died every day, most of them from diseases related to contaminated water."

❑ From Southern Asia a reporter explains, "A devastating cyclone ripped through Bangladesh, killing more than 139,000 and leaving 10 million homeless."

❑ From Somalia, Ethiopia, and the Sudan we hear news of millions threatened with starvation.

❑ In Peru health officials estimate that more than 1,400 people recently died from cholera.

❑ Worldwide, every minute of every day 18 children under the age of 5 die of hunger.

What happens to us when day after day we see, hear, and read of overwhelming suffering?

It is possible to be so overwhelmed by the suffering in the world that we simply ignore it and go about our daily tasks. Overdoses of worldwide suffering without personal action can inoculate us against compassion. But living a life of assurance and victory in Christ is not a self-focused life, but one that is called to compassion.

Visitors to a prominent author's home in England are shown the row of trees that he planted to shut out the view of the slaughterhouse next door. It is the natural desire of the human heart to screen out things that bring us pain, so we do whatever is necessary to insulate ourselves from the suffering of others.

In Paul's opening words to his second letter to the Corinthians he says: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion" (2 Cor. 1:3).*

What kind of Father do we have? How does He relate to all of the problems of the world? Paul says He is "the Father of compassion." We would say of God the Father that He is the Father of all discipline, the Father of all righteousness, the Father of all truth and justice. That would all be true, but it is not the picture Paul seeks to give to those in Corinth. He speaks of God as "the Father of compassion."

Compassion means "to suffer or hurt with." Our God is the Father who *"hurts with."* Jesus portrayed that compassion in His life:

❑ He had compassion for the *lost*: "When he saw the crowds, he had compassion on them, because they were harassed and helpless, like sheep without a shepherd" (Matt. 9:36).

❑ He had compassion for the *sick*:

"When Jesus landed and saw a large crowd, he had compassion on them and healed their sick" (Matt. 14:14).

❑ He had compassion for the *hungry*: "I have compassion for these people; they have already been with me three days and have nothing to eat" (Mark 8:2).

❑ He had compassion for the *blind*: "Jesus had compassion on them and touched their eyes. Immediately they received their sight and followed him" (Matt. 20:34).

God has compassion. He "hurts with people." The Incarnation illustrates His compassion, His "hurting with." After the Fall, God didn't leave fallen humanity and start again with new dust to make a new earth with a new man and woman. He "hurt with us"! He didn't abandon us. "Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign: The virgin will be with child and will give birth to a son, and will call him Immanuel" (Isa. 7:14). *Immanuel* means "God with us."

God showed that He "hurt with us" by becoming a human and experiencing the pain. He didn't just make a phone call from heaven and say, "I'm awfully sorry about your problem!" He didn't just mail a nice note that read "Hope you get well soon!" God became human to hurt with us.

Paul continues as he writes to the Corinthians: "Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of compassion and the God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our troubles, so that we can comfort those in any trouble with the comfort we ourselves have received from God" (2 Cor. 1:3, 4).

There is a purpose to God's hurting with us. He comforts us in our troubles so that we can comfort others in trouble. As He has compassion, so we are to have compassion. God does not comfort us to make us comfortable, but to make us comforters.

Peter says it as well: "Be ye all of one mind, having compassion one of another" (1 Peter 3:8, KJV). John says it, but uses a different word: "Beloved, let us love one another" (1 John 4:7, KJV). And in another text Paul repeats: "If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort

from his love, if any fellowship with the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and purpose. Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves. Each of you should look not only to your own interests, but also to the interests of others" (Phil. 2:1-4).

A Shoulder to Lean On

Can you imagine the heavenlike atmosphere God intends His earthly family to enjoy, a place where love for others is the guiding principle, where each person is more interested in the well-being and happiness of others than his own? Peace born of unselfishness should certainly replace harsh words and lonely hearts. The child of God should never have to bear a burden alone. Everyone should have and be a shoulder to lean on. And eternity would loom bright in joyful anticipation of being with the world's best Friend.

Whenever I think of compassion and understanding, I think of my aunt Mary Green, a dedicated Bible instructor who worked with my father and Sunny Liu for some years in New York and California. Aunt Mary had no idea how many hours there were in a day, especially when there was someone she could share with, whether it was friendship, a home-cooked meal, a Bible study, her home, or simply lending her ear for someone who was hurting. Her multiplied sorrows enabled her to comfort all, because she had been there before.

She died before she retired. I'm sure God decided she deserved to rest. During the last year of her life she saw 40 precious souls baptized with whom she had studied. She kept going when her pain was so severe that others had to drive her from home to home. I never listened to her give a Bible study, but I saw her live one every day. Her last whispered words before she died were "I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12, KJV). And we knew too. Everything about her showed she knew and loved Him and all of His earthly children down here, erring or not. I believe it is to such "other-mindedness"

that God calls each of us.

Paul's words to the Corinthians continue: "For just as the sufferings of Christ flow over into our lives, so also through Christ our comfort overflows" (2 Cor. 1:5). Picture a cup so full that it overflows onto the ground. In the same way our lives are so full of the comfort that God gives us that our compassion spills over to all around us. We hurt with others and are comforted in God together.

But, you might say, "I don't like the pain; I don't like to hurt." You may be one who turns off the television when it



is filled with pictures of the bloated bellies of malnourished children. "Life is tough enough," you say. "Why should I expose myself to more pain?"

Paul tells us why: "I want to know Christ . . . and the fellowship of sharing in his sufferings, becoming like him in his death" (Phil. 3:10). Paul is not a masochist who seeks out pain for pain's sake. He says he wants to know Christ. Paul was aware that knowing Christ required fellowshiping in His sufferings. That meant more than just thinking about the pain He suffered on the cross. To fellowship with Christ's suffering meant to identify with others in their pain as He identified with ours. To know Christ is to identify with others as He identified with us, and to identify with others is to identify with Him. "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these my brethren, ye have

done it unto me" (Matt. 25:40, KJV).

"But we are compassionate, aren't we?" you reply. "After all, we have a Community Services program, and we try to help others." Yes, but we often prefer to be selective with our compassion, dispensing it to the deserving!

□ We have compassion for people with AIDS, as long as they got the disease from a blood transfusion.

□ We have compassion for people who lost their jobs, as long as it wasn't their fault they were fired.

□ We have compassion for people whose houses burn down, if it wasn't because they were smoking in bed.

We choose to have compassion for the deserving poor. What does it mean to be deserving? Isn't it enough to be hungry to be deserving? Isn't it enough to be thirsty to be deserving? Isn't it enough to be in prison to be deserving of a visit? *It is our need that stirs God's compassion, not the origin of the need.*

As sinners we have all received God's compassion. Were we deserving sinners? Are there undeserving sinners who don't receive God's compassion?

Once a boy was swimming in a river. He got out too far and was in danger of drowning. A man who was passing along a road beside the river heard his cries for help. Going to the riverside, he began to scold the boy for being so careless as to get into the deep water, but made no attempt to help him. "Oh, sir," cried the boy, "please help me first! Scold me later!" When you want to rescue a person from drowning, you have to jump into the water. The needy of the world get plenty of scolding. What they need is compassion. How often do we think, if not say, *Well, they wouldn't suffer so much if they had acted differently.*

We are confronted with moral choices, and they are not always easy to make. In operating Adventist Community Services centers, we can't be so generous that we leave nothing for those with the greatest needs. If our hospitals open their doors to all the needy who can't pay, they would soon be in bankruptcy. Thus, some conclude, we can't help anyone. Not so! We live life in tension, a tension between moral choices.

Television fills us with images of need. I can make choices to do some-

thing somewhere, or I can use the overload of images as an excuse to do nothing. I can make choices to change my part of the world with compassion, or I can fold my arms and say the problems are too big. Compassion is not sentimental sadness over anonymous suffering multitudes. It is specific action for specific need. Compassion means to hurt with a person.

What Can I Do?

The amount of suffering in the world seems overwhelming compared to the little we can do individually. Once a boy was walking along the beach with his father after a storm, and high tide had stranded thousands of starfish on the shore. The starfish were dying, and as the boy walked along the beach he picked up one after another and flung it back into the ocean. His father, looking down the miles of beach at the thousands of stranded starfish, said, "Why are you wasting your energy? Look at all of them. What possible difference could you make?" "It makes a big difference to this one," the boy said as he picked up another starfish, looked at it, and flung it into the sea. Likewise, when Mother Teresa was questioned about how she could hope to make an impact on Calcutta's 3,000 slums with new refugees pouring in daily, she replied, "I do not think the way you think. I do not add up. I only subtract from the total dying."

Along this line Ellen White noted: "After His resurrection, Christ ascended to heaven, and He is today presenting our needs to the Father. 'I have graven thee upon the palms of my hands,' He says (Isa. 49:16). It cost something to engrave them there. It cost untold agony. If we would humble ourselves before God, and be kind and courteous and tenderhearted and pitiful, there would be one hundred conversions to the truth where now there is only one" (*Testimonies*, vol. 9, p. 189).

Compassion—not just for the deserving, but for the needy. When Jesus comes in the clouds of glory, the distinguishing feature that will separate the righteous from the wicked is not church attendance or church membership. It will be compassion.

Thus, we read: "Then the King will

say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me'" (Matt. 25:34-36).

Jesus "hurt with us" and so, as His children, we hurt with others. We have compassion. As we touch others we touch God. In one sense Clement of Alexandria was right when he said, "If thou hast seen thy brother, thou hast seen God." And Jesus asserted, "I tell

*People who are close
to each other share
pain and joy.*

you the truth, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers of mine, you did for me" (Matt. 25:40).

Compassion in Christ is not sympathy for the deserving or a kind word for the worthy. Compassion for the deserving worthy frequently isn't compassion at all, but rather a reward for good behavior. Compassion in Christ is the expression of empathetic feeling for the undeserving, even as Christ's death was for the undeserving—for you and for me.

Dr. Brand, who worked for 18 years at the Christian Medical College in Vellore, India, tells this story of dealing with Sadan, a leper. The greatest threat to Sadan's body was the lack of pain. Because he felt no pain, his body couldn't warn him of sharp, hot, or abrasive objects that could injure his flesh.

Sadan came to the hospital in Vellore for treatment. After four years of reconstructive surgery and rehabilitation therapy, he was doing well enough to return home to his family for a weekend. "I want to go back to where I was rejected before," he said proudly, referring to the

cafés that had turned him away and the buses that had denied him service. Before leaving, he and the doctor reviewed all of the dangers. Not able to sense pain, he had to be careful of any sharp object that might cut him and injure his body.

On Saturday night he ate a reunion dinner with his family and went to his old room, where he had not slept for four years. At last he was home. The next morning after awakening, Sadan examined himself, as he had been trained to do at the hospital. He recoiled in horror. Part of the back of his left index finger was mangled. He knew the culprit. A rat had visited him during the night and gnawed his finger.

He thought of returning to the hospital, but decided to stay home another night. This time he determined to stay awake so no rats could bother him. He sat reading a book by a kerosene lantern. About 4:00 in the morning he could no longer fight off sleep. As he fell asleep, his hand slid over to one side against the hot glass of the lamp, and when he awoke the next morning he saw that a large patch of skin had burned off the back of his right hand.

He returned to the hospital at Vellore the next day. As Dr. Brand removed the bandages, Sadan wept and said, "I feel as if I've lost all my freedom." And then he asked a significant question: "How can I be free without pain?"

Pain unites the different parts of our body in a network of communication. People who are close to each other share pain and joy even though there are no nerves that connect them physically. They hurt with one another.

We live in a world community. It is by our compassion, the willingness "to hurt with each other," that we show that we know our Creator.

And this compassion comes from Jesus. As we are in Him, we see as He sees and feel as He feels. Just as the Lord calls us to repentance, assurance, and victory in Christ, so He calls us to Christ's compassion.

Tomorrow we will explore another step in Christian living—the call to witness.

* Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

CALLED TO WITNESS— IN CHRIST

More than duty—a joy

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

During the first half of construction of the Golden Gate Bridge in San Francisco, 20 workers fell to their death or were seriously injured. Construction finally stopped while a giant net was built under the construction area to catch anyone who fell. During the rest of the construction only eight men fell. The net not only increased their safety, but also made the workers more confident and thus less likely to fall. An unexpected bonus was that their efficiency improved 25 percent. Their confidence increased their productivity.

The Christian life is like that: because of the assurance of God's grace and care, we can live and witness with confidence.

Ellen White wrote: "The true Christian draws his motives for action from his deep love for his Redeemer. His affection for his Master is true and holy. And it is the cheerful, lovable Christian of whom Christ says, 'Ye are my witnesses' (Isa. 43:10). Such a man is Christ's representative, for he reflects Christ in his daily life. It is when he recedes from the light that he cannot diffuse its bright beams to others" (*Manuscript Releases*, vol. 9, p. 379).

The closer we are to Jesus, the more we will reflect Him in our lives. As we experience victory and assurance, we

will attract others to Him.

When Peter and John were ordered by the Jewish authorities not to talk about Jesus anymore, they replied: "We cannot help speaking about what we have seen and heard" (Acts 4:20).*

Gospel witnessing is like that. It shouldn't be something we have to force ourselves to do. Nor is it like a requirement, a special "work" that contributes to our salvation. Instead, when we love Jesus and enjoy the assurance of salvation, we can't help speaking about Him.

After the Resurrection, Jesus gave His disciples the Great Commission: "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).

His last words to His disciples on earth were these: "But you will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes on you; and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea and Samaria, and to the ends of the earth" (Acts 1:8).

Throughout the world today there are Seventh-day Adventists rejoicing in their assurance of salvation and victory in Christ, who are fulfilling the commission that Jesus gave His disciples.

I think of the 24 young Taskforce

workers in predominantly Muslim Sudan, who are laboring to establish an Adventist presence in 12 unentered cities. I have pictures of the six new groups of believers they have established, along with stories of how the Lord has given the Taskforce teams outstanding courage in the face of danger.

Reports from the Taskforce workers are exciting: 15 baptized here, 34 baptized there, six Bible studies started here.

I quote from one report: "Even though gathered under a rented plastic tarp, the 26 new members still faithfully come." Another writes: "Between us, my evangelism partner and I have a pair of shoes and a pair of slippers. Whoever gives Bible studies in the village nine kilometers away gets to wear the shoes." Rented tarps and inadequate shoes, yet the Holy Spirit is moving upon this church.

Today at Spicer College you will find 182 members of the New Mission Generation, student-evangelists who daily count it a privilege to be ambassadors for Christ in India. They have already formed 91 new congregations.

"'Come, follow me,' Jesus said, 'and I will make you fishers of men'" (Matt. 4:19). Could we say the opposite: "If we are not fishers of men, then we are not following Him"? Some have an idea about witness that is contrary to the picture that Jesus gives us. They see witnessing as a required activity, something that they do on Sabbath afternoon or when they talk to someone at work about their church. If they choose not to participate in a church witness activity personally, they contribute money so others can do the work.

The Power of Relationships

We have visualized witnessing as an occasional invitation for someone to attend some meetings or leave a piece of literature somewhere. But "witnessing" is more inclusive than that. The nature of witnessing is revealed by how Jesus communicated with us. God needed to witness to us about the good news of the birth of His Son and the eternal life that was ours if we would accept it. He needed to tell us the truth about His own and His Son's character. He didn't do it just by sending us literature, the Bible. God sent His Son, Jesus, in person so

we could experience how loving and unselfish He really is.

In a similar fashion, God wants to live in us by the Holy Spirit so that other people can see the joy of being followers of Jesus. "The badge of Christianity," wrote Ellen White, "is not an outward sign, . . . but it is that which reveals the union of man with God. By the power of His grace manifested in the transformation of character the world is to be convinced that God has sent His Son as its Redeemer. No other influence that can surround the human soul has such power as the influence of an unselfish life. The strongest argument in favor of the gospel is a loving and lovable Christian" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 470).

We know others through relationships, so we witness to others through our relationships. We witness best to those whom we know the best. If a stranger came to your door and asked to borrow \$50, you probably would not lend the money. If, on the other hand, a close friend came to your door and made the same request, you would be much more inclined to respond positively because of your friendship. Likewise, our most effective influence for Jesus is with our closest friends.

The church is a community of believers whose lives are being transformed by the Holy Spirit. It is His church only as it experiences and demonstrates the faith of Jesus in the lives of its members. Witness is a primary reason for the existence of the church. At its best, the church is a community of Christians who care deeply for one another and invite others to share in the peace of assurance in Christ and the joy of the family of God.

A witness must have personal, first-hand information. You can't pay someone else to witness for you. John says: "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked at and our hands have touched—this we proclaim concerning the Word of life. The life appeared; we have seen it and testify to it, and we proclaim to

you the eternal life, which was with the Father and has appeared to us. We proclaim to you what we have seen and heard, so that you also may have fellowship with us" (1 John 1:1-3).

This text gives me a lot of confidence in the truth of the gospel that we share. We don't follow cunningly devised fables. Those who were there wrote down their testimony. The text also points out



the importance of an experience as opposed to truth alone. Personal experience lends validity and power to truth. We can't share what we don't have, but we must share not only what we believe but what we have experienced.

Without the experience, a person's expression of faith will sound like the common practice of radio stations during election times. After the delivery of some passionate political assertion, the same announcer reminds the hearers that these words were a paid advertisement and do not necessarily reflect his or her own views or those of the station.

Unless and until we possess a faith of our own, until we enjoy a trusting, intimate relationship with our Saviour, proclaiming the gospel to others will come through as superficial. It will not carry the power of sincere, personal

witness any more than a recorded telephone message.

Ellen White wrote: "Christ directs, strengthens, ennobles, and sanctifies the faculties of the soul. It is through personal acquaintance with Him that we become qualified to represent His character to the world" (*Review and Herald*, Sept. 10, 1895).

John says: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God, even to them that believe on his name" (John 1:12, KJV).

If witness is born of the joy of assurance in Christ rather than being a momentary expression of faith, then opportunities for witness are everywhere. The best place to witness is the place where we spend most of our time. Some years ago, when the message of assurance in Christ moved from theory to reality in my life, from my head to my heart, I found my whole approach to witnessing changed. Witnessing to my new joy in Jesus became the enjoyable and unavoidable consequence of being with others, rather than an unnatural effort motivated by some promotion or a new program.

We all have prime opportunities for evangelism in our homes, our communities, and our workplaces.

In other words, the most natural place to witness is where we live, work, play, and worship. You see, we aren't just Seventh-day Adventists, but *seven-days* Adventists!

Christian witnessing doesn't just happen on weekends or in evangelistic meetings. What happens during the week does more to spread the gospel than what happens on Sabbath or special occasions. A few people leave their secular work to be full-time workers for the church, but people are the most effective gospel workers where they come in contact with others—at work, at home, and in their neighborhoods.

We all need to think of our vocations as places where we practice our ministry. Our relationship with the Lord should be such that we can share our faith in the natural environment of work.

Too often when we try to mold the

opinions of people by the theory of truth before they know us personally, we run the danger of inoculating them against the gospel. Through our caring, loving friendship, in which we share our personal experience with God, the Holy Spirit can melt hearts. Regardless of how true they may be, presenting our distinctive doctrines apart from a personal testimony of our assurance in Christ will seem cold, powerless, and theoretical.

Ellen White pointed out that "Christ's method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Saviour mingled with men as one who desired their good. He showed His sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then He bade them, 'Follow Me'" (*The Ministry of Healing*, p. 143).

A riddle is told of five frogs. "If there were five frogs on a log and one decided to jump, how many would be left on the log?" The answer to the riddle is five, because deciding to jump is not the same as jumping. Being called to witness by Christ is not the same as being a witness.

Personal testimony is the most effective and convincing way to witness. Ellen White wrote: "As witnesses for Christ, we are to tell what we know, what we ourselves have seen and heard and felt. If we have been following Jesus step by step, we shall have something right to the point to tell concerning the way in which He has led us. We can tell how we have tested His promise, and found the promise true. We can bear witness to what we have known of the grace of Christ. This is the witness for which our Lord calls, and for want of which the world is perishing" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 340).

Personal Experience

When Christians speak from personal experience about the meaning Christianity has given their lives, they present a compelling argument in favor of Christianity. It can be rejected, but it confronts the hearer with words backed up with a life that calls for a decision.

The Bible is filled with powerful testimonies of personal witness. Thus we read of the confession of a Thomas prone to doubt, "My Lord and my God" (John 20:28, KJV); the testimony of a

Gentile centurion, "Truly this was the Son of God" (Matt. 27:54, KJV); an officer's reply to the priests when they returned emptyhanded, "Never man spake like this man" (John 7:46, KJV); the witness of Lazarus returned from the dead; the Mary changed from mourner to enthusiast, having seen the resurrected Christ; the changed demoniacs telling what Jesus had done for them; and Paul's unflagging testimony, "I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed" (2 Tim. 1:12, KJV). Personal testimonies such as these fueled the growth of the early church. The confirmation of these testimonies in the hearts of believers today is the foundation of life-witness.

Ellen White penned: "You can point to the living spots in your experience,

*When we love Jesus,
we can't help speaking
about Him.*

without going back for years into the past. Would that we could oftener hear the simple, earnest *testimony of heart conflicts and victories*" (*Review and Herald*, Dec. 20, 1881; italics supplied).

Some years ago there was a shipwreck off the coast of the Pacific Northwest of North America. A crowd of fishermen in a nearby village gathered to watch the ship as it was smashed on the rocks. A lifeboat raced to the rescue, and after a terrific struggle the rescuers came back with all the shipwrecked sailors but one. "There was no room in the lifeboat for him, so we told him to stay by the ship and someone would come back for him," shouted a young man. "Who will come with me?"

Just then a woman cried out, "Don't go, Jim. Don't go. You are all I have left. Your father was drowned in the sea; your brother William sailed away, and we've never heard from him; and now if you are lost, I'll be left alone. Oh, Jim, please don't go."

Jim listened patiently to his mother's

pleading, then said, "Mother, I must go! It is my duty. I must go!" The onlookers watched as the men in the lifeboat fought their way toward the wreck. Anxiously Jim's mother wept and prayed. Then the boat started back, a frail little shell tossed about by the angry waves. At last it came close enough to hear, and the people shouted, "Did you get him?"

Jim shouted back, "Yes, and tell Mother it's William!"

Many of the people with whom you come into contact every day are in eternal jeopardy. They are all children of God, and many of them need to hear the good news about Jesus from the lips of a friend. As Jim said as he went to rescue the sailor, "It is my duty." It is the Christian's duty, but more than that, it is the Christian's joy to rescue others for God and to hear the angels rejoice over one more sinner that repents.

Seventh-day Adventists, through the power of God's Spirit, are rescuing the perishing all over this world. I think of the young man in a certain country who went to an unentered district and organized a body of believers amid terrifying persecution. In the process he was beaten, the place of worship burned, and his life repeatedly threatened. And yet today the hope of this message shines in that community.

I think of the Spicer College Taskforce teams. I have read many of their reports. Many of these young missionaries walk 10, 15, 20 miles a day to give Bible studies and hold meetings in towns that only 12 months ago were without an Adventist. Why do they walk? Because they don't have the money to buy a bicycle; but they go on undaunted.

Our studies this week have now taken us through five steps—repentance, assurance, victory, compassion, and witness. Let us remember that we don't take these steps on our own. They are always taken in Christ.

Tomorrow we look at another part of the Christian life—the joyful expectancy of Christ's return.

* Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

CALLED TO EXPECTANCY— IN CHRIST

How to wait for His return

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

In the year 999 in the old basilica of St. Peter's a mass of weeping worshippers awaited the end of the world. They understood it to be the eve of the millennium. Many worshippers had given away their homes and lands to assure for themselves forgiveness and vindication in the impending judgment.

In 1978 a group of 100 city dwellers led by John Strong moved to the Australian bush, believing that the world would end with a nuclear holocaust on October 31.

We have been traveling as Christians through the highs and lows of history, through the Dark Ages and Reformation, for almost 2,000 years, waiting for the fulfillment of the promise of our Lord: "I will come again, and receive you unto myself; that where I am, there ye may be also" (John 14:3). We as Seventh-day Adventists have been proclaiming the last days for 150 years as we await the realization of Jesus' words: "And, behold, I come quickly" (Rev. 22:12). When will that promise meet its fulfillment? Where are we in the time line from the Crucifixion to the glorious resurrection?

This desire to know our place in the stream of history is especially strong as we see events of major historical consequence unfold. Recently Communism

fell, opening the way for the rapid spread of the gospel. At the same time daily newscasts provide evidence of the fulfillment of the signs of the end of the world as recorded in Matthew 24.

After listing all the signs of the end of the world, Jesus told the story of 10 virgins who went out to meet the bridegroom. Five of them were foolish, five wise. That which separated the wise from the foolish was how prepared they were to wait for a bridegroom who "was delayed" (Matt. 25:5, RSV). All of the virgins fell asleep as they waited. None of them expected that there would be a delay, but five of them were prepared for any eventuality. They had secured sufficient oil to sustain a bright flame in their lamps, whereas the foolish virgins didn't have enough. When the bridegroom came, the wise virgins with lamps aglow entered into the wedding banquet, while the foolish, having gone to get more oil, missed the feast. Jesus ends the parable with the warning "Watch therefore, for you know neither the day nor the hour" (Matt. 25:13, RSV).

As we wait for the return of our Lord we must remember what Peter said: "First of all, you must understand that in the last days scoffers will come, scoffing and following their own evil desires. They will say, 'Where is this "coming" he promised?'" (2 Peter 3:3, 4, NIV). There will be those who, like the foolish

virgins, will say, "There is enough time to get ready later."

What is it like to wait for Jesus? The disciples had been with Jesus for three years, and they were so anxious to be with Him again that they greeted each other with "Maranatha," which means "Come, Lord!" They were impatient to see Him again.

Our anticipation at seeing visitors increases in proportion to how well we know them and how long we have been separated from them. Humanity's 2,000-year physical separation from Christ should make us intensely anxious to see Him. But has it? Does our eagerness to see Him give evidence of how intimately we know Him?

The Second Coming will be an abstract doctrine of the church as long as the Person who is coming is a remote and abstract biblical character. The Second Coming will be a cold, dead doctrine, detached from our daily living, as long as the Person who is coming is not living in our hearts. The Second Coming will not be loved and looked for as long as Jesus is not deeply loved and looked at.

How Do We Wait?

How we wait for people depends on whom we wait for. How do we wait for the bill collector, compared to how we wait for the first glimpse of our bride or groom on our wedding day? Compare our waiting for a long-absent son or daughter with our nervous expectation of a thief who has been breaking into homes in our neighborhood. The relationship we have with people determines the kind of expectation we have while we wait for them.

Christians have been waiting so long for Christ that some are in danger of losing their sense of urgency. The Seventh-day Adventist Church developed out of an anticipation of the imminent return of Christ, and that hope has provided the driving force for our taking the gospel to the world. Our church is still a church of the Second Advent.

There is good reason that Seventh-day Adventists believe in the Second Advent. The Bible talks a lot about it:

❑ "If I go . . . , I will come again" (John 14:3).

❑ "And then shall they see the Son of man coming in a cloud with power and great glory" (Luke 21:27).

❑ "This same Jesus . . . shall so come in like manner as ye have seen him go into heaven" (Acts 1:11).

❑ "They shall see the Son of man coming in the clouds of heaven with power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30).

❑ "Behold, he cometh with clouds; and every eye shall see him, and they also which pierced him" (Rev. 1:7).

❑ "For the Son of man shall come in the glory of his Father with his angels" (Matt. 16:27).

❑ "Unto them that look for him shall he appear the second time without sin unto salvation" (Heb. 9:28).

❑ "Be ye also patient; . . . for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh" (James 5:8).

Many of the parables and much of the message of Jesus centered on the reassurance of His return. Without this, His death would have been without purpose. All Christians should be Adventists! For if there is one teaching in Scripture that is more emphasized than another, one topic that receives more attention in the New Testament than another, it certainly is the return of Jesus.

If a major newspaper assigned us to write a news story about what the Bible has to say about the Second Coming, we wouldn't have any trouble coming up with information. We would ask the questions that reporters ask: who, what, when, where, why, and how?

❑ *Who* is coming? "This same Jesus." This same Jesus, the One whom the disciples knew, their Friend, Jesus of Nazareth (Acts 1:11, NIV).

❑ *What* will happen? This same Jesus "will come back in the same way you have seen him go into heaven" (verse 11, NIV).

❑ *When* will it happen? "But of that day and hour knoweth no man" (Matt. 24:36).

❑ *Why* will it happen? So that Jesus can "gather his elect" (Matt. 24:31, NIV).

❑ *Where* will it happen? "Behold, he



is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him" (Rev. 1:7, RSV).

❑ *How* will it happen? "With power and great glory" (Matt. 24:30). "When the Son of man shall come in his glory, and all the holy angels with him, then shall he sit upon the throne of his glory" (Matt. 25:31).

These texts are familiar to most of us, maybe so familiar, in fact, that we no longer seem to have a sense of expectancy. We may be asking the questions without waiting for the answers. It is so easy for the routine of daily living to move the message of the Lord's coming to a lower priority. Paul reminded Titus that "the grace of God that brings salvation has appeared to all men. It teaches us to say 'No' to ungodliness and worldly passions, and to live self-controlled, upright and godly lives in this present age, while we wait for the blessed hope—the glorious appearing of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:11-13, NIV).

Distractions

We can be easily diverted from the message of the Second Coming by distractions, including an unwarranted focus on the time of the return of Jesus. He specifically told us, "But of that day and hour knoweth no man."

There are those who are more interested in establishing the time of His return than teaching the hope of His return. They are more intent on establishing the dates of the time of trouble than learning of Him who will carry us

through the trouble. Jesus Himself gave us signs to watch for in Matthew 24, but when our focus is on signs rather than the Sign Giver, we have missed the message of the Advent.

As we get closer and closer to the year 2000, we can expect many would-be prophets and prognosticators to manipulate scriptural dates, times, and seasons to come up with dates for the Lord's return. We must not weaken the credibility of our message with veiled time setting, unsound speculations, or the even more widespread blight of casual Laodiceanism that dulls our spiritual senses.

I am sure that the goal of most of these date publishers is to awaken people to the imminence of the Lord's return, but let us not be beguiled by fascination with the sensational and miss our focus on the Person who is returning.

When a scheduled airline flight wings its way toward its destination, the flight controller knows all the details of the flight pattern. The controller knows exactly when the plane departed and where it was, is, and will be at various stages of the flight, including when it will arrive. On the other hand, a young lady whose fiancé is on the flight knows only the approximate time of arrival and nothing about its flight path, but she is overjoyed at the prospect of meeting a certain passenger who is on the plane! The flight controller has much more information than the young lady, but is not very excited about the flight, because he or she doesn't know anyone on the plane. I'd rather know very little about the details of Christ's coming and have a heart full of expectation because I know the Person who is coming.

Even more dangerous, we may lose our expectancy of the Second Coming by becoming caught up in the affairs of daily living. Like the wicked servant in Jesus' parable (Matt. 24:48-51), we begin to put off the day of His return. Rather, we should follow this counsel from the servant of the Lord: "He who is seeking for eternal riches should be striving for the heavenly treasure with far greater earnestness and persever-

ance, and with an intensity that is proportionate to the value of the object of which he is in pursuit" (*Counsels on Stewardship*, p. 158).

Maybe we can understand how vital it is to believe that He is coming by considering the opposite. What would the implications be if Christ were never to return? It would make meaningless many of the messages He gave while He was here. To have a God who healed physical pain for one brief moment in history and then left forever would make no sense. It would be like a doctor coming to give us a shot to relieve our pain for a couple hours and then leaving, never to return. Christ's first coming would have been utterly foolish were there to be no Second Coming. Of what benefit would His forgiveness be? How could the cross help if there were to be no crown?

To intervene personally for an instant in earth's history and then leave forever would not portray a loving God. Of that God we would have to ask, "Why did He come at all? Is He trying to increase our misery and pain by relieving it for a moment so we can really understand how bad off we are?" No, even if Jesus had not told us He was coming back, the message of the New Testament mandates His return.

If we want to know the message of the Second Coming, we should reflect on what was so good about His first coming. The message of the Second Advent is a message of hope. What was experienced by Planet Earth for a brief moment in history 2,000 years ago will be experienced again. We are not left to our own devices. The message of the Second Coming brings hope and joy as we anticipate living again with Jesus, the same Jesus who lived among us, the same Jesus who heals our hurts. He is coming to be with us again.

I can think of only one reason some of us don't rejoice in the good news of the Second Advent. We don't know Jesus yet and haven't accepted His assurance of salvation and the promise of eternal life.

The disciples had been three years with Jesus, and they couldn't stand the separation. So driven were they by the hope of His coming that in a few years

they spread the good news across the Roman Empire.

The separation of Jesus from His disciples was like a family separation. When we have been away for an extended period, we become eager to return home. Why? Is it to get back to our house, or is it because we love the view from our house? No! The desire to be home is the desire to be with those we love. The more we know Jesus, the more will be our desire for His return. If we are not particularly excited about His return, it is probably because we don't know Him.

We may know all about

the Second Coming,

but do we know

the One who is coming?

What does Jesus say in the Bible to those who were not ready for His coming? Not "You didn't know enough." Not "You didn't know the time of My coming." He says, "You didn't know me" (see Matt. 7:21-23).

Preparing the Way

When we know Jesus and desire to see Him again, we will prepare the way for Him. When we have repented and have assurance in Christ, our witness of Him will have a sense of urgency. We won't be able to stand the separation any longer. We will be like those people in Jesus' wedding parable who were "waiting for their master to return from a wedding banquet, so that when he comes and knocks they can immediately open the door for him" (Luke 12:36, NIV). Our assurance of our relationship with our Master will lead us to an active, expectant waiting for His return. We will share the good news of His return with others. "And this gospel of the kingdom will be preached in the whole world as a testimony to all

nations, and then the end will come" (Matt. 24:14, NIV).

Ellen White wrote: "It is the privilege of every Christian not only to look for but to hasten the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ (2 Peter 3:12). Were all who profess His name bearing fruit to His glory, how quickly the whole world would be sown with the seed of the gospel. Quickly the last great harvest would be ripened, and Christ would come to gather the precious grain" (*Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 69).

God is anxious to join His children, but He is not willing that any should perish. We have a part to play in this divine conclusion to earth's history.

Dear friends, many of you have been expecting Jesus' return for years—some for 20, 30, 40, or even 50 years. Have you begun to doubt the promise of the glad return? Have you started to say in your heart, "My Lord delays His coming"? Let me assure you that God hasn't failed. We may have, but He hasn't!

Ellen White wrote: "For forty years did unbelief, murmuring, and rebellion shut out ancient Israel from the land of Canaan. The same sins have delayed the entrance of modern Israel into the heavenly Canaan. In neither case were the promises of God at fault. It is the unbelief, the worldliness, unconsecration, and strife among the Lord's professed people that have kept us in this world of sin and sorrow so many years" (*Evangelism*, p. 696).

She also explained: "We may have to remain here in this world because of insubordination many more years, as did the children of Israel; but for Christ's sake, His people should not add sin to sin by charging God with the consequence of their own wrong course of action" (*ibid.*).

A father once left his four sons and traveled to a distant land to earn his fortune. He was gone a very long time. At first his children missed him a lot, but as the months passed, they got used to his not being around. They received letters from their father quite regularly, which at first they read, but later some of the sons didn't even bother to read them.

Finally, after a very long time, the sons received a letter giving the time, airline, and flight number of their

father's return. The letter said that their father had earned his fortune and wanted to share it with the family. The children studied the letter and checked the flight schedules. Sure enough, there was a flight scheduled at that time.

Finally the day arrived for the father's return. The second son, who was busy planning a birthday party for his girlfriend, thought that the oldest should be the one to go pick up their dad.

The first son doubted from the letters he had read that his father had made a fortune at all. He suspected that his dad was returning to live off his sons, so the eldest blocked his father's return completely out of his mind.

The third son had read about the delays that airlines had been experiencing and concluded that his dad could find his own way home.

The father had left home when the fourth son was very small, so that son didn't know his dad at all. He hadn't even read the letters that his dad had sent. He figured he wouldn't recognize his dad even if he did go to the airport. And besides, it wasn't his responsibility, as the youngest son, to do such chores.

Well, their father did arrive at the airport, and when he found no one to meet him, he took a taxi home. When the taxi arrived at the house, all four sons were surprised. But when he told them his fortune was to be shared only with those who believed his letter enough to meet him at the airport, there was weeping and gnashing of teeth.

Jesus is coming back. Again there will be only two classes: the wise and the foolish. One class will call in terror for the rocks and mountains to fall on them (Rev. 6:16). Joyfully the others will say, "Lo, this is our God; we have waited for him, and he will save us" (Isa. 25:9). "So do not throw away your confidence; it will be richly rewarded. You need to persevere so that when you have done the will of God, you will receive what he has promised. For in just a very little while, 'he who is coming will come and will not delay'" (Heb. 10:35-37, NIV).

Yes, we are called to a sense of expectancy in Christ. Tomorrow we will study the revival God intends for His people in these last days.

FRIDAY

CALLED TO REVIVAL— IN CHRIST

The church's great need

BY ELLEN G. WHITE

The article that follows represents one of the most powerful appeals made by Ellen G. White for revival and reformation.¹ In keeping with the theme and spirit of the readings for this week, I thought it appropriate to review its message with our members once again, in the hope that it will receive the most prayerful consideration on the part of everyone. May it have the intended effect on our hearts.

—Robert S. Folkenberg

A revival of true godliness among us is the greatest and most urgent of all our needs. To seek this should be our first work. There must be earnest effort to obtain the blessing of the Lord, not because God is not willing to bestow His blessing upon us, but because we are unprepared to receive it. Our heavenly Father is more willing to give His Holy Spirit to them that ask Him than are earthly parents to give good gifts to their children.

But it is our work, by confession, humiliation, repentance, and earnest prayer, to fulfill the conditions upon which God has promised to grant us His blessing. A revival need be expected only in answer to prayer. While the people are so destitute of God's Holy Spirit,

they cannot appreciate the preaching of the Word; but when the Spirit's power touches their hearts, then the discourses given will not be without effect. Guided by the teachings of God's Word, with the manifestation of His Spirit, in the exercise of sound discretion, those who attend our meetings will gain a precious experience, and returning home, will be prepared to exert a healthful influence.

The old standard bearers knew what it was to wrestle with God in prayer, and to enjoy the outpouring of His Spirit. But these are passing off from the stage of action; and who are coming up to fill their places? How is it with the rising generation? Are they converted to God? Are we awake to the work that is going on in the heavenly sanctuary, or are we waiting for some compelling power to come upon the church before we shall arouse? Are we hoping to see the whole church revived? That time will never come.

There are persons in the church who are not converted, and who will not unite in earnest, prevailing prayer. We must enter upon the work individually. We must pray more, and talk less. Iniquity abounds, and the people must be taught not to be satisfied with a form of godliness without the spirit and power. If we are intent upon searching

our own hearts, putting away our sins, and correcting our evil tendencies, our souls will not be lifted up unto vanity; we shall be distrustful of ourselves, having an abiding sense that our sufficiency is of God.

We have far more to fear from within than from without. The hindrances to strength and success are far greater from the church itself than from the world. Unbelievers have a right to expect that those who profess to be keeping the commandments of God and the faith of Jesus will do more than any other class to promote and honor, by their consistent lives, by their godly example and their active influence, the cause which they represent. But how often have the professed advocates of the truth proved the greatest obstacle to its advancement! The unbelief indulged, the doubts expressed, the darkness cherished, encourage the presence of evil angels, and open the way for the accomplishment of Satan's devices.

Opening the Door to the Adversary

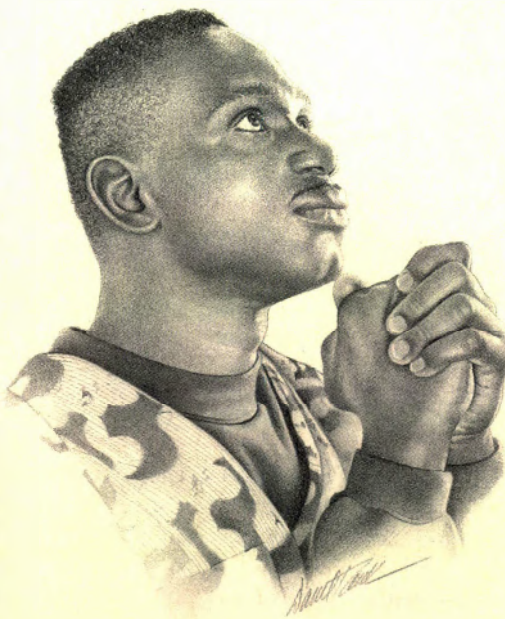
The adversary of souls is not permitted to read the thoughts of men; but he is a keen observer, and he marks the words; he takes account of actions, and skillfully adapts his temptations to meet the cases of those who place themselves in his power. If we would labor to repress sinful thoughts and feelings, giving them no expression in words or actions, Satan would be defeated; for he could not prepare his specious temptations to meet the case.

But how often do professed Christians, by their lack of self-control, open the door to the adversary of souls! Divisions, and even bitter dissensions which would disgrace any worldly community, are common in the churches, because there is so little effort to control wrong feelings, and to repress every word that Satan can take advantage of. As soon as an alienation of feelings arises, the matter is spread before Satan for his inspection, and the opportunity given for him to use his serpentlike wisdom and skill in dividing and destroying the church.

There is great loss in every dissen-

sion. Personal friends of both parties take sides with their respective favorites, and thus the breach is widened. A house divided against itself cannot stand. Criminations and recriminations are engendered and multiplied. Satan and his angels are actively at work to secure a harvest from seed thus sown.

Worldlings look on, and jeeringly exclaim, "Behold how these Christians hate one another! If this is religion, we do not want it." And they look upon themselves and their irreligious characters with great satisfaction. Thus they



are confirmed in their impenitence, and Satan exults at his success.

The great deceiver has prepared his wiles for every soul that is not braced for trial and guarded by constant prayer and living faith. As ministers, as Christians, we must work to take the stumbling blocks out of the way. We must remove every obstacle. Let us confess and forsake every sin, that the way of the Lord may be prepared, that He may come into our assemblies and impart His rich grace. The world, the flesh, and the devil must be overcome.

We cannot prepare the way by gaining the friendship of the world, which is enmity with God; but by His help we can break its seductive influence upon ourselves and upon others. We cannot indi-

vidually or as a body secure ourselves from the constant temptations of a relentless and determined foe; but in the strength of Jesus we can resist them.

From every member of the church a steady light may shine forth before the world, so that they shall not be led to inquire, What do these people more than others? There can be and must be a withdrawal from conformity to the world, a shunning of all appearance of evil, so that no occasion shall be given for gainsayers. We cannot escape reproach; it will come; but we should be very careful that we are not reproached for our own sins or follies, but for Christ's sake.

There is nothing that Satan fears so much as that the people of God shall clear the way by removing every hindrance, so that the Lord can pour out His Spirit upon a languishing church and an impenitent congregation. If Satan had his way, there would never be another awakening, great or small, to the end of time. But we are not ignorant of his devices. It is possible to resist his power. When the way is prepared for the Spirit of God, the blessing will come. Satan can no more hinder a shower of blessing from descending upon God's people than he can close the windows of heaven that rain cannot come upon the earth. Wicked men and devils cannot hinder the work of God, or shut out His presence from the assemblies of His people, if they will, with subdued, contrite hearts, confess and put away their sins, and in faith claim His promises. Every temptation, every opposing influence, whether open or secret, may be successfully resisted, "not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zech. 4:6).

We Are in the Day of Atonement

We are in the great day of atonement, when our sins are, by confession and repentance, to go beforehand to judgment. God does not now accept a tame, spiritless testimony from His ministers. Such a testimony would not be present truth. The message for this time must be meat in due season to feed the church of God. But Satan has been seeking gradu-

ally to rob this message of its power, that the people may not be prepared to stand in the day of the Lord.

In 1844 our great High Priest entered the Most Holy Place of the heavenly sanctuary, to begin the work of the investigative judgment. The cases of the righteous dead have been passing in review before God. When that work shall be completed, judgment is to be pronounced upon the living. How precious, how important are these solemn moments! Each of us has a case pending in the court of heaven. We are individually to be judged according to the deeds done in the body. In the typical service, when the work of atonement was performed by the high priest in the Most Holy Place of the earthly sanctuary, the people were required to afflict their souls before God, and confess their sins, that they might be atoned for and blotted out. Will any less be required of us in this antitypical day of atonement, when Christ in the sanctuary above is pleading in behalf of His people, and the final, irrevocable decision is to be pronounced upon every case?

What is our condition in this fearful and solemn time? Alas, what pride is prevailing in the church, what hypocrisy, what deception, what love of dress, frivolity, and amusement, what desire for the supremacy! All these sins have clouded the mind, so that eternal things have not been discerned. Shall we not search the Scriptures, that we may know where we are in this world's history? Shall we not become intelligent in regard to the work that is being accomplished for us at this time, and the position that we as sinners should occupy while this work of atonement is going forward? If we have any regard for our souls' salvation, we must make a decided change. We must seek the Lord with true penitence; we must with deep contrition of soul confess our sins, that they may be blotted out.

We must no longer remain upon the enchanted ground. We are fast approaching the close of our probation. Let every soul inquire, How do I stand before God? We know not how soon our names may be taken into the lips of Christ, and our cases be finally decided. What, oh, what will these decisions be! Shall we be

counted with the righteous, or shall we be numbered with the wicked?

The Church to Arise and Repent

Let the church arise, and repent of her backslidings before God. Let the watchmen awake, and give the trumpet a certain sound. It is a definite warning that we have to proclaim. God commands His servants, "Cry aloud, spare not, lift up thy voice like a trumpet, and shew my people their transgression, and the house of Jacob their sins" (Isa. 58:1). The attention of the people must be gained; unless this can be done, all

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effort is useless; though an angel from heaven should come down and speak to them, his words would do no more good than if he were speaking into the cold ear of death.

The church must arouse to action. The Spirit of God can never come in until she prepares the way. There should be earnest searching of heart. There should be united, persevering prayer, and through faith a claiming of the promises of God. There should be, not a clothing of the body with sackcloth, as in ancient times, but a deep humiliation of soul. We have not the first reason for self-congratulation and self-exaltation. We should humble ourselves under the mighty hand of God. He will appear to comfort and bless the true seekers.

The work is before us; will we engage in it? We must work fast, we must go steadily forward. We must be preparing for the great day of the Lord. We have no time to lose, no time to be engaged in selfish purposes. The world is to be warned. What are we doing as individu-

als to bring the light before others? God has left to every man his work; every one has a part to act, and we cannot neglect this work except at the peril of our souls.

O my brethren, will you grieve the Holy Spirit, and cause [Him] to depart? Will you shut out the blessed Saviour, because you are unprepared for His presence? Will you leave souls to perish without the knowledge of the truth, because you love your ease too well to bear the burden that Jesus bore for you? Let us awake out of sleep. "Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil, as a roaring lion, walketh about, seeking whom he may devour" (1 Peter 5:8).

[A few years later, in another Review and Herald article Mrs. White returned to the subject of revival and reformation. We end with one paragraph from that piece.]

In many hearts there seems to be scarcely a breath of spiritual life. This makes me very sad. I fear that aggressive warfare against the world, the flesh, and the devil has not been maintained. Shall we cheer on, by a half-dead Christianity, the selfish, covetous spirit of the world, sharing its ungodliness and smiling on its falsehood? Nay! By the grace of God let us be steadfast to the principles of truth, holding firm to the end the beginning of our confidence. We are to be "not slothful in business; fervent in spirit; serving the Lord" (Rom. 12:11). One is our Master, even Christ. To Him we are to look. From Him we are to receive our wisdom. By His grace we are to preserve our integrity, standing before God in meekness and contrition, and representing Him to the world.²

¹ The article was published in the *Review and Herald*, Mar. 22, 1887. It is reprinted in *Selected Messages*, book 1, pp. 121-127.

² *Selected Messages*, book 1, p. 127 (see also *Review and Herald*, Feb. 25, 1902).



Ellen G. White was a cofounder of the Seventh-day Adventist Church, which recognizes her as possessing the prophetic gift.

CALLED TO TRIUMPH— IN CHRIST

His victory is our victory.

BY ROBERT S. FOLKENBERG

You could feel the excitement in the air for weeks. You could see the dust before you saw what was stirring it up. You could hear the rumble before you could see the chariots. All of Rome would be along the Appian Way, one of the great roads that gave meaning to the saying "All roads lead to Rome." It was the victory parade of a conquering Roman general. Large floats three to four stories high were carried along in the parade depicting battle victories, fortifications being taken by war machines, enemy temples being put to the fire, and conquered armies. Some of the floats, covered with gold and ivory, depicted the spoils of war.

"A victorious general was welcomed by government officials at the gates of the imperial city, where the triumphal march began. First came the senators, preceded by a body of magistrates. After the senators came trumpeters, heralding the approach of the victor. Then followed a long train of carts laden with the spoils of war. Articles of great value, rarity, or beauty were fully exposed to view. There were also white bulls and oxen destined for sacrifice. Here and there incense bearers waved their censers to and fro, perfuming the air. Lions, tigers, elephants, and other

strange animals from the captive lands often appeared in the procession. After these came the captive kings, princes, or generals, and a long train of inferior captives, bound and fettered. Next came the great conqueror himself, standing in a splendid chariot. A crown of laurel or gold was upon his head. In one hand he held a branch of laurel, the emblem of victory, and in the other his truncheon or staff of authority" (*The SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 6, p. 840).

Paul had the image of just such a triumphal procession in mind when he wrote: "But thanks be to God, who always leads us in triumphal procession in Christ and through us spreads everywhere the fragrance of the knowledge of him. For we are to God the aroma of Christ among those who are being saved and those who are perishing" (2 Cor. 2:14, 15).*

At another time and in a different way another King made His triumphant entry. King Jesus rode a donkey into Jerusalem in His triumphal victory march. As the conquering generals would march into Rome as heroes, so Jesus entered Jerusalem as a conquering king the week of His crucifixion, thus fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah: "Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold,

thy King cometh unto thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass" (Zech. 9:9, KJV).

What contrasting victory processions! The Roman victor would have in tow conquered princes in chains of slavery. Jesus was followed by a people whom He had delivered from the slavery of disease and sin. Leading the colt Jesus rode was Lazarus, recently delivered from death itself. Jesus was surrounded, not by beaten captives, but by freed slaves; not by humiliated enemies, but by victorious friends. All the people "vied with one another in paying Him homage" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 570). The multitude that welcomed Jesus into Jerusalem that Sunday of the Passion Week ecstatically extended to Jesus the welcome of conquering royalty.

All week we have been studying triumphant living in Christ. When we live a life of repentance and have confident assurance of our relationship with Jesus, we can live victorious lives. We are in a victory march with Christ, marching to Zion. One might ask, "How can we be triumphant today, given all the problems?" Another might say, "I feel like a failure!" Let us remember that the victory is the Lord's, not ours. When a team wins a victory and earns a trophy, the entire team wins. In the Christian life it is important that we are on the right team, God's team. God through Jesus Christ won the victory on the cross.

When Jesus Returns

The victory we experience today will be dramatically magnified when Jesus returns in triumph. We experience today but a taste of the triumphant victory on that day when "a new heaven and a new earth" will be created by our victorious God (Rev. 21:1, KJV). The sense of triumph we have today lives in anticipation of God wiping away "all tears from their eyes" (verse 4, KJV). Imagine the procession of the triumphant, fleeing forever the pain and suffering of sin.

Ellen White describes the first ascension of Jesus. We can learn from it, since the Second Coming will be similar: "As they ascended to the Holy City, the angels who escorted Jesus cried out,

'Lift up your heads, O ye gates; and be ye lift up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in.' The angels in the city cried out with rapture, 'Who is this King of glory?' The escorting angels answered in triumph, 'The Lord strong and mighty, the Lord mighty in battle! Lift up your heads, O ye gates; even lift them up, ye everlasting doors; and the King of glory shall come in!' Again the waiting angels asked, 'Who is this King of glory?' and the escorting angels answered in melodious strains, 'The Lord of hosts, he is the King of glory.' And the heavenly train passed into the city of God. Then all the heavenly host surrounded their majestic Commander, and with the deepest adoration bowed before Him and cast their glittering crowns at His feet. And then they touched their golden harps, and in sweet, melodious strains filled all heaven with rich music and songs to the Lamb who was slain, yet lives again in majesty and glory" (*Early Writings*, pp. 190, 191).

Many are so fearful, doubting their own security in Christ, that any talk of triumph seems premature. Unsure of their salvation, they experience no victory and expect no daily triumph until they stand on the sea of glass. Their concerns are more for the time of trouble than for the time of grace. Their focus is more on present pain than on the promised peace. They are so apprehensive about coming Sunday laws that they miss the promised Sabbath rest now.

But triumph in Christ is based not on our doings, but on Christ's. The entire Bible is about victory and triumph. It is about overcoming and winning. Jesus compares God's kingdom to a banquet (Luke 14:16-24), and also to an invitation to a wedding feast provided by a king (Matt. 22:2-14). The victories of the Bible are not our victories, but God's. That is the message of the following verses:

□ "For the Lord your God is the one who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies to give you victory" (Deut. 20:4).



□ "The Lord gave David victory wherever he went" (2 Sam. 8:6).

□ "I do not trust in my bow, my sword does not bring me victory; but you give us victory over our enemies,

The decisive battle

*has been won, and the
victory is ours.*

you put our adversaries to shame" (Ps. 44:6, 7).

□ "The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the Lord" (Prov. 21:31).

Let's look at the victories that God has won for us.

□ He won the victory for us over the devil in the wilderness. Three times Satan tempted Jesus, but He did not yield, and angels came and attended Him (Matt. 4:11).

□ He cast out Satan (John 12:31) and defeated the dragon (Rev. 12:7-10).

□ He won the victory over the powers of darkness. "And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing

over them by the cross" (Col. 2:15).

□ He won the victory over death by His resurrection. "Since the children have flesh and blood, he too shared in their humanity so that by his death he might destroy him who holds the power of death—that is, the devil—and free those who all their lives were held in slavery by their fear of death" (Heb. 2:14, 15).

Because of the triumph of Jesus at the cross, death cannot spoil our sense of victory. Jesus turned a symbol of defeat—the cross—into a symbol of victory. No longer an instrument of total defeat, the cross has become a symbol of eternal victory.

The triumph of Christ is not something He does for Himself. It is not the kind of prideful victory that we experience on earth. His mission of triumph and victory is for our sakes. His victory is our victory. It is a multifaceted victory.

He gives us victory over sin. "What shall we say, then? Shall we go on sinning so that grace may increase? By no means! We died to sin; how can we live in it any longer?" (Rom. 6:1, 2).

He gives us victory over the world. "For everyone born of God overcomes the world. This is the victory that has overcome the world, even our faith" (1 John 5:4).

He gives us victory over pain and trouble. "Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? Shall trouble or hardship or persecution or famine or nakedness or danger or sword? As it is written: 'For your sake we face death all day long; we are considered as sheep to be slaughtered.' No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us" (Rom. 8:35-37).

He gives us victory over death. "When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true: 'Death has been swallowed up in victory.' 'Where, O death, is your victory? Where, O death, is your sting?' The sting of death is sin, and the power of sin is the law. But thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:54-56).

Jesus "knew that the life of His trust-

ing disciples would be like His, a series of uninterrupted victories, not seen to be such here, but recognized as such in the great hereafter" (*The Desire of Ages*, p. 679). Christians may not appear to triumph. In the eyes of the world they may appear to be defeated. But the decisive battle has been won, and the victory is ours. As Jesus said, "I will build my church, and the gates of Hades will not overcome it" (Matt. 16:18). We are all a part of the body of Christ, and we triumph in Him.

But in spite of Christ's victory, there will be times when discouragement presses in from all sides, when defeat seems imminent. At such times we must remember that victory is in the hands of the Lord. Ellen White wrote: "When you think that the work is in danger, pray, 'Lord, stand at the wheel. Carry us through the perplexity. Bring us safely into port.' Have we not reason to believe that the Lord will bring us through triumphantly?" (*The Faith I Live By*, p. 282).

Going Home

A prominent citizen in town was dying. As he lay in his lovely home, the best doctors surrounding him, he whispered with a note of despair, "I'm leaving home. I'm leaving home." Across town there lay a solitary figure in surroundings bare. Her modest home contained only the most threadbare of life's essentials. But in her eye was a gleam of faith. Before she died she whispered triumphantly, "I'm going home. I'm going home."

My Bible assures us that "though [our] sins be as scarlet, they shall be as white as snow" (Isa. 1:18, KJV). Praise God, there is power in the blood! And not only are we forgiven, but victory is assured, for "he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). If this earth is our only home, we will find defeat at every hand. But our heavenly home brings a triumphant conclusion to all our sorrow, pain, and defeat.

Satan may try to discourage us by giving us the impression that ours is a lost cause and that victory will forever be out of our reach. Perhaps some of us are convinced that it is impossible to be

overcomers, that it is too hard to measure up. The picture the devil paints suggests that only a small minority, the best of the best, will have any chance of salvation.

But John the revelator doesn't give one that impression. He says: "After this I looked and there before me was a great multitude that no one could count, from every nation, tribe, people and language, standing before the throne and in front of the Lamb. They were wearing white robes and were holding palm branches in their hands. And they cried out in a loud voice: 'Salvation belongs to our God, who sits on the throne, and to the

*The dangers of good
times are greater
than the dangers
of persecution.*

Lamb" (Rev. 7:9, 10).

John doesn't call the saved a small minority. He doesn't suggest that Christ's victory was effective for only a few. Rather, John proclaims that there "was a great multitude that no one could count." Praise the Lord God who has opened the gates of heaven for all who choose to follow Jesus.

All who find their assurance of salvation in Christ will one day stand with that great multitude described in Revelation. "Then I heard what sounded like a great multitude, like the roar of rushing waters and like loud peals of thunder, shouting: 'Hallelujah! For our Lord God Almighty reigns. Let us rejoice and be glad and give him glory! For the wedding of the Lamb has come, and his bride has made herself ready'" (Rev. 19:6, 7).

Look at the witnesses to the triumph of Christ, the great personal victories down through the ages. These are victories that would not be inscribed on their tombstones by the world, but victories that are inscribed where it counts, in the

Lamb's book of life. In the judgment of humanity these are not the triumphant people, but they are victorious by God's standards. God's triumphant are the apostolic martyrs Peter and Paul; the martyrs of Nero's persecution; the martyrs of Domitian; the martyrs of the Colosseum; the martyrs of the Reformation; and the missionaries whose blood blends with the soil of China, India, Japan, Africa, and the islands of the sea. Along with these stand all who have lived as lights for Christ in a world of darkness and sin. All are victorious. The secret of their victory is living in Christ.

There is another triumphant group. They are not martyrs of the past, but the triumphant of today. They are those who during an age of Laodicean laziness and smugness have followed the counsel of Revelation 3 and have bought "gold refined in the fire, . . . and white clothes to wear, . . . and salve to put on" their eyes (Rev. 3:18). Among this group are young people who have refused to fall for the sins of conformity in an evil society, older people who have held high the banner of truth in an age of compromise, and all people who understand that the dangers of good times are greater than the dangers of times of persecution.

"I ask them whence their victory came;

They, with united breath,
Ascribe their conquest to the Lamb,
Their triumph to his death" (Isaac Watts).

Now we have . . .

- ☐ Repentance in Christ,
- ☐ Assurance in Christ,
- ☐ Victory in Christ,
- ☐ Compassion in Christ,
- ☐ Witness in Christ,
- ☐ Expectancy in Christ,
- ☐ Revival in Christ, and we
- ☐ Triumph in Christ.

All these may be ours in Christ. May we all through faith live in Christ so that soon we may be with Him—forever and ever. Amen.

* Unless otherwise noted, Bible texts in this article are taken from the New International Version.

"Please, God, Who Are You?"

By Malcolm Allen, associate director of Church Ministries at the General Conference.



S a b b a t h

The I Am That I Am.

Scripture reference: Exodus 3:1-14.

Several years ago when I was in Ghana, West Africa, I attended a state reception put on by the king of the Ashanti. After the reception I was invited inside the palace, where I saw the king's throne. It was a carved stool covered with pure gold. The base and legs of the stool made the shape of the first letter of their alphabet and also the name of their god.

I asked what the name of their god meant, and someone told me that it meant "the I am." Now, I don't know whether they knew about the true God we worship, but our God gave Himself a strange name that sounds almost like that.

One day Moses was looking after his sheep in the land of Midian when God spoke to him from the burning bush. God said to tell the ruler of Egypt to let His people go back to their own country. Moses was a little nervous about doing this and asked, "What authority do I have? Who will I tell them sent me?"

God replied, "Tell them the name of the God who sent you."

"And what name shall I give?" said Moses.

"You just tell them that the 'I Am That I Am' sent you."

Now, that was a strange name.

But Moses knew what it meant. It was a name with authority.

When Moses told the Israelites who sent him, they understood who it was. When Moses talked to Pharaoh, the ruler of Egypt, he understood too, but he didn't want to admit it. Pharaoh knew that this was *the* God who is alive and has power to create everything.

Now, the Egyptians had many gods made of wood and stone. However, none of their gods was alive. None could speak. But this God, the I Am That I Am, was a living Creator-God. He had power and authority because He was real. Unlike the dead gods of the heathen, made of wood and stone, our God—the I Am—really exists and is alive!

But because the I Am was so great and powerful and wise, Satan began to tell lies about Him. Satan said that God was cruel and unforgiving, and Someone to be afraid of. This was not true. It made God sad because many people no longer believed in Him. So God decided to send His Son, Jesus, to earth to show us just what God is really like. I am so glad He did. Now we understand a lot more about God. Through Jesus, we saw that God is kind, gentle, and forgiving. He doesn't want to hurt us. And He's not someone to be afraid of. He may give Himself a strange sounding name, but He loves young people, and older people too, like you and me.

S u n d a y

"Please, God, Who Are You?"

Scripture references: Matt. 11:1-13; Luke 15:11-31; Matt. 19:14, 15.

Before God sent Jesus to this earth, people used to wonder what God was like. They heard thunder rolling in the sky or saw fierce storms smashing the trees and wondered if God was angry. They would cry out to God not to hurt them.

Other times, when the sun rose and the world looked beautiful, they thought the great God above must be pleasant. They questioned, Did He ever know when they were in trouble? Did He ever think about them at all? They were not sure.

Some people made images to pray to—ugly wooden idols and big golden images—that they called gods. They wanted these images to protect them from the real God.

Other people, of course, believed in God, but even they did not know what He was really like. They were a little afraid of Him too.

Then Jesus came to earth and told them delightful things about God and the place where He lived.

He told them that it was a wonderful, kind, and beautiful world, where every-

one is happy and nobody does anything bad. He especially told them the stories they loved to hear most, that where Jesus came from—where God lives—we can one day live too.

Jesus said, “You must not be afraid of God. God is the kindest, dearest friend you have. Don’t think that He is cruel or unkind. He is a friend who is so interested in you, and cares for you even more than a father loves his children. In fact, when you pray, call Him ‘Our Father.’”

One day Jesus was talking to some people who had been very bad. They were sorry for what they had done, but were afraid that God would not forgive them. To help them understand, Jesus told them a story about a boy who had run away from home. He had nearly broken his father’s heart. He lived a wicked life in a big city far away from



his home. When he had spent all his money and was hungry, he wanted to go back to his old happy home, but he was afraid to go back. He thought his father would be angry. At last he decided to go back home, and on his way he got the surprise of his life! He had expected to see an angry father, but there at the corner of the road he saw his dear old father trying to run to meet him. He had a great big smile on his face and was shouting with excitement, “My son is home! My son is home!”

And Jesus said, “This is what God is like. When you do something wrong, it hurts God terribly. But when you are sorry for what you have done, everyone is happy, even the angels of God.”

Jesus loved to tell people about God and His home. “Because I am so inter-

ested in you,” He said, “I have come down here to tell you the good news about our kingdom, to tell you how much your Father loves you and has made it possible for you to be there yourselves someday.”

I am so glad He told us. I want to be there with Him—don’t you?

M o n d a y

“I Am . . . the Light”

Scripture reference: John 8:12.

One evening just as it was getting dark, Jesus and His disciples were leaving the Temple in Jerusalem. It was the week of a special festival called the Feast of Tabernacles. At the gate of the Temple on either side were two giant light stands. They burned all day and all night as part of the festival, and could be seen from all over the city. Jesus stepped between these two giant light stands and said, “I am the light of the world!”

What did He mean by that?

He explained that whoever follows Him will never walk in darkness, but will have the light. When Jesus comes into our lives and we believe His Word, it is like a light that shines into every corner of our lives. That’s why He said, “I am the light of the world.” There can’t be any sin when He is in our lives, because He is the light and darkness can’t exist with light.

When I was a boy, I was afraid of the dark. We didn’t have electricity. We had to use oil lamps and candles. We had to carry our lamps from one room to another. There were so many dark corners and big dark shadows. I didn’t like the darkness at all. I remember the day that the electricity was connected to our house. It was so exciting. I couldn’t wait for the sun to set, so that I could turn the

lights on. The house was full of light. There were no more dark corners and no more big scary shadows. I wasn’t afraid anymore, because now there was light.

If you feel scared or worried, let Jesus be your light. He has even promised to light our candle. He will give us the answers we need and show us what is right and what is wrong. If we use His light, we will never be afraid or get lost in the darkness that sin makes in this world.

The Bible calls Satan the “prince of darkness.” He tries to shut out the good news about God. He brings all the sin and suffering and death into this world, and then he tries to blame God for it. He wants to keep people in darkness so they won’t learn the truth about God.

Several years ago I was in Wales and visited a coal mine. I went down deep underground to see what it was like. The only light we had was from our flashlights on our helmets.

When we got almost a mile underground, our guide stopped and said, “This is where I started working as a boy. We didn’t have flashlights then; we used candles.” He asked us to turn off our flashlights. It was pitch dark! While we were standing there in the darkness, the old man said that when he was a boy, sometimes he was left to work on his own, and when the candle went out, he would be left in the dark. If he could not find the matches, he would have to walk or crawl all the way to the top in the dark. Sometimes it was hard to find the way in the dark. As we stood there in the dark, someone farther down in the shaft turned on a flashlight, and suddenly there was light and I could see. The darkness was gone.

I thought of the boy in the mine with the candle that went out and no matches to relight it. Sometimes I am just like that boy. I live in this world that is full of the darkness of sin. I can’t see and I can’t find my way. But I can ask Jesus, and He will light my candle. When Jesus comes, there are no dark shadows. There is no darkness at all because He is light. He gives me light so that I can find my way. John wrote, “God is light, and in him is no darkness at all” (1 John 1:5). I want Jesus to be my light—always. Don’t you? He has told us He will be our light.

T u e s d a y

"I Am . . . the Bread of Life"

Scripture reference: John 6.

Close your eyes for a moment. I want you to imagine you are walking past a bread shop and you can smell fresh bread. Are you starting to lick your lips and imagine you are eating it? Nothing compares to the smell of fresh bread.

In nearly every country of the world people bake bread and eat it. Jesus must have known this, for He talked a lot about bread, using it to teach us more about God.

One day a big crowd came to see Jesus. The people had walked a long way to find Him. Jesus walked around the crowd, listening to what worried them, making the sick children well, and telling them wonderful things about His Father in heaven. And the disciples went among them too, helping everyone they could.

At last it was late in the afternoon. Jesus was thinking about those tired, hungry people. He wanted them to have something to eat.

"What do you think we can do, Philip?" Jesus asked.

"We can't do anything, Master. We haven't got enough money to buy bread for all these people, and there are no shops way out here!"

Then the other disciples came and said, "Lord, just send them home."

"No," said Jesus, "we can't do that. We must feed them ourselves."

"But Lord, how can we? That's impossible! The only one we have seen with food is that little boy over there. He has five little barley loaves and two small fish!"

"Bring him to Me," said Jesus.

And so the boy came to Jesus and gave Him the five little pieces of bread that he hadn't eaten. The people sat down on the grass. Everybody was watching Jesus, wondering what He was going to do.

Then Jesus took the little boy's basket, opened up the cloth, and took out the five small loaves of bread and the two small cooked fish. Then, saying a little prayer, He broke off some of the round, flat bread with His fingers and gave it to the disciples. As the people watched, He kept breaking off pieces of bread and fish—the loaves getting no smaller, the fish getting no less. The disciples felt as if they were dreaming.

The hungry people, including many children, ate and were filled. Even so, 12 baskets were left over. As Jesus tried to dismiss the crowd, they didn't want to go. Excited, they cheered and shouted, and some of the people wanted to make Him king right then.

The next day they came looking for Jesus, but He wasn't there. After a while they found Him a long way away on the other side of the lake.

"I know why you have come to see Me again today," said Jesus. "You enjoyed the free meal yesterday. And now you want some more. I can, indeed, give you more bread such as you had yesterday. But if I did, you would only get hungry again. I can give you better bread than this. And if you take the bread I offer, you will never get hungry again, and you will live forever" (see John 6).

"Let us have this special bread," they begged.

Then Jesus said "I am the bread of life."

Some didn't understand and said, "What does He mean?"

But other people understood. Jesus wants us to be hungry to hear what He has to say. His Word gives us all the answers we need in our lives. The bread from the pot or oven will stop our hunger for a little while, but God's bread—His life, His Word—will give us life now and always, if we believe Him. This is what Jesus meant when He said, "I am the bread of life."

He is waiting for you to take His bread. He wants to see you smile and hear you say, "Thank You."

W e d n e s d a y

"I Am . . . the Water of Life"

Scripture reference: John 7:1-46.

Have you ever been very thirsty—your mouth, your tongue, your throat all dry? And all you could think about was having a cool drink of water?

I was thirsty like that one day. I was backpacking with a group of young people way up in the mountains. It was summertime, and it was so hot! We had been walking all day, and were tired and very thirsty. There was no water left in our water bottles. The more we thought about water, the thirstier we felt.

Then someone remembered that about two miles ahead there should be a small spring of pure, clear water trickling out of the rock high up in the mountain. We began to think about how good it would be to just have a drink of this cool water. It seemed to take so long to get there.

Finally we found the place, but what a disappointment for us. It was summertime, and the spring had almost stopped running. Yes, there was a small pool of water, but the wild animals had discovered it before we did, and the water was dirty and the place smelled terrible.

The Best Source

Jesus was always looking for ways to tell people about God. It was the last day, the best day, of the Jewish festival in Jerusalem. The most important part of the celebration was the special ceremony of the drawing of the water.

A huge crowd of people waving palm branches and singing praises to God would make their way to the pool of Siloam to bring back water for a special service in the Temple. At the front of the parade would be the priests in their

beautiful clothes, the lead priest carrying a large golden pitcher. At the pool of Siloam they would fill the golden pitcher with cool, clear, pure water, then carry it carefully back to the Temple, singing and shouting and praising God all the way.

Then back at the Temple everybody watched as the priest took the golden pitcherful of clear, pure water and poured it over the altar. This was to remind them of how God gave cool, clear water to the people in the desert. But the ceremony was also a reminder that God gives a special blessing to people who are thirsty for Him in their hearts. For in that outwardly happy crowd were many who were unhappy and sad, and were thirsty for God.

When the special service was finished they blew the silver trumpets and the people sang, "Oh, give thanks to God, for His mercy lasts forever!" Then the music stopped. There was a pause, and everything was quiet. Suddenly one clear voice called out. It was Jesus. Everybody turned around and looked. Listening, they heard Jesus say: "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. I am the water of life."

Now the people could understand the meaning of the festival. They really wanted to know God. Their hearts were very thirsty. Jesus said, "I am the water. Come and drink from Me. Learn about Me and listen to what I have to say. You will not be disappointed."

Are you thirsty for Jesus today?

T h u r s d a y

**"I Am . . .
the Good
Shepherd"**

*Scripture references: Matt. 18:12-14;
Luke 15:3-7; John 10:11-18.*

Jesus had such an interesting way of reaching people. He did not preach long

sermons. He did not use big words. He just started to talk to people. Sometimes they asked questions, but most of the time He told stories. In these stories He told the people what He wanted them to know and understand.

Once He told them of a great king with his servants around him in the hall of his castle and little piles of money on the long table. He told many other stories—like that about the mean old man who kept building more buildings to hold all the things he owned, or of the Pharisee going to church to pray, or of the rich man in his big house who wouldn't help a poor homeless person begging for food outside his gate.

There was one thing that Jesus specially loved to teach. This was about God being like a parent to all of us. God longs to save even the bad and disobedient boys and girls. Jesus told stories about things that people saw every day.

One day when Jesus was walking with His disciples on the road to Jerusalem He told a story about sheep. In many parts of the world farmers look after their sheep—not hundreds or thousands of sheep; just a few. In the early morning, the farmers call all the sheep by name, and they follow. They go out to find nice fresh grass. The farmers watch the sheep all day. They make sure that the sheep are safe from danger and have enough food and water. If it is hot, they look for shade for the sheep to lie down in. Then at night they call the sheep again and take them home. They count them to make sure they are all there and then lock the gate so nothing can hurt them while it is dark and they aren't with them.

Jesus told about a farmer who had 100 sheep. One day when he took them out to eat the nice fresh grass one naughty sheep ran away and got lost. The shepherd—that is what we call someone who looks after the sheep—was very upset. He thought, *What will happen if my lost sheep falls down the mountain onto the rocks or gets attacked by wild animals?*

So he walked through the fields and then up into the mountains. He looked and looked for the lost sheep. At last he found it. It was too tired to walk. He picked it up and put it on his shoulders

and carried it home. When he got home, he called all his friends. "I am so happy!" he said. "Come to my house and we will have a party because I have found the sheep that ran away."

Then Jesus said, "I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd would even die to save his sheep!"

"That is just how God feels," said Jesus, "when boys or girls wander away from God."

We are not sheep, but God loves us just as the good shepherd loves his sheep. If we wander away, He is so happy when we come back!

Jesus knows the name of every boy and girl. He loves every one of you. Jesus knows all about us and cares about us. He died for us so that we could be safe again in His house. Jesus is someone we can trust.

F r i d a y

**"I Am . . .
the Way"**

Scripture reference: John 14:1-14.

Have you ever imagined what it must have been like to travel with Jesus when He lived on earth? Perhaps we should do so now. Let us close our eyes and pull down the screens in the back of our minds and start making a picture of what it could easily have been like back then.

Jesus is walking along a dusty road with His disciples. They are on their way from Jerusalem to Capernaum. It is early in the morning.

As Jesus and the disciples walk along, they do not see many signposts on the road giving directions. Then they come to a crossroads. Which road should they take to get to Capernaum? Peter asks a man waiting beside the

road, but he doesn't know the way. Andrew asks a lady sitting by the road selling oranges, but she doesn't know the way either. Then Jesus says to Thomas, one of the disciples, "Ask that man coming toward us with the donkey. I think he might know the way."

So Thomas goes to the young man and asks, "Do you know the way to Capernaum?"

"Yes," answers the man. "I have just come from Capernaum. I can tell you the way." And he gives them the right directions.

Some months later Jesus was just finishing the Passover meal with His disciples. He began talking to them. "Don't be upset or worried. You are trusting God. Now trust Me. There are many homes where my Father lives, and I am going there to prepare them so they will be ready for you when you come. When everything is ready, I will come back to get you so you can always be with Me where I am. If this were not true, I would tell you plainly. You disciples know where I am going and you know how to get there."

"No, we don't," said Thomas. "We haven't got any idea where You are going, so how can we possibly know the way?"

Jesus answered, "Thomas, do you remember the time we walked to Capernaum? How did we find the way? You asked a young man with donkeys who had already been to Capernaum, and he knew the way." Then Jesus turned to the rest of the disciples. "If you want to get to heaven, you must ask someone who has been there. You can ask Me. I come from heaven and I am going back to heaven. I am the way. If you want to get to heaven, you must let Me give you the right directions. You must listen to Me. I am the only one who really knows the way."

This is true. We cannot get to see God and live with Him unless we know and love Jesus first.

I am so glad I heard this story. I want to live with God forever. When Jesus knows the way and has promised to take us, we will surely be safe if we follow Him. We cannot ask anyone else for directions. Jesus is the only one. Are you listening to Him and following His way?

S a b b a t h

"I Am . . . the Life"

Scripture reference: John 3:1-21.

Once there was a very important man who wanted to see Jesus, but he didn't want anyone to see him talking to Jesus. He waited until the sun had gone down and it was dark. Then he went and met Jesus in a garden. He had lots of questions to ask Jesus about God and where He lives and how he could get there. This man's name was Nicodemus. You will find the story in John 3.

Jesus had a wonderful talk with Nicodemus. Jesus said, "Those who believe in Me will not die like the wicked people, but I will give them life forever. For God loved the world so much that He gave His only Son, Jesus. Anyone who believes in Him will not die but will be given life forever. God did not send His Son into the world to punish people when they were wicked. Instead, His Son came to save the world and give them life."

A young boy began thinking about life one day and asked a kindly old man, "Can you tell me what is important in life?"

The old man thought for a while and then took him out to his car, which was parked on the street. The old man took the boy by the arm and led him to the front of the car and kicked the front wheel.

"What's that?" he asked the boy.

"It's a wheel," the boy replied.

"And what's on the wheel?" the old man asked.

"It's a tire."

"That's right," he replied.

He took him to the other front wheel and then to the back wheels and asked the same questions. The young boy was puzzled and began to

wonder what the old man was doing.

"Now," said the old man, "what would happen if I let the air out of a tire?"

The boy looked at the old man in amazement. He felt sure the old man had gone crazy. "You would have a flat tire."

"That's right," said the old man. "This car, which runs on four tires full of air, is just like your life. If there is no air in the tires, you just can't move the car. You can have a strong body, you can have a good brain, you can make lots of money, you can have many toys, but this is not what is important. It's important to have God in your life. Imagine that the air in the tires represents God. Unless you have God in your life, you just can't go anywhere."

The young boy thought for a while and then said, "You are right. I have a good body, I have a good brain, I have Nintendo and other fun games, but I am still not happy. I guess I have just got a flat tire."

That boy understood what Jesus meant when He said, "I am the life." It meant, I am your happiness.

We need God in our lives. Our God may have a strange-sounding name, but we don't need to be afraid of Him. He loves us. He sent His Son, Jesus, to show us what He was like. He told us about His world and where He came from. He told us how interested God is in each of us and how we are so special to Him. He explained how He is the light, so we never have to be afraid of the darkness of sin in this world. He told us He is like our bread and water, so we never will be spiritually hungry or thirsty if we trust in Him. He showed us that He is like a good shepherd who watches out for us all the time. Then He explained that when we follow Him we will not get lost, because He is the way. If we have light and food and shelter and protection and if we walk with Him every day, we will have a wonderful life, both in our world and in His world, where He will take us soon.

Aren't you excited? Why don't you thank Him right now for being such a great God and tell Him how much you love Him? It will make Him so happy, and it will make you happy, too.