

The Journal



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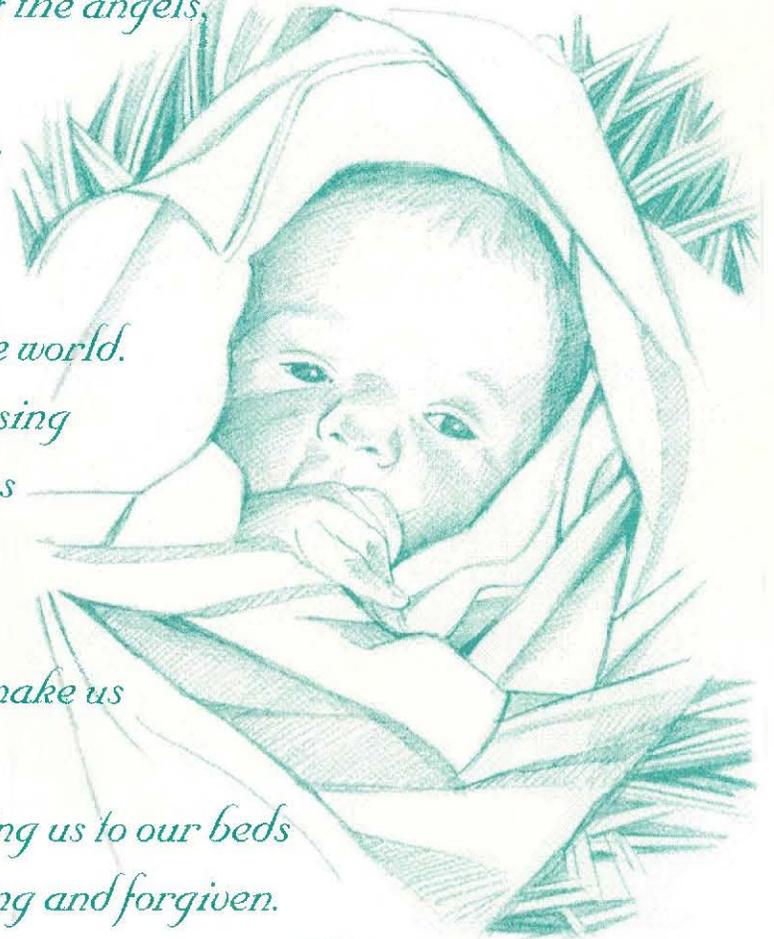
Number 4

*O God, our loving Father,
Help us rightly to remember the birth of Jesus
that we may share in the song of the angels,
the gladness of the shepherds,
and the worship of the wise men.*

*Close the door on hate and
open the door of love all over the world.
Deliver us from evil by the blessing
that Christ brings, and teach us
to be merry with clear hearts.*

*May the Christmas morning make us
happy to be thy children
and the Christmas evening bring us to our beds
with grateful thoughts, forgiving and forgiven.
For Jesus sake,*

Amen.



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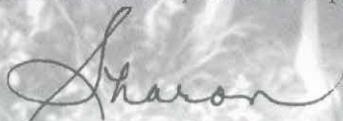
Editor's Musings

The fourth quarter Journal is always a special issue focused on the first advent. Again, this 2002 issue includes stories and inspirational thought that I hope will be faith-building.

As we prepare to enter into this new year, many of us will be making resolutions based on how we are going to do things differently or better. Traditionally, January is a good time to start afresh. So, we make a list, check it twice, and by about March it goes from the refrigerator door to the trash as we face stark reality. The same old things are always on the list—lose that 20 pounds that seem to keep finding us, clean out all the extra junk in the house, spend more time with the family, pursue some continuing education courses, and about a dozen other very appropriate goals.

This year my list is rather simply stated but broadly based and probably the most difficult yet to accomplish. Some words of wisdom I recently came across and am earnestly trying to apply—“There is always a choice about the way you do your work, even if there is not a choice about the work itself.” Most spouses of pastors are employed outside the home. Some by choice. Some by necessity. In this new year, whether it is our responsibility to our family, our employer, or our congregation, it is my prayer that we will find in each day some enjoyment and fun in whatever work or expectations are thrust upon us. We can be serious about our work without being serious about ourselves. Maybe it will be contagious!

God bless us every one and Happy New Year.



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Buying a Miracle

Author Unknown



Tess was a precious eight year old when she heard her mom and dad talking about her little brother, Andrew. All she knew was that he was very sick and they were completely out of money. They were moving to an apartment complex next month because daddy didn't have the money for the doctor's bills and their house. Only very costly surgery could save him now and it was looking like there was no hope.

She heard daddy say to her tearful mother with whispered desperation, "Only a miracle can save him now."

Tess went to her bedroom and pulled a glass jelly jar from its hiding place in the closet. She poured all the change out on the floor and counted it carefully. Three times, even. The total had to be exactly perfect. Carefully placing the coins back in the jar and twisting on the cap, she slipped out the back door and made her way six blocks to Rexall's Drug Store with the big red Indian Chief sign above the door.

She waited patiently for the pharmacist to give her some attention but he was too busy at this moment. Tess twisted her feet to make a scuffing noise.

Still nothing.

She cleared her throat with the most disgusting sound she could muster.

Via the internet

No good.

Finally she took a quarter from her jar and banged it on the glass counter.

That did it!

"And what do you want?" the pharmacist asked. "I'm talking to my brother from Chicago whom I haven't seen in ages," he said without waiting for a reply to his question.

"Well, I want to talk with you about my brother," Tess answered back in the same annoyed tone. "He's really, really sick and I want to buy a miracle."

"I beg your pardon?" said the pharmacist.

"His name is Andrew and he has something bad growing inside his head and my daddy says only a miracle can save him now. So how much does a miracle cost?"

"We don't sell miracles here, little girl. I'm sorry but I can't help you," the pharmacist said, softening a little.

"Listen, I have the money to pay for it. If it isn't enough, I will get the rest. Just tell me how much it costs."

The pharmacist's brother was a well-dressed man. He stooped down and asked the little girl, "What kind of a miracle does your brother need?"

"I don't know," Tess replied with her eyes welling up. "I just know he's really sick and mommy says he needs an operation. But my daddy can't

pay for it, so I want to use my money."

"How much do you have?" asked the man from Chicago.

"One dollar and eleven cents," Tess answered barely audibly, "and it's all the money I have, but I can get some more if I need to."

"Well, what a coincidence," smiled the man. "A dollar and eleven cents—the exact price of a miracle for little brothers." He took her money in one hand and with the other hand he grasped her mitten and said, "Take me to where you live. I want to see your brother and meet your parents. Let's see if I have the kind of miracle you need."

That well dress man was Dr. Carlton Armstrong, a surgeon, specializing in neurosurgery.

The operation was completed without charge and it wasn't long until Andrew was home again and doing well. Mom and Dad were happily talking about the chain of events that had led them to this place.

"That surgery," her Mom whispered, "was a real miracle. I wonder how much it would have cost?"

Tess smiled. She knew exactly how much a miracle cost—one dollar and eleven cents . . . plus the faith of a little child. A miracle is not the suspension of natural law, but the operation of a higher law. 

Christmas . . . and Everything Didn't Get Done



Renee Hawkley

One blustery twenty-fourth night of December;
Time's candle had snuffed leaving nary an ember.
I lay in my bed knowing all was not right;
Christmas would come at the first break of light.

The cards were not sent and the pies were not ready,
A burden much worse made my heartbeat unsteady.
No gifts had been bought for each daughter and son,
Christmas . . . and everything didn't get done.

My pillow was crumpled and stained with fresh tears;
And I felt alone with my fate and my fears.
I wondered how God would approach such a trial
And wake in the morning still wearing a smile.

Then, amidst my emotion, a single thought stirred,
It fluttered and gently alit like a bird;
God in his infinite, wonderful way
Had left out so much on that first Christmas Day.

He left out the gingerbread and fruitcake making,
In fact, he left out all the holiday baking.
He left out the candy canes, chestnuts, and eggnog,
He left out the turkey, the toffee, and Yule log.

He left out the good cheer of "Frosty" and snow,
He left out the wreaths and the warm fire's glow.
He left out the ornaments, parties, and pageants;
He left out the toys that each young child imagines.

Instead of the pomp and the trimmings and trappings,
Instead of the presents in colorful wrappings,
God offered his gift from an animal's stall,
Wrapped in crude bands and a young mother's shawl.

Just one little baby, so gentle and mild,
A common occurrence, the birth of a child;
Yet this special baby salvation has won,
For God so loved the world that He gave His own Son.

I knew in that moment that all would be well,
Christmas would come with its usual spell;
I could survive without even one elf,
I could give presents right out of myself.

And so, Christmas morning, the family awoke,
We laughed and we played even though we were broke;
With plenty to eat, we were warm and content,
Our happiness seemed, for the most, heaven sent.

And so I suggest if you're ever in doubt
And need to know what Christmas fuss is about,
Reach deep inside you and pull out your best,
Give something better than toys or a vest.

Give something meaningful, something unique,
It may be as small as the words that you speak;
You'll find, if you do, that when Christmas is past,
You have given a gift like God's Son that will last. 

Renee is the librarian at a middle school in Boise. Her daughter, Janette is their last child at home, and "it's very different being a family of three around the dinner table." Renee was selected to represent Idaho as the Idaho Mother of the Year in 2000. More recently she has been serving on the national board of AMI as Education/Literacy Chairman.

Christmas at a Frontier Pastor's House



Author Unknown

I remember a day one winter that stands out like a boulder in my life. The weather was unusually cold, our salary had not been regularly paid, and it did not meet our needs when it was.

My husband was away much of the time, traveling from one district to another. Our boys were well, but my little Ruth was ailing, and alas none of us were decently clothed. I patched and re-patched, with spirits sinking to the lowest ebb. The water gave out in the well and the wind blew through the cracks in the floor.

The people in the parish were kind, and generous too; but the settlement was new, and each family was struggling for itself. Little by little, at the time I needed it most my faith began to waiver. Early in life I was taught to take God at His word, and I thought my lesson was well learned. I had leaned upon the promises in dark times, until I knew as David did, "who was my fortress and my deliverer." Now a daily prayer for forgiveness was all that I could offer. My husband's coat was hardly thick enough for October, and he was often obliged to ride miles to attend some meeting or funeral. Many times our breakfast was Indian

cake (corn bread) and a cup of tea without sugar.

Christmas was coming: the children always expected their presents. I remember the ice was thick and smooth and the boys were craving a pair of skates. Ruth, in some unaccountable way, had taken a fancy that the dolls I had made were no longer suitable; she wanted a nice large one, and insisted on praying for it.

I knew it seemed impossible, but oh I wanted to give each child its present. It seemed as if God had deserted us, but I did not tell my husband all this. He worked so earnestly and heartily. I supposed him to be as hopeful as ever. I kept the sitting room cheerful with an open fire, and I tried to serve our scanty meals as invitingly as I could. The morning before Christmas James was called to see a sick man.

I put in a piece of bread for his lunch—it was the best I could do. I wrapped my plaid shawl around his neck and then tried to whisper a promise as I often had, but the words died away upon my lips. I let him go without it.

That was a dark, hopeless day. I coaxed the children to bed early for

I could not bear their talk. When Ruth went to bed, I listened to her prayer. She asked for the last time most explicitly for her doll and for skates for her brothers. Her bright face looked so lively when she whispered to me, "You know I think they'll be here early in the morning, mamma." I sat down alone, and gave way to the bitterest tears.

Before long James returned, chilled and exhausted. He drew off his boots. The thin stockings slipped off with them, and his feet were red with cold. "I wouldn't treat a dog that way let alone a faithful servant," I said. Then as I glanced up and saw the hard lines in his face, and the look of despair, it flashed across to me - James had let go too. I brought him a cup of tea, feeling sick and dizzy at the very thought. He took my hand and we sat for an hour without a word. I wanted to die and to meet God, and tell Him his promises were not true; my soul was so full of rebellious despair.

There came a sound of bells, a quick stop, and a loud knock at the door. James sprang up to open it. There stood Deacon White. "A box came by express just before dark, I brought it around as soon as I could

get away. Reckon it might be for Christmas. At any rate I said they shall have it tonight. Here is a turkey my wife asked me to fetch along, and these other things I believe belong to you."

There was a basket of potatoes, and a bag of flour. Talking all the time he hurried in the box and then with a hearty good night he rode away. Still without speaking, James found a chisel and opened the box. He drew out first a red blanket, and then we saw that beneath it the box was full of clothing. It seemed at that moment as if Christ fastened upon me a look of reproach. James sat down and covered his face with his hands, "I can't touch them," he exclaimed. "I haven't been true, just when God was trying me to see if I could hold out. Do you think I could not see how you were suffering? I had no word of comfort to offer. I know now how to preach the awfulness of turning away from God."

"James", I said clinging to him, "don't take it to heart like this. I am to blame. I ought to have helped you. We will ask him together to forgive us."

"Wait a moment dear I can't talk now," he said. Then he went into another room. I knelt down, and my heart broke. In an instant all the darkness, all the stubbornness rolled away. Jesus came again and stood before me, with the loving word, "daughter!", sweet promises of tenderness and joy of soul. I was so lost in praise and gratitude that I forgot anything else. I don't know how long it was before James came back, but he too had found peace. "Now my dear wife," he said, "let us thank God together," and he then poured out words of praise, Bible words: for nothing else could express our thanksgiving.

It was 11 o'clock, the fire was low and there was the great box, and

nothing touched but the warm blanket we needed. We piled on some fresh logs, lighted two candles, and began to examine our treasure. We drew out an overcoat. I made James put it on; just the right size, and I danced around him. Then there was a cloak. He insisted on seeing me in it. My spirits always affected him, and we both laughed like foolish children.

There was a warm suit of clothes also and three pairs of woolen hose. There was a dress for me, yards of flannel, a pair of arctic overshoes for each of us. In mine was a slip of paper. I have it now and mean to hand it down to my children. It was Jacob's blessing to Asher, "Thy shoes shall be iron and brass and as the days so shall thy strength be." In the gloves, evidently for James, the same dear hand had written, "I the Lord thy God, will hold thy right hand, saying unto thee, Fear not I will help thee."

It was a wonderful box, and packed with thoughtful care. There was a suit of clothes for each of the boys, and a little red gown for Ruth. There were mittens, scarves and hoods. Down in the center of the box was another box. We opened it and there was a great wax doll. I burst into tears again.

James wept for joy. It was too much. We then both exclaimed again. Close behind it came two pair of skates. There were books for us to read, some of them I had wished to see, stories for the children to read, aprons and underclothing, knots of ribbon, a gay little tidy, a lovely photograph, needles, buttons, thread and actually a muff, and an envelope containing a ten-dollar gold piece. At last we cried over everything we took up.

It was past midnight, and we were faint and exhausted even with happiness. I made a cup of tea and cut a fresh loaf of bread and James

boiled some eggs. We drew up the table before the fire, how we enjoyed our supper! And then we sat talking over our life and how sure a help God always proved.

You should have seen the children the next morning! The boys raised a shout at the sight of their skates. Ruth caught up her doll and hugged it tightly without a word. Then she went to her room and knelt by her bed. When she came back, she whispered to me, "I knew they would be there, Mamma, but I wanted to thank God just the same." We went to the window and there were the boys out of the house already and skating on the ice with all their might.

My husband and I tried to return thanks to the church in the east that sent us the box and have tried to give thanks to God everyday since. Hard times have come again and again, but we have trusted Him, dreading nothing so much as a doubt of His protecting care. Over and over again we have proved that "they that seek the Lord shall not want anything."

Just as the Lord supplied the Savior so many years ago He supplies today. We have been fooled into thinking that we have to have more and more to be happy. When we have so much that we have trouble being happy with our bounty. Maybe this story will help all of us to be a little more content with the things we often take for granted. 

*He who has not
Christmas in the
heart will never
find it under a tree.*

Drama at Gate 67

Ray Jenkins



The surge of holiday traffic would have taxed the congested Atlanta airport under the best of circumstances. But, as Christmas neared some ten years ago, nature had added an ice storm that stranded thousands of travelers.

Outside, the great jet engines were silent. With depressing regularity loudspeakers would blare out, in robot tones, that the airline regretted Flight 421 had been delayed again. Even the coffee urns were running out under the heavy demand.

As the midnight hour tolled, weary pilgrims clustered around ticket counters, conferring anxiously with agents whose cheeriness had long since evaporated; they, too, longed to be home. Others gathered at the newsstands to thumb silently through paperback books. A few managed to doze, contorted into human pretzels, in uncomfortable seats.

If there was a common bond among this diverse throng, it was loneliness. But airport decorum required that each traveler maintain his invisible barrier against all the others. Better to be lonely than to be involved, which inevitably meant listening to complaints, and heaven knows everyone had enough complaints of his own already.

Just beneath the surface, in fact, lurked a competitive hostility. After all, there were more passengers than

seats; when an occasional plane managed to break out, more travelers stayed behind than made it aboard. "Standby," "Reservation Confirmed," "First Class Passenger" were words that settled priorities and bespoke money, power, influence, foresight—or lack thereof.

Gate 67 was a microcosm of the whole cavernous airport. Scarcely more than a glassed-in cubicle, it was jammed with travelers hoping to fly to New Orleans, Dallas and points west. More than once, the harried agent posted a departure time, only to announce later yet another delay. The crowd swelled until there was standing room only. Dignity were cast aside; well-dressed people sat on the floor.

Except for the fortunate few traveling in pairs, there was little conversation. A salesman stared absently into space, as if resigned. A young mother cradled an infant to her breast, gently rocking in a vain effort to soothe the soft whimpering.

And there was a man in a finely tailored suit who somehow seemed impervious to the collective suffering. There was a certain indifference about his manner. He was absorbed in some arcane paperwork. Figuring the year-end corporate profits, perhaps. A nerve-frayed traveler sitting nearby, observing this busy man, might have

*This article appeared in the New York Times
December 25, 1979.*

indulged in a cynical fantasy: "His clothes are different, but he can't disguise his nature. It's Ebenezer Scrooge."

Suddenly, the sullen silence was broken by a commotion. A young man in uniform, no more than 19 years old, was in animated conversation with the desk agent. The boy held a low-priority ticket. But he must, he pleaded, get to New Orleans, so that he could take the bus on to the obscure Louisiana village he called home.

The agent wearily told him the prospects were poor for the next 24 hours, maybe longer.

The boy grew frantic. He was soon to be sent to Vietnam. If he did not make this flight, he might never again spend Christmas at home.

Even the businessman looked up from his cryptic computations to show a guarded interest. The agent clearly was moved, even a bit embarrassed. But he could offer only sympathy, not hope. The boy hovered about the departure desk, casting wild and anxious looks around the crowded room, as if seeking but one friendly face.

Finally the agent hoarsely announced that the flight was ready for boarding. The Pilgrims heaved themselves up, gathered their belongings, and shuffled down the small corridor to the waiting craft. Twenty, 30, 100—until there was no more seats. The agent turned to the frantic young man and shrugged. For one uneasy moment, it appeared that the boy might actually try to force his way aboard.

Inexplicably, the businessman had lingered behind. Now he stepped forward. "I have a confirmed ticket," he quietly told the agent. "I'd like to give my seat to this young man."

The agent stared incredulously; then he motioned to the soldier. Unable to speak, the tears streaming down his face, the boy in olive drab

shook hands with the man in gray flannel, who simply murmured, "Good luck. Have a fine Christmas. Good luck."

As the plane door closed and the engines began their rising whine, the businessman turned away, clutching his briefcase, and trudged toward the all-night coffee bar.

No more than a few among the thousands stranded there at the Atlanta airport witnessed the drama at Gate 67. But for these, the

sullenness, the frustration, the hostility, all dissolved.

The lights of the departing plane blinked, starlike, as the craft moved off into the darkness. The infant slept silently now on the breast of the young mother. Perhaps another flight would be leaving before many more hours; but those who saw were less impatient. The glow lingered, gently and pervasively, in that small glass-and-plastic stable at Gate 67.



Reflections on Christmas

Val Smetheram



I have to say . . . it seems to me
As a child . . . Christmas then appeared to be
A peaceful happy holiday feel
Wartime, yes . . . but I recall . . . great goodwill
Neighbor to neighbor . . . one to another
With love and respect and care for each other
Sharing what little they had for sure
In those days I enjoyed Christmas a whole lot more
Than all today's tinsel and the hard ruthless selling
I'm tired of it all . . . without all the fuss . . .
A good old-fashioned down-to-earth country Christmas?
Minus the hassle . . . stress . . . bally-hoo
I really would like that, I think . . . wouldn't you? 

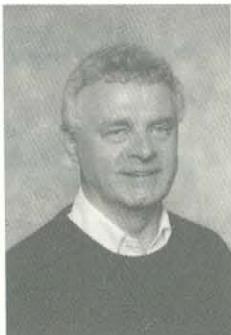
Val Smetheram, British born, is a naturalized Australian living in Queensland, Australia. Passionate about the environment, justice, and all growing things, she is an amateur writer and poet with over a hundred pieces published. She has been a minister's wife for over 18 years. Her ambitions are to become superfit, learn to swim and write a book, not necessarily in that order. Her motto: Life begins at 60!

The Marvel of Christmas

J. Grant Swank, Jr



Grant Swank is pastor of the New Hope Church in Windham, ME. He is married to Priscilla and they have three children—Crystal, Jay, and Heidi. Pastor Swank is the author of several books and 1,000 magazine articles.



Christmas is heaven's marvel. It is beyond us and yet with us. The birth of God! It took place in Bethlehem. The theologians refer to this marvel as the "incarnation."

This is truly the marvelous paradox in our midst. God had no beginning, yet Bethlehem is his start. God is the author of life, yet he comes to life in a castoff barn. God, the creator of all, is created in Mary's womb. The Eternal One becomes earth-bound. The Invisible becomes visible.

The Immortal becomes mortal. The Immeasurable becomes measurable. The Timeless and Spatially Limitless One becomes logged into this globe's time and space.

Why, it is the marvel of all history and eternity! It is the miraculous intersecting of history and eternity in the revelation of the Person.

What this birth does not signify is that the incarnate One is sinful. He is not sinner, but holy One born of a virgin. However, continuing the complexity of the simple, he does come to earth to become sin for us. The Lamb of God is destined to become scapegoat for humanity!

His name? Jesus Christ. The "Jesus" is his human name and nature—Jehovah—Redeemer, Deliverer. The "Christ" is the same

as "Messiah," referring to his divine name and nature—anointed one, king. So it is, the marvel, Jesus Christ is both human and divine—the Godman—"Emmanuel" or "God with us."

Mary was a teen Jewess who lived in Nazareth. She became a part of the marvel in her own simplicity. We know not her mother's name nor her father's name. We know not whether she had brothers and sisters. But we do know that Mary was spiritually excellent, even as a youth before God. She was holy, strong, wise, and loyal to her faith.

Joseph was a teen fellow who resided as a carpenter in Nazareth. We know his father's name was Jacob. Joseph too was spiritually keen, sanctified before God, caring, and kind. However, after Jesus' twelfth birthday, we read nothing more about Joseph.

Jesus was born of a virgin conception. We often hear of his coming into this world by way of a "virgin birth." But it was actually more precisely a virgin conception which led to a virgin birth. In other words, the father of Jesus was none other than the Holy Spirit. That accounts for Jesus' divinity, his holiness from conception.

Joseph then was Jesus' foster father. Mary provided Jesus with his

humanity. Through her womb the divine came into the human race. There has been no other conception like this conception. It is the crux of the marvel. So it is that the Christian accepts this by faith. If this cannot be "faithed," then nothing can.

For instance, to accept the resurrection of Jesus Christ but discount His virgin conception is nonsense. Indeed to accept the resurrection account but put aside the virgin truth is selfishness at its most insulting obvious.

You see, there are those who want to believe in the risen Christ because that gives them hope that there is a heaven beyond death. They bask in this assurance. Easter is the highlight for their faith, their preaching, and teaching. However, some of these same persons look askance at the virgin conception as simply unbelievable, a fable, myth, a legend manufactured by some gospel writers who were a bit crazed.

In other words, it is fashionable in some theological quarters to leap by faith into the empty tomb but it is likewise fashionable to downplay Mary impregnated by the third person of the holy trinity. It would be more believable simply to conclude that Joseph is the logical father of Jesus, they say. After all, why not?

Consequently, there is at times by some the explaining away of the virgin conception through their demythologizing, that is, their scissoring out the first chapters of the Gospel of Matthew and Luke in order to make the record more scientifically palatable.

No. Speaking of logic, to see

through the above is unreasonable at its most evident brash selfish thrust. Why should one accept the miracle of a dead man coming back alive when one cannot accept a marvelous, miraculous start to such a Creature's existence? If he can defy death and the grave, he can entrance this

scriptural *modus operandi*, that is, its own approach to history and faith.

The New Testament maintains a consistent logic of human-divine presence from start to finish—miracle at the beginning and miracle at the closing. In other words, the incarnation is the source of that which is beyond human calculations, such being the only reasonable means by which to accept the intrusion of the miracle working God into the affairs of human-kind.

There is therefore no break, no contest, no competition between the start and conclusion of Jesus Christ's biography as presented in the four Gospels. What is given is a given. It is considered historical empirical evidence accepted by faith.

How marvelous! The God of life (Easter) then can spark His own life (Christmas) as he wills, even by coming into the human family by way of the Holy Spirit's moving upon the womb of a teen Jewess.

Mary's womb, miracle presence birthing the Son of God and the Son of Man. The womb is filled with the presence of God!

Joseph of Arimathea's tomb, miracle presence emptying the grave of the resurrected body of the Son of God and the Son of Man. The tomb is filled with the absence of God! He is in the Garden, just where Jesus was always to be found—with His own—caring, uplifting, enlightening, revealing.

It is, in short, marvel—from start to finish! Praise be to the Father. And to the Son. And to the Holy Ghost. Amen.



The New Testament maintains a consistent logic of human-divine presence from start to finish—miracle at the beginning and miracle at the closing.

human existence in a miraculous turn of nature and law.

The New Testament record itself knows nothing of separating the virgin conception from the resurrection possibilities. Both are presented as sheer fact. They are offered as that which occurred—no debate, no argument, no quibbling. Then to be consistent with the scriptural writings, one should at least remain in line with the



Christmas Memories



Jacquie Biloff

Jacquie Biloff is a Commercial Pilot and Certified Flight Instructor and serves as Director of Operations at Mustang Air, Inc., in Palmer, Alaska. She met her husband Neil at Walla Walla College and they have three adult children. Neil is pastor of the Palmer SDA Church.



Too often life is so cluttered with activity that we recall little of it. In a curious way we miss large sketches of our own lives if we do not take time to reflect, reintroduce sights, smells, and sounds, glean the gems, and discard the pain. Shorthand versions of past Christmases dance fleetingly through my memory, evoking a range of emotions. I remember having difficulty mustering surprise and suppressing guilt when opening a gift for the second time on Christmas Day. The joy and fascination of the original find could not be shared and was therefore shattered. I had ruined my own Christmas and learned a great lesson.

Christmas is a time to bunch up and chatter, get and give a warm caress and not fault loitering. One Christmas stands out from the rest in my mind's eye. Another learning experience, one more gem decorating the tree of my life.

It has been months since I had been back to my childhood home, an eight hour drive from the stresses of our business, the raising of three children, and the chores of the farm. The business was open six days a week, the sheep and cattle had to be

fed twice a day, and the kids were restless for warm spring days. Going "home" was relaxing. My brother's and sister's families lived close to the folks. The cousins entertained themselves for hours and I relaxed and ate the blackberry pie mom always cooked just for me.

My mind had painted lots of "warm fuzzies" as we drove up the narrow switchbacks to the home of the "cliff dwellers" (a name given the home place by my flatland in-laws). There were soon hugs all around as we moved from the kitchen door, which the family always used, to the living room. The warm paneling Dad had installed, the hardwood floors Dad had laid covered by the plush area rug, the beautiful granite fireplace Dad had built from stones we had collected on family camping trips to the mountains—all just as I had remembered. Familiar sights were disturbed by mom's laughter. "What is *that*?"

"That is the Christmas tree. I found it and put it up myself," she said proudly.

"*Mom!*" I blurted.

She continued to laugh at the shock registered on all of our faces. The "Christmas tree" was the bones of some sad deciduous that had long

since met its demise. It was sparsely decorated with Christmas balls and popcorn. A sorry sight for sore eyes. Mom was reveling in triumph. Dad, however, was not to be outdone. From beneath the tree came a gift wrapped with such flair that a kindergartener would have been hard pressed to duplicate.

Multiple patches of various Christmas wrap were wrapped and cornered. Various colored bows and ribbon over-adorned each color selection. He thrust it toward me, "Now tell me what type of person would wrap a gift like that?" "I don't know, Dad," I said bewildered. He laughed. "A program on the radio was saying that you could tell a person's personality type by the way they wrap gifts. I'd like them to decipher this one."

I was home and it was fun. It was always fun at home. Always the unexpected. Always the laughing. Always the blackberry pie. Always extra presents under the tree "from Jesus" for each of us (something extra Mom had wanted to give).

Perhaps it was the same year that my brother's annual Christmas treasure hunt, prepared for the cousin's entertainment, had ended in the barn with the last clue hidden in a calf's ear. Which of the cousins would be brave enough to distract the mother cow while another retrieved the last clue to where the treasures were hidden?

Mom died in 1988, but the gifts from Jesus are still found under the Christmas trees of three families who now make Christmas memories for another generation.

And the lesson learned from that Christmas long ago? It's not the tree, it's not the exquisitely wrapped gifts, it's the memories. Christmas memories. Make them. Share them. Bunch up and chatter. You'll be creating ornaments to hang on the tree of your life. 

I Heard the Bells

Henry Wadsworth Longfellow was filled with sorrow at the tragic death of his wife in a fire in 1861. The Civil War broke out that same year, and it seemed this was an additional punishment. Two years later, Longfellow was again saddened to hear that his own son had been seriously wounded as a lieutenant in the Army of the Potomac.

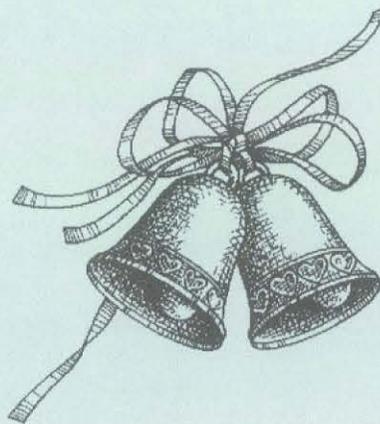
Sitting down to his desk, one Christmas Day, he heard the church bells ringing, and ringing. It was in this setting he wrote:

I heard the bells on Christmas Day
Their old familiar carols play
And wild and sweet the words repeat
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

And in despair I bowed my head
There is no peace on earth I said
For hate is strong and mocks the song
Of peace on earth, good will to men.

Then pealed the bells more loud and deep,
God is not dead, nor doth he sleep.
The wrong shall fail, the right prevail
With peace on earth, good will to men.

At this Christmas time whether you are in sorrow or in joy you can know that God is not dead, nor doth he sleep. He knows your every need and longs to comfort you and be that special friend you need. Seek Him this year instead of the outward manifestations of the season. He will give life real meaning and your heart real peace, the peace that passes all understanding. 



When God Messes With Your Plans

Marvin McKenzie



Marvin is a pastor in Astoria, Oregon.

When God Messes With Your Plans!

Matthew 1:18-25

Fella's, can you remember those days of your engagement? You had fallen in love with the dream of your life. And what was even better, *She Had Fallen In Love With You Too!* There came that time when you made up your mind to ask her to marry you. *And She Agreed!*

This evening, I want to speak about the marriage of Joseph and Mary:

When God Messes With Your Plans!

Engagements were handled differently in those days than they are now. Marriages were pre-arranged by the parents, often when the kids were only infants. But, there had to come a point, when the couple became aware of the engagement, and began to make their plans!

I imagine young Joseph. The wedding date is approaching, and he is making preparations. I can see Mary. The date every young lady lives for is just about here. She is so excited as she and her parents make the wedding plans. She and Joseph have such dreams for their lives together. But then, ***God Messed With Their Plans!***

It was not ever in their goals for Mary to become pregnant before

their wedding night. And certainly, the idea of becoming pregnant miraculously and giving birth to the Lord Jesus Christ was not the foremost of their thinking. Mary's reaction to the news was one of perplexity. She asks in Luke 1:34, "How shall this be, seeing I know not a man?"

Joseph's reaction was a little different. He has a decision to make. Should he believe that Mary has been faithful to him and that she had miraculously become pregnant with the Son of God? Or should he decide to break off the engagement? Of course, you know the rest of the story. They did get married, did give birth to the Messiah, and the rest is history!

Let me make three observations based upon this Biblical scene:

Observation One

God didn't ask Joseph and Mary. He told them! I do not note any passage where the angel announcing God's plan, asks Mary or Joseph if this is acceptable with them! God simply told them His plan and will for their lives!

"How many of you are doing what you planned on doing when say, you were in 7th grade?" (Most of us aren't doing what we thought we would be doing when we graduated from High School!) I have found

that the majority of the plans I had as a young person are radically different than what has really come to pass.

Some of the plans have changed because I have changed my decisions and desires.

But other plans were changed because of circumstances beyond my control: God! And God has never asked me when He has chosen to put those circumstances into my life!

Listen, God has a plan for your life. He made that plan before He created the world. And He has no intention of asking your permission to proceed with His plan! Now, you can choose not to obey His will, but you cannot change His will for your life!

Observation Two

God's plan for Mary and Joseph was not an easy one. Sometimes we think that if we are in the will of God, everything will be a bed of roses and life will be without trial or difficulty. That was not the case for Joseph and Mary. Consider the following:

1. Why didn't God work it out so the tax was collected either before Joseph and Mary were married, or after the Baby was born? He could have done that couldn't He? I mean, having a woman who was so pregnant that she just barely got to Bethlehem before she had the baby travel by foot, camel, or donkey, *would not have been easy!* Surely God could have worked things out better than that!

2. The baby was born in a manger because there was no room in the Inn. Again, I can see the young couple's frustration as, after traveling that far, Mary is exhausted and ready to deliver, *and they cannot find any place comfortable even to*

take her! Now, God is a sovereign God. He is able to do anything He wills. He obviously has willed that there is no room in the Inn! He isn't making it easy for them, even though they are obeying the will of God for their lives.

3. Why were they forced to flee Bethlehem to Egypt because of the threat of King Herod. Again, we can see the hand of God at work because He warned them of the danger so they could flee. Why didn't he just make the King's heart soften so they

God has a plan for your life. He made that plan before He created the world. And He has no intention of asking your permission to proceed with His plan!

wouldn't have to flee at all? Especially since all the babies 2 years old and younger were killed by Herod's men after Mary and Joseph were gone. The Baby was about 2 year's old when they went to Egypt. And that would not have been an easy trip to make!

4. Then, after all of this, somewhere between when Joseph took his family back to Nazareth and when Jesus became 30 years old, Joseph died. Jesus had to become the head of the home, taking care of his mother and his half brothers and sisters. We make a terrible error in our concept of Christianity when we

believe that God makes life easy when we are in His will and that the easy way is God's way. Take for instance Jesus' message about the two roads:

The broad and easy way that almost everyone takes is the way that leads to destruction.

The straight, narrow, and more difficult way is the way that leads to eternal life.

When we choose the way that looks the easiest, we aren't necessarily choosing the way that is the will of God! Christ chose a path that led to the cross. Paul chose a path that led to imprisonment and execution. But both chose paths that were in the plan of God for them! God does not promise us an easy trip. He promises to be with us as we take it!

Need a verse? Isa 43:2 "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee; and through the rivers, they shall not over-flow thee: when thou walkest through the fire, thou shalt not be burned; neither shall the flame kindle upon thee."

Observation Three

Though things were difficult, God did bless. I see it in two thoughts:

1. They wondered at the child as he grew. Look at these verses in Luke 2:52 "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favour with God and man."

Luke 2:49-51: "And he said unto them, How is it that ye sought me? wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business? And they understood not the saying which he spake unto them. And he went down with them, and came to Nazareth, and was subject unto them: but his mother kept all these sayings in her heart."

Luke 2:40: "And the child grew, and waxed strong in spirit, filled

with wisdom: and the grace of God was upon him.”

Luke 2:33: “And Joseph and his mother marvelled at those things which were spoken of him.”

It must have been a joy beyond belief to raise Christ as he grew up! Just that blessing would have been worth it!

2. Ultimately, Jesus grew up to be a blessing to the whole world! Any parent is blessed when their child grows up to be a person of influence and importance in the world. More parents are blessed if their kid grows up to do something good for mankind. I realize Joseph was gone by this time, but can you imagine the blessing Mary must have experienced when her firstborn son, Jesus Christ, rose victorious over death and the grave? Can you imagine what she must have felt like as she watched Him ascend visibly, bodily, and gradually into heaven! Can you imagine the excitement in her soul when she realized in a tangible way, *that her son had opened the door to heaven for all who would accept him and receive him as Saviour?*

God’s plan for our lives isn’t always an easy one. But it is a plan that will lead to our being a blessing to many. Even if His plan is an early death. He is going to use that in some way ultimately to bring more people to a saving knowledge of the truth. Fanny Crosby’s doctor gave her the wrong medicine when she was a baby, resulting in her blindness. Rather than growing bitter, Fanny Crosby used her condition to make her more spiritually sensitive; She wrote some of the most beautiful hymns we sing.

God used the death of H.G. Spafford’s children to inspire him to write one of our favorite hymns. Spafford’s wife and kids were on a ship to England, and he was going to join them there in a short time.

However, the ship with his family on board sank. His wife was saved, but his kids all died. Back home, Spafford awaited news as to the fate of his family, and when it finally came, it was a telegram from his wife simply saying, “Saved, Alone.” Spafford, while mourning their deaths wrote these words,

“When peace like a river attendeth my way.

When sorrow like sea billows roll.

Whatever my lot thou has taught me to say,

It is well, it is well with my soul!”

God didn’t ask Spafford if it was okay to make that part of his plan for him. And I am sure Spafford didn’t plan it for himself. But as difficult as God’s plan was, it has resulted in something that has blessed countless numbers of suffering souls since it was written!

And, while you and I may not think our lot is nearly that tragic, nor our influence nearly that broad, the truth of it is *if we will agree to follow God’s plan, no matter how difficult, eternity will record a far reaching impact for good because of it!* ☺

Spirit of Christmas

Val Smetheram



Christmas can be a time for reflection
When lonely people reach for a connection
To the spirit of Christmas . . . a sense of the divine
When a life can be changed . . . Yes, even mine!
If we can ignore all the things we don’t need
All that commercialism and terrible greed . . .
The horrors we hear on the news every day
Clear your mind of that stuff . . . just throw it away!
Let’s all ask ourselves this season . . . each one
What can I do to improve the life of someone?
Let’s all hold on to ancient truth we can savor
And plumb the depths of the meaning of this . . .
Love your Neighbor. ☺

Val Smetheram, British born, is a naturalized Australian living in Queensland, Australia. Passionate about the environment, justice, and all growing things, she is an amateur writer and poet with over a hundred pieces published. She has been a minister’s wife for over 18 years.

The Parable of the Shopper

Author Unknown



My feet were tired, my hands cold, my arms exhausted from the weight of the packages, and it was beginning to snow. The bus was late. I kept rearranging my packages, trying to hold them in a different way in order to give my poor arms a rest.

I still remember that day as if it were yesterday, and yet fifteen years have gone by. Nevertheless, when Christmas rolls around, I remember that day on the bus.

Like I said, I was tired. I had been Christmas shopping all day long. When the bus finally arrived, it was packed with holiday shoppers in the same exhausted mood as I was. I sank into the only vacant place, near the back, by a very handsome gentleman. He politely helped me to situate my packages and even held some of them himself.

"My goodness," he said, "did you leave any merchandise still in the stores for the rest of us?"

"I don't think so," I moaned. "Worst of all, I still haven't made all of my purchases."

The woman in the seat behind us joined in my grief and added, "No, the worst thing is that the day after Christmas we will be carrying this same armload back to the stores to exchange it."

Her comment brought a general chuckle from all those within earshot, including my seatmate. As the

laughter subsided, he began in a quiet, melodious voice, deepened with experience, to teach me a lesson that I have never forgotten.

"Hear now the parable of the shopper," he said, speaking gently and indicating my packages. "A woman went forth to shop, and as she shopped, she carefully planned. Each child's desires were considered. The hard-earned money was divided, and the many purchases were made with the pure joy and delight that is known only to the giver. Then the gifts were wrapped and placed lovingly under the tree.

In eager anticipation she scanned each face as the gifts were opened.

'What a lovely sweater,' said the elder daughter, 'but I think I would prefer blue. I suppose I can exchange it?'

'Thank you for the cassette player, Mother, it's just what I've always wanted,' said her son. And then aside, secretly to his sister, he continued, 'I told her I wanted the one with the automatic reverse and an extra speaker. I never get what I want!'

The youngest child spoke out with the spoiled honesty of her age, 'I hate rag dolls! I wanted a china doll. I won't play with it!' And the doll, still in the box, was kicked under the couch.

One gift still lay under the tree. The woman pointed it out to her husband, 'Your gift is still there.'

Via Internet

'I'll open it when I have time,' he stated. 'I want to get this bike put together first.'

"How sad it is," continued his soft, beautiful voice. "When gifts are not received in the same spirit they are given. To reject a thoughtful gift is to reject the loving sentiment of the giver himself. And yet, are we not all sometimes guilty of rejecting?"

He was talking not only to me, but also to all of those on the bus. They had all gathered around. The bus was parked.

He took a present from my stack.

"This one," he said, holding it up and pretending to open the card, "could be to you."

He pointed to a rough-looking, teenage boy in a worn denim jacket and pretended to read the gift card.

"To you I give My life, lived perfectly, as an example so that you might see the pattern and live worthy to return and live with Me again. Merry Christmas from the Messiah."

"The gift of example is a precious yet often rejected gift." He set the present down and took another one from my pile.

"This one," he said, holding up a pure, white present, "is for you." He held out the gift to a worn-looking woman, who in earlier years must have been a real beauty and was still attractive in her slim black skirt, black tights, and heels. She read the card out loud and allowed her tears to slip without shame down her painted face.

"My gift to you is repentance. This Christmas I wish you to know for certain that though your sins be as scarlet, they shall be white as snow, and I the Lord will remember them no more. Have a happy New Year. Signed, your Advocate with the Father."

"Ah, repentance, something every

Christian needs," said my seatmate.

"But that isn't all. No, here is a big, red package." He looked around the group and brought a ragged, unkempt, little child forward. "This big, red package would be for you if He were here. The card would say, 'On this Christmas and always, My gift to you is love. My love is pure! It is not dependent on what you do or what you look like. I love you as you have been, as you are now, and as you will be in the future. From your brother, Jesus.'"

"How we receive these gifts . . . is the telling point. Are we exchangers?" he asked. "Is there really anything else we would rather have?"

Then he gently wiped the ninny, dirty, upturned nose with his white handkerchief and drew the child into a tight hug.

"And this silver package to you, madam," he said with a bow and handed the gift over to an aging grandmother two rows behind.

"Yes, it would be for you, because you would appreciate it most of the time. His precious gift to you would be the gift of salvation. The surety that you will rise from the grave and live again with a perfect, resurrected body. The card would read, 'I give this precious gift freely to you and all men, by laying down My life for you. Signed, your Saviour.'"

"One final gift," said my seatmate. "The greatest of all the gifts of God. Eternal life! A chance to receive the same quality of life that Christ

Himself lives. But though this gift is to all men, it must be assembled. He has given us the instructions. They are here in the scriptures." He tore off the paper to reveal a worn, well-used book. "He even has a toll-free number if you need help; anytime, day or night, just pray."

He held our minds and our hearts. We were a hungry audience. Though our shopping had left us drained, now we were being filled by his words.

"How we receive these gifts, these precious gifts from the Babe of Bethlehem, is the telling point. Are we exchangers?" he asked. "Is there really anything else we would rather have?" He searched our eyes and our souls. "Is there a feature missing? It is what we do with a gift long after we have opened it that shows our true appreciation. Have we used it, worn it, displayed it, or cherished it?"

I glanced at the loving hands still holding tightly the Holy Book. He followed my glance and holding up the book asked, "How does Christ feel when we don't even take time to open it? Or when we don't use His gift of repentance, the one He purchased with such a great price? How sad it is when gifts are not received in the same spirit they are given!"

He stood up. He was leaving, making his way slowly down the aisle. He paused just as he reached the front and said, "One last gift. Peace! Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

With those words, he was gone. That was fifteen years ago, only a wink in time. But not even an eternity could erase the sermon, or the man.



The Miracle in Bethlehem



It was the night before Christmas
and all through the town
everybody was busy, it was time to “bed down.”
The stockings were pulled on all feet to keep warm,
a chill in the air caused a bit of alarm.

As the little ones slept, others searched, some in vain
for a warm place to sleep and keep out of the rain.
Mama in her kerchief, Papa in his cap
had just gone to bed when they heard someone rap.

And out on the lawn was a sight to be seen!
A man and his wife not looking too lean!
The donkey she sat on looked tired and spent
and they looked like they wouldn't have money for rent.

It looked like the woman would soon have a child,
and the weather was really not what you'd call mild!
Papa felt a pang in his heart for these two,
but his inn full of beds was filled up—what to do!

Mama to the rescue! suggesting the barn.
Twas better than nothing, and certainly warm.
So off they all went to see what they could do
Fresh hay in the manger—the baby was due!

With gratitude, man and wife thanked the old pair,
who went back to the inn, thankful they could share.
But later that night something woke them from sleep!
A bright light lit the room, from their bed they did leap!

They looked out the window, and there not too far,
was the biggest, the best, the brightest new star!
And over the hilltops some shepherds ran down
and seemed to be searching through Bethlehem town.

Via Helpmate, Upper Columbia Conference, Washington

Papa and Mama ran into the street
to ask a good shepherd to rest his sore feet
And tell them what happened that caused such a stir!
So the shepherd reported all that did occur.

He told of the angels who lit up the sky
with God's glory—and told of a baby nearby
Wrapped in swaddling clothes, laid in a manger with hay
in somebody's barn—and it's over this way!

It might be *our* barn they told the shepherd
but what is so special about what you heard?
The shepherd reported to them what was said—
The Savior! The Lord's in that small manger-bed!

The three on the run entered into the barn,
and there on the hay the new baby kept warm.
The Savior it was! Of that they were sure!
And “Jesus” they called Him—so perfect, so pure!

And in the short distance they heard angels sing
“Glory to God, peace on earth, He's your King!”
What a wondrous event did take place that great night
when Jesus our Lord came to do what was right.

To set an example, to show us the way
to our Father in heaven who loves us always,
To pay for our sins which, ourselves, we can't do,
by dying and shedding His blood for me and you.

The shepherds returned to the sheep on the hill
with a song in the air of praise and goodwill.
Others came, rich and poor, in the days that went by,
The star showed them the way, shining bright in the sky.

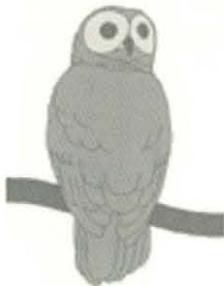
And today we remember the babe in the hay—
Merry Christmas To All—Follow Him! He's the Way! 🐏

The Night Owls

J. Vernon Jacobs

It was not until Clarence, the new boy, came to town that folks began to notice a change in the neighborhood, and the things that were going on proved to be entirely different from anything they had known in the past. No longer were windows broken, and door bells rung, and flower beds ruined, and playthings missing. Instead, a number of good things seemed to be happening that gave the neighborhood a better name.

It all came about in this way. When Clarence Howell moved to the brown house on Polk Street, the "Night Owls" invited him to their



club which they had built on a vacant lot, and gave him the privilege of joining their club. As part of the initiation, Clarence was to go down and turn on a fire alarm at a box four blocks down the street, while the gang enjoyed the excitement from a clump of bushes. Clarence reached the box, turned the key, and then raced up an alley, but the boys missed the fun, for a cop had been watching them, and chased them out of the bushes, very nearly catching one of the boys.

The next morning there were great headlines in the paper. The fire truck, dashing madly to answer what proved to be a false alarm, hit a boy riding on a bicycle and seriously injured him. He was in the hospital, and it was unknown, as yet, whether he would recover.

The "Night Owls" were scared, and a special meeting of the gang was called as soon as school was out. They had wanted to have a good time, but this was different. It would be murder if the boy died.

"Boys," said Bud Brinkley, the president of the club, "we've been carrying our sport too far. If that cop recognized any of us, it may be we'll land in jail."

"Too bad about the kid. I never dreamed anything like that would happen," spoke up Bill Morey. "Wish we could do something."

"Why can't we take him some puzzles in a few days when he gets better? We can say we read about it in the paper, and thought he would enjoy something to pass the time," said Red Callahan.

"Listen, fellows," remarked Clarence. "I belonged to a club where I came from that had a good time, and didn't risk getting run into jail. Let me tell you about it."

And so it came to pass that when there was a door bell rung and the scampering of feet, there was something left on the porch when the door was opened. Perhaps it was a toy for some little sick boy; perhaps it was a can of beans and a loaf of bread for some poor woman; perhaps it was a bundle of magazines for a shut-in. And the neighborhood talked, but they were none the wiser. They only knew that good things were happening, and that it was the work of a mysterious group who enclosed a little slip which read, "From the Night Owls."

"Imitate not that which is evil, but that which is good" 3 John 11. 

Unemployed Employee: The Dilemma of an SDA Pastor's Wife

Maria Buwa

Maria Buwa is a pastor's wife. She has been doing full-time team ministry with her husband for 18 years. They have three children—Mbulelo, Nwabisi and Ayanda. Presently they are facing the challenge of opening a new district at Humansdorp near Port Elizabeth, South Africa. She is also a coordinator for Women's Ministries in Southern Hope Conference Eastern Region, and a literature evangelist as well. Maria enjoys reading, preaching and teaching.



God intended partnership from the very beginning. Hence, Jesus also when sending His disciples, paired them in partners to assist each other, encourage each other, support each other, and they become more effective in the work.

According to African culture in general getting married to a pastor is to become a pastor. Even when a married layman accepts a call into Ministry, it is taken for granted or as a foregone conclusion that the wife has also accepted the call and from that day she also is to be regarded (by the congregation) as a pastor.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church is using this strategy of man and woman, called together and serving together, to hasten Jesus' coming.

Ellen White recognized the value of team ministry both to pastoral couples marriages and to their ministry. This team working gives us a clear recognition that both spouses are called by God for the service and presupposes that they are both equally dedicated to ministry of proclaiming the good news of salvation and hastening the return of Jesus Christ.

The church seems to shun the responsibility of accepting the spouse as a distinct worker. As a result she goes on carrying along the unjust expectations to serve while not recognized and not prepared for the service (the church does not prepare her or pay her).

Two For The Price Of One

Hiring two for the price of one is tragedy to a pastor's wife. The church hires the pastor and the wife is thrown in. As a result, pastors are employed and their wives are "unemployed employees". This means that wife's labors are merged in their husbands' and this cripples their individuality.

Dr. M. Munroe once said that "everybody is designed to be distinctive, special, irreplaceable, and unique" (*Maximising Your Potential*, p. 1). It is impossible to be special, unique, or distinct when you are merged forcefully to somebody else. How painful it is to be buried alive. Imagine a person who is placed deep down into a grave without a coffin, heavy soil and stones thrown onto her, oxygen is cut off, the person is suffocating, feeling pains and instead of a rescue a voice is heard, "You are not employed".

This situation places at risk the healthy development of the self-esteem. She becomes confused as to whether she is "dead or alive". Her self-esteem becomes low which ultimately results in inability to form non-violent healthy relationships, especially towards the administrators and in the church at large. This manifests itself in various ways. She may be shy, quiet, careless, or even very strong. All these traits serve as defensive mechanisms.

According to E. G. White, "A woman should fill the position which God originally designed her, as her husband's equal . . . she should stand by his side, she faithfully at her post of duty and he at his" (AH, p. 231).

When God says that "husband and wife are to be one flesh" (Gen. 2:24) we assume that we have to decide whose flesh.

God created pastor's wives having a purpose in mind. In them (pastor's wives) there are potentials, hence E. White states it clearly that, ". . . a responsibility rests upon the minister's wife which she should not and cannot lightly throw off. God will require the talent lent her with usury. She should work earnestly, faithfully . . . to save souls" (1T, p. 452). The church ideally contradicts its own counsel by merging the two together. ". . . to restrict, abuse, misuse, or repress the potential of any living thing has a direct effect on the purpose and will of God" (*Maximising Your Potential*, p. 171). The releasing and maximization of the potential is dependent however, on an environment that is conducive to its development and release . . . this great potential is minimized, restrained and immobilised by an improper environment conditions.

The Capacity-Preparedness For Being a Pastor's Wife

The pastor's wife is expected to play an advisory role to her children, church members, and her husband, which must be accompanied by the knowledge of the work in depth. Minister's wives come straight from colleges, laymanship, university, high school, etc. They have never been in the ministry before. They receive no training (because they are not employed) nor told how and what to do. They are expected to know.

The church hires the pastor and the wife is thrown in. As a result, pastors are employed and their wives are "unemployed employees."

The expectations go without assistance in terms of seminars or inservice training to equip them. There are seminars organized by the church for pastors, and in most cases when the pastors' education is insufficient the administrators usually suggest and encourage (they do not force her) the wife to assist the pastor in terms of supporting him at college in order to qualify for the job. Sometimes the church subsidizes the pastor with a certain percentage and in most cases this poor wife has to work hard to assist him with the remaining percentage

and support the family until the pastor obtains his degree. In most cases this situation deprives the wife the opportunity for education. She may become less interested in reading and, as a result, her husband may not find her very intellectually stimulating anymore. Instead of growing together, they have grown apart. When the pastor comes back to work after completing his degree, the church is not interested in his wife. The pastor (husband) may be kind enough to and be prepared to send her now to college but unfortunately he does not choose his own congregations and districts. It is very possible that he will be relocated in a district where there is no college or university, etc. or even if there are any, they may not offer courses required by the wife.

The issue may be discussed among the family and they agree that the wife might attend the college or university where the required courses are offered. The institution may be 100 or more kilometres away, this goes without saying that this woman has to find accommodation at the institution or nearby. As soon as the church becomes aware of this matter, the pastor is humbly called into the office and politely asked that his wife come home. Failing which he will be released to go and stay with her.

After spending so many difficult years at the college studying theology he then will ask the wife to forfeit her education and stay with him because the office has promised to fire him. There is no alternative. The poor wife has to obey and remain uneducated, leading highly educated church members and living with an educated man.

One cannot over-emphasize the fact that this woman will be frustrated, develop an inferiority

complex that will manifest itself in various ways and this pastor and his wife will continue growing apart. Uneducated, untrained, unemployed as she is, she is blamed when the pastor fails.

In some cases there is a need for the pastor to be reprimanded by the administrators. They are both called into the office. Yes, the emphasis is on the pastor but in some cases on both and the very fact that she has been called is unpleasant. Imagine the pastor and his wife sitting at the matron's office or duty-room being reprimanded by the matron or the sister in charge of the ward, because the pastor's wife (who is a nurse) did not record the blood pressure of a certain patient in the ward, or the nursing process charts were not properly charted, etc. I wonder how would the pastor respond? How would he feel?

It does happen in the ministry that the pastor's wife finds herself sitting at the office having no answer to any of the questions. Tears run down her cheeks. This unpleasant situation taps directly on the animal side of a human being, which may result in her hating the administrators, the work and anyone who is involved in the problem.

After accumulating all these types of hatred she moves from the real world and lives in what Caroly Rathburn-Sutton calls, "the fantasyland". A life in fantasyland is not a real life but an imaginary one which manifests itself in various ways. She builds castles in the air, becomes devastated and has low morale.

In such a situation the role and influence becomes very minimal. Manipulative and controlling behavior reduces an individual's capacity to choose for himself/herself or to function adequately

without dictatorial directives. In every work there is a direct need of creativity, resourcefulness, enthusiasm, etc., which comes from within the person. It cannot be dictated. Hence Stephen Covey puts it this way, "You can buy a person's hand, but you can't buy his heart. His heart is where his enthusiasm, his loyalty is. You can buy his back, but you can't buy his brain. That's where his creativity is, his ingenuity, his resourcefulness." (*The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*, p. 58).

Some pastor's wives never seem to fit the role. They are not remembered for their influence and love.

Why?

Creativity, resourcefulness, enthusiasm, etc., all go with the understanding of what one is doing so as to be effective.

Some pastor's wives never seem to fit the role. They are not remembered for their influence and love. Why?

Stephen Covey often suggests the importance of maintaining what he calls, P/PC balance (Production and Production Capability must be balanced). He says, ". . . true effectiveness is a function of two things: What is produced (fulfilling of the expectations) and the capacity to produce (clarity regarding role expectations and equipping the pastor's wife). He goes on to say, "If you adopt the pattern of life that focuses on the production and neglect the capacity to produce or producing asset you will soon be without assets that produce the

production" (*Ibid.*). This means that the ministers' spouses probably won't leave ministry, but will continue to live in the "fantasyland". Stephen Covey continues and says, "On the other hand, if you only take care of the production capability with no aim toward the production, you soon won't have the wherewithal to feed yourself. Effectiveness lies in the balance of the two."

Remuneration of Pastor's Wives

Pastor's wives do a lot of work even if they are employed in other lines of work. They give many hours of volunteer service to God's cause each day no matter how tired they become. They are sometimes pressurized by heavy expectations as well.

Remunerating pastor's wives gives them courage, a sense of belonging, and a great motivation. Everybody feels secure when they know that they belong somewhere. They may become more committed to the work. It goes without saying that everybody wants to be recognized. If one is recognized, belongs, is committed and secure then they tap into the energies of the mind and heart. It has already been said that resourcefulness and ingenuity come from these two parts of a human body, and that is what brings success.

The Seventh-day Adventist Church demands a pastor's spouse for service, and yet there is no budget for her. Some of the ministers' wives faithfully support their husbands full-time but many receive little recognition and few incentive to continue their work. Remuneration does not only refer to money, there are various ways of remunerating a person. 

To Be Continued . . .

A girl of ten years went with a group of family and friends to see the Christmas light displays at various locations throughout the city. At one church, they stopped and got out to look more closely at a beautifully done nativity scene. "Isn't that beautiful?" said the little girl's grandmother. "Look at all the animals, Mary, Joseph, and the baby Jesus." "Yes, Grandma," replied the granddaughter. "It is really nice. But there is only one thing that bothers me. Isn't baby Jesus ever going to grow up . . . he's the same size he was last year."

One Small Child



It was the week before Christmas. Parking spaces were hard to come by. There were long lines, crowded stores, rude people, and grossly inflated prices. In one long checkout line, one man was heard to say, "They should kill the guy who started Christmas." One wise and godly woman in the line said, "They did. They hung Him on a cross." Therein lies the real Christmas story.



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