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*Growing Characters
for Eternity*

THE JOURNAL

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ON THE COVER

Ministry spouses long for their children to be in heaven! How do we help our children grow characters for heaven?



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MINISTRY TO PASTORAL SPOUSES AND FAMILIES DIVISION COORDINATORS:

East-Central Africa: Antoinette Mwangachuchu
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Trans-European: Paul Tompkins
West-Central Africa: Josephine Wari

EDITORIAL OFFICE:

12501 Old Columbia Pike
Silver Spring, MD 20904-6600
Phone: 301-680-6513 | Fax: 301-680-6502

Email: lowes@gc.adventist.org

Executive Editor: Janet Page
Associate Editor: Sarah K. Asaftei
Editorial Assistant: Shelly Lowe
Copy Editor: Becky Scoggins
Layout & Design: Erika Miike

Printed in the U.S.A.
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A Wrestling Match I Will Never Forget!

I HAVE A SPECIAL MEMORY of my father during one Friday night worship. When my brother and I were young, Daddy traveled a lot as a minister, and this night was so special because he was home.

My brother and I were giggling and laughing about nothing in particular. We were thrilled to have Dad's time and attention.

At first, Dad told us to settle down and be quiet as he read to us. But we couldn't stop giggling. Suddenly, he pulled us both to the floor and started wrestling with us. We rolled around and laughed and laughed.

It is such a good memory—and a wonderful representation of my heavenly Father. The older I get, the more I realize my God is a God of joy and delight! So many times I sense Him saying to me, "Janet, will you lighten up? I will take care of you. Rejoice!"

Don't get me wrong. He is a God to be revered, respected, and obeyed. But He also delights over us. "The Lord your God in your midst, The Mighty



One, will save; He will rejoice over you with gladness, He will quiet you with His love, He will rejoice over you with singing" (Zeph. 3:17, NKJV).

It is so important that we have family worship together with our children!

- It gives families quality time together.
- There is a great controversy going on, and it is vital to cover and protect our children with prayer.
- It is an incredible privilege to lead our children into God's presence each morning and teach them that the best part of the day begins with Jesus.
- As we show them our tender, loving Savior, who is with them throughout the day, they won't be afraid to ask forgiveness when it's needed.
- Each evening we thank God for His love and protection and read a Bible story together. Sharing the day's beginning and end with Jesus helps them realize that He is our everything.

Ellen White counsels, "Let the seasons of family worship be *short* and *spirited*. Do not let your children or any member of your family dread them because of their tediousness or lack of interest. When a long chapter is read and explained and a long prayer offered, this precious service becomes wearisome, and it is a relief when it is over" (*Child Guidance*, p. 521, emphasis supplied).

My dad's example helped me see God as a wonderful, fun-loving Father.

Around the same age, one day I was invited over to a little friend's house. We had a good day playing together.

When it came time for evening worship, her dad sat us down. My little friend started giggling. Her dad suddenly yanked her off the couch, put her over his knee, and spanked her in front of all of us. I was trembling and shocked.

They moved away, and I did not see her again until college. By that time, she had become a hardened, angry, and rebellious young woman.

I realize that other things might have influenced her, but I can't help wondering if the picture of God she received from her dad had something to do with it. Humiliating, harsh treatment of our children is so wrong and can cause lifelong scars. Believe me, I have had to ask my kids' forgiveness many times.

So, make it fun. If your children are giggly and can't sit still, then hug them, love them, and even get down on the floor to play. Let them know our God is a delightful and joyful God.

If your children are grown and you regret some of the ways you dealt with them (like I have), I cannot encourage you enough to claim daily the promise in Joel 2:25: "So I will restore to you the years that the swarming locust has eaten" (NKJV). Claim this promise; it really works!

Every morning is a new day for each one of us. Our Lord is just waiting to strengthen and encourage us as He delights in us and covers us with His singing. J

Janet Page serves as associate ministerial secretary for pastoral spouses, families, and prayer.

*Living in the
Present,*

Not

The Past

*“Do not remember
the former things, nor
consider the things of
old. Behold, I will do a
new thing, now it shall
spring forth; shall you
not know it? I will even
make a road in the
wilderness and rivers in
the desert.”*

Isaiah 43:18, 19, NKJV

THE WORDS OF ISAIAH 43:18, 19, resonated deep in my heart the first time I read them. I knew God had led me to these verses to settle once and for all a matter that I had been struggling with. The night before I read those verses, I had pleaded with God to speak clearly about a particular situation. I didn't know what to do and feared what God might ask me to do. The very next morning, God spoke: I had to let go of the past and trust Him to do a new thing in my future.

If you are sentimental like me, letting go can be a real struggle. Whether it's moving on after loss, accepting the new city where God has led you to live, forgiving others, or letting go of a relationship—parting with the past is difficult.

This passage in Isaiah commands us to forget the past by not remembering or even considering it. Easier said than done, right? It's not easy to stop replaying hurtful words. It's not easy to let go of a friendship that you realize is more harmful than good, even if God has made it clear that it's time to distance yourself. However, the Word of God tells us to stop replaying the "former things." When we are slaves to the past, we prevent ourselves from experiencing the new things that God wants to do in our lives.

The next thing God declares in Isaiah is that He *will* do a new thing. God does not say He *might* do a new thing; He says that He *will*. He does not say what the "new thing" will be, but we have the assurance that He *will* do something new.

The last phrase in these verses encourages me to trust God even when things seem impossible: "I will even make a road in the wilderness and rivers in the desert." What powerful words directly from the Creator! You might think that only a miracle will help your situation. And you're probably right. It *will* take a miracle to fix your marriage. Or to bring a wayward child back to God. But do not lose heart; our God is the God of the impossible.

He can bring healing, revival, transformation, and deliverance to the desert places of our lives. He can open our eyes to the beauty of the present. All we have to do is take His word for it and let *Him* do it. ■

Christina Zaiback-Khabbaz lives in Brisbane, Australia, with her husband, Joseph, an associate youth director for the South Queensland Conference. As the daughter of a diplomat, Christina grew up in multiple countries and loves learning about new cultures and cuisine. In her free time she enjoys cooking, gardening, photography, and jogging by the sea near her home.

When Hope Becomes Flesh

PART 2

“I can see how small I am, Lord, and that I don’t know as much as I thought I did. What else can I say? I will put my hand over my mouth and keep silent.”

Job 40:4, Clear Word



MY STILLBORN BABY'S DEATH left me with heartache too deep for words. Eventually our church family set out to find us a baby in need of adoption, hoping to rescue me from my broken heart. I'll never forget the phone call from our pastor: "Rod and Donna, we have a baby for you."

Hope had become flesh! A sweet, newborn baby girl was waiting for us at the hospital. After six years of praying and waiting, we were ready. From the moment I laid eyes on little Nicole Marie, my heart was taken. She grasped my finger with her tiny hand and gazed into my face with big, brown eyes. I couldn't stop praising God.

For ten weeks, we held this precious little one. I invested everything in her. For ten weeks, the smile on my face didn't fade. And then another call came.

"The birth mother has rescinded her decision; she wants the baby back." I'd have given my arm or leg, a lung, money—anything to keep her. The doorbell rang, and without apology a woman took the baby out of my arms and walked away, leaving me emotionally paralyzed, helpless, and hopeless.

Rod had a one-way monologue with God in the back yard: "How dare You! If You are there.

. . . What have we done to deserve this? . . . What kind of God are You? I thought You cared. How do You stand by and watch our lives become empty . . . again?"

I felt the coldness as the enemy tried to persuade me into his spiritual POW camp. Night after night I cried to God, "Why, did You bring me this far and then drop me in this cesspool of brokenness? How can You stand on high and watch this? Where is Your justice? If this is what mercy looks like, I don't need it."

God was silent. Often He chooses silence as the incubator to grow faith.

My heart had been broken by miscarriage, shattered by hysterectomy, and now crushed over Nicole! A threefold loss was more than I could bear. I demanded answers from my God. I screamed at him. I withdrew my trust; I renounced every praise I had once given. I faced each day from behind self-made bars of depression and anger. I dismantled friendships—there was nothing to talk about.

And then God began asking me a few questions: "Where were you when I created the world? If you know the answer, tell me. Who stretched the measuring line over the globe and decided how large it should be? Surely you know! What foundation does the earth rest on? Who laid its cornerstone while the morning stars sang together and the heavenly host shouted for joy? How were the ocean boundaries determined, and how were the waters held back when they burst forth from the womb of the earth? Where were you when I made the clouds to cover the earth and used them to wrap the earth in darkness, when I established boundaries for the seas, setting its doors and gates in place?" (Job 38:4-10, *Clear Word*).

Then He asked, "Donna, how long will you contend with Me and question My wisdom?"

“Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted.”

John 6:12, The Message

From that moment on, I could only stand with Job. *Who am I to question You, my God, my only hope? I believe . . . help my unbelief.*

God often asks probing questions of those who are holding on, waiting for a miracle. I have come to know His questions as defining moments—the ones that come just before a miracle is born. Often our depression and disappointments become our excuse, and before God delivers a miracle, we must answer His question: Are you satisfied with where you are, or do you really want to change? “Donna,” He said, “Do you want to be healed—*healed from self-pity and distrust?*”

The years had emotionally crippled me. Healing would take a decision on my part. It would take newly born trust.

“Do you really want to get well?” Jesus asked me. “Then take up your bed and walk.” My bed was filled with heartaches and disappointments, and Jesus wanted me to pick them all up—just like the man at the pool of Bethesda—and accept them. No pretending that all was well, no more emotional walls of protection. Without a baby, a very important room in my home was empty, as was my heart. And Jesus longed to fill it.

God wastes nothing. Every heartache is an ingredient to be used and savored as part of a full and complete life.

When we read the story of Jesus feeding the five thousand from a small boy’s lunch, we stand amazed at the miracle of multiplication. We often stop at this point of the story, stunned at the power of God. But we miss the best part of that day—the miracle of the leftovers, the part that’s so often thrown away, the part in which we see little value. But not Jesus. He said, “Gather the leftovers so nothing is wasted.”

While waiting for God to heal your broken heart and fill your emptiness, hold onto Jesus and stand confident that He will waste nothing. It seemed like an eternity, but while I was holding on, Jesus was collecting the fragments of my life—the injustice from the hospital, the shame and humiliation, my losses and pain, all my broken dreams—to create a personal miracle. A miracle of “leftovers” that would truly . . . *take my breath away.* **7**

Donna Willey (www.donnawilley.com) has co-lay-pastored with her husband for 17 years. This article is adapted from her new book, *Empty: From Despair to Deliverance*.

QUESTION AND ANSWER

WHAT ARE YOUR FAVORITE ACTIVITIES FOR FAMILY WORSHIP AND WAYS TO ENCOURAGE SPIRITUAL GROWTH AT HOME?

DARLENE ANDERSON

Our family memorizes hymns. Our girls love those hymns they've learned, and we have fun singing them together. Also, we each share what we're learning in our own personal devotions—it's fun to hear our 13-year-old and 8-year-old share!

JANICE SCHMIDT

Scripture memorization is my favorite! We do it as a couple—no children old enough to talk yet. We choose a passage (three to five verses or so) and memorize it in one week.

KARYL BAHR KRIEGER

When our girls were still at home, we gathered on Friday evening after worship to talk around the supper table. It was somewhat of a free-for-all—Scriptures, lifestyle standards, sometimes church members (uh oh!), current events in light of Bible prophecy. Sometimes we asked, "What do you and your friends think about. . . ?"

OLIVIA TOUMAZOS-SMITH

With three kids (ages five, three, and two), it's mostly singing and getting them to act out whatever story we are doing. They LOVE the acting. And prayer is a major component, especially with the kids. It is amazing to see their prayers attain new depths as time goes on!

DEBBIE BROWNFIELD

We don't have children in the home, so in the morning we each have our devotional time, then (on most days) we take our morning walk together and share new things we've read, learned, and discovered. Or we share what has encouraged and blessed us. It's a sweet time!

ROCHELLE PRICE

We have three girls under the age of seven. Each girl has a Bible, and they love just opening it randomly and pointing somewhere on the page for me or hubby to read. That's been fun!

We like to hear your answers to questions like this. To participate, join our Facebook group online at www.facebook.com/groups/ministerialspouses/. Your answer could be featured in an upcoming issue of The Journal. Responses may be edited to fit the space.

Nature's Sunshine Vitamin: Is It Enough?

IT WAS EARLY AFTERNOON when an elderly, pleasant-looking man walked into the clinic. I recognized him as a retired co-worker who loved gardening and being outdoors. He was currently caring for all the flowers and bushes at the housing complex where he lived, and also for the entire grounds of a large local church. He looked healthy and well-tanned. He returned my greeting and sat down in preparation for his yearly flu shot. As we talked together he proudly informed me he had just completed his physical health exam with a good report on everything except for low vitamin D levels. This was a surprise to him. His physician advised a vitamin D supplement to help correct the problem.





WHY ALL THE FUSS ABOUT VITAMIN D?

Vitamins C and E have long been the darlings of supplement users. But lately we hear more and more about the many important functions of vitamin D. Perhaps you are already aware that vitamin D promotes healthy bones, largely by facilitating the absorption of calcium. A deficiency brings increased risk of osteoporosis or osteomalacia (softening of the bones), especially in the elderly. Children who don't get enough vitamin D are at risk for rickets—a bone disorder which causes them to soften and break easily.

Some other important benefits of vitamin D:

- It helps to lower blood cholesterol levels, aiding the fight against heart disease.
- It reduces the risk of certain cancers, including lung, prostate, breast, and some skin cancers.
- It helps to regulate the immune system. One three-year study saw a 70 percent reduction of colds in participants who were given vitamin D supplements.
- It may slow the aging process. One study showed that certain biological markers (called telomeres) were longer (a sign of youth and health) in participants with higher vitamin D.
- It stimulates the pancreas to make insulin, fighting Type I and Type II diabetes.
- It reduces depressive symptoms by contributing to the function of dopamine and norepinephrine, while also modulating the relationship between depression and inflammation.

- It reduces acne by helping the body fight infections.
- It can help with weight loss. Every body cell needs vitamin D to function properly—even despised fat cells. Vitamin D plugs into special receptors to signal whether you should burn fat or simply store it. With vitamin D plugged in, the result is much like a key that revs up the body's flab-melting mechanism. Also, special receptors in the brain need vitamin D to keep hunger and cravings under control.
- Vitamin D also reduces the risk of cognitive impairment, according to ongoing studies, particularly in relation to the progression of Alzheimer's disease.



Nature's Sunshine Vitamin: Is it Enough?



IS VITAMIN D HARD TO GET?

Not at all! Just step outside your front door. Sunshine is nature's best source of vitamin D for our bodies; in fact, it is called the "Sunshine Vitamin." Just a few minutes in sunshine can stimulate the production of vitamin D in the skin. If your vitamin D level is healthy, it can also help protect your skin from cancer development.

Most people can meet at least some of their vitamin D needs with sunshine. However, sunshine exposure through a window, on a cloudy day, through dark-colored skin, or through high-SPF sunscreen can be inadequate for the skin to successfully make vitamin D. People who are sensitive to the sun and who cover their bodies with clothing should include foods containing vitamin D in their diet or take a supplement.

Sources of vitamin D for a vegetarian include any fortified foods such as breakfast cereals, some brands of orange juice, yogurt, margarine, and soy beverages. Mushrooms and leafy green vegetables and eggs provide variable amounts of vitamin D. Most milk and milk products are also fortified—but check labels to be certain. Vitamin D can

also be found in supplement form, of which there are two different kinds: D2 (ergocalciferol) and D3 (cholecalciferol). Either one taken regularly will increase vitamin D in the blood.

HOW CAN I BE SURE I'M GETTING ENOUGH VITAMIN D?

Your doctor can order a blood test, called the 25-hydroxyvitamin D. Levels below 30 Nano grams per milliliter (nmol/L) are too low for bone and overall health. Levels above 125 nmol/L are likely too high. Your doctor can suggest a treatment plan if you need one.

Most of the population is vitamin D deficient. Some possible contributing factors:

Age: With increasing age our skin becomes less efficient at making vitamin D when exposed to sunlight, as indicated by my clinic patient.

Babies: Breastfed infants may need extra vitamin D, as human milk is a poor source of the nutrient.

Skin Color: People with darker skin have less ability to produce vitamin D from the sun because of the pigmentation barrier.

Exposure: People with limited exposure to sunlight because of their jobs or routines often miss out on natural sources.

Location: People above 40 degrees north latitude won't be able to make much vitamin D in the winter due to decreased sun exposure and quality of sunlight.

Disease: Those who have difficulty absorbing dietary fat because of inflammatory bowel disease or cystic fibrosis will be unable to absorb sunlight efficiently.

Medications: People who take medicines called glucocorticoids, such as prednisone, are at risk for low vitamin D.

Weight: Obese people are hindered from adequate benefits of sunlight because their body fat can bind to vitamin D and prevent most of it from getting into the blood.

CAN VITAMIN D BE HARMFUL?

Yes, when blood levels get too high. Toxicity signs include nausea, vomiting, poor appetite, constipation, weakness, weight loss, confusion, disorientation, problems with heart rhythm, and kidney damage. It is impossible to acquire vitamin D poisoning from too much sunshine because the body limits the amount of this vitamin it produces. However toxicity can occur from overuse of vitamin D supplements.

Trying to get adequate vitamin D by long exposure to sunlight can result in harm to the skin and risk of skin cancers,

including actinic keratosis, basal cell carcinoma, squamous cell carcinoma, or melanoma. Here are some safe sunning suggestions:

1. Get your sun exposure in the morning before 10 a.m.
2. Limit sun exposure to 20 minutes.
3. Be sure not to use sunblock or sunscreen while sunning for vitamin D.
4. If you have any questions, consult with your physician.

Remember, the more skin that is exposed, the less time you need in the sun.

FINAL NOTE:

Information given in this article should not replace medical advice. Talk with your healthcare provider regarding vitamin D and the right course of treatment for you, based on your current health status. Find out today how you measure up.

Are you getting enough of the Sunshine Vitamin?

Rae Lee Cooper is a registered nurse. She and her husband, Lowell, have two adult married children and three adorable grandchildren. She spent most of her childhood in the Far East and then worked as a missionary with her husband in India for 16 years. She enjoys music, creative arts, cooking, and reading.

*May the
sunshine
brighten
your heart,
May the
burdens
of the day
rest lightly
upon you,
And may
God enfold
you in the
mantle of
His love.*

—Irish Blessing



Growing Characters for Eternity

TWO-YEAR-OLD HANNAH pulled the toys out of her toy box and scattered them over the floor. Finally she found what she was looking for—a soft rattle for her new baby brother to play with. Instead of focusing on the messy floor, Mom smiled, hugged her, and said, “Thank you, Hannah! That was very kind of you.” She could learn about tidying up another time.

Toby was doing his math homework. It was hard, but he was determined to finish it before bedtime, even if it meant missing his favorite TV

program. Dad came by with a glass of juice for him. “Hey, son! I’m proud of you for sticking with your homework, even when it’s hard and takes a long time. That’s perseverance.”

Pastor Gary and his family parked around the corner from Katie’s home. Her husband had just left her. She had four children, and the youngest, Janna, was chronically



ill. Quietly, Pastor Gary's family carried several boxes of groceries and vouchers for children's clothing and toys up to Julie's front porch. As they drove away, they planned their next act of kindness.

All of these families understand the importance of growing characters for eternity. They are pro-actively nurturing their children's characters, and their own.

GROWING STRENGTHS

A character strength is what you're capable of being and doing when you're functioning at your best. The more often you use a character strength, the stronger it will become. The more character strengths you cultivate, the happier and more resilient you'll be, and the more likely you'll be to have healthy relationships and a strong faith. You can work on character strengths as a family, encouraging each other and developing them in creative ways. Pray that you and your children will develop your different strengths so that you can become more like Jesus.



EXPLORING CHARACTER STRENGTHS TOGETHER

- Make a list of characteristics you want to nurture in yourself and your children.
- Invite your children to create posters for your home describing the different character traits. Search for poster samples on the Internet to inspire them.
- Focus on one character strength each week and ask your children to research and list the choices and behaviors that develop each character strength.
- Read Bible verses about each character strength and look for Bible stories about people who used that strength. Think about characters who made mistakes. Which strengths were they neglecting or missing? What could they have chosen to do instead?
- Watch for people using character strengths at church, at school, in the family, in storybooks, in movies, in news stories, etc.
- Encourage one another to practice different character strengths—as individuals and together.
- Work on your own character strengths so that your children have a positive role model.

FOCUS ON THEIR STRENGTHS

It's easy to focus on your child's mistakes and misbehavior and forget to notice the amazing times when they practice their character strengths.

- Try to notice your child using one of their character strengths every day. Let them know when you've seen them using a character strength, however small it may seem. Your appreciation is one of the biggest incentives they have for developing their character strengths.
- Make a chart where your child can add a sticker, shape, or mark whenever they've practiced a character strength.
- At bedtime tell them which strengths you've noticed them using throughout the day. Ask them to tell you about a time when they used one of their character strengths, too.

MAKE GROWING CHARACTER STRENGTHS FUN!

Think of fun ways to help your child develop character strengths—then they will associate practicing their character strengths with feeling happy and appreciated. Here are some ideas to get you started:

- **Thankfulness:** Make a scrapbook of things your family is thankful for, or make a collage of pictures and objects on a canvas, grouped around the word *Thanks!*
- **Appreciating creation:** Make a “wonder box” and fill it with non-perishable nature objects for your children to explore, such as seed pods, shells, feathers, etc. Encourage them to find three things about each object that fill them with wonder.



- **Generosity:** Grow vegetables or bake bread and cookies so your child can share with others.
- **Kindness:** Plan a special act of kindness each month. Work on the project together and do something fun as a family after dropping off your soup at the soup kitchen or leaving a package of food on someone's doorstep.
- **Patience:** Teach your child fun things to do whenever they're waiting or bored. Encourage them to save up for things they want, so they learn to wait.
- **Respect:** Role-play different situations where they can show respect to others. Set out a pretend banquet at home and make it fun to learn good table manners. Help them to look for the good in every person, even those who are hard to like.
- **Helpfulness:** Encourage your child to find ways to help others, or to ask, “How can I help you?” and then help cheerfully.
- **Teamwork:** Do fun projects where your family needs to work together for a good result. Try flying a kite, putting up a tent, or making a surprise party for someone. 7



Karen Holford writes from Crieff, Scotland, where she's working on being wiser and more patient.

SOME CHARACTER STRENGTHS TO CONSIDER:

- Appreciation of God's creation: David. Psalm 104; Phil. 4:8.
- Contentment: Paul. Phil. 4:12.
- Kindness: Dorcas, Ruth, Abigail, Widow of Zarephath, David and Mephibosheth. Eph. 4:32.
- Thankfulness: Ten lepers. 1 Thess. 5:18.
- Helpfulness: Little boy who shares his lunch, Rebekah at the well. Matt. 25:35-40.
- Cooperation: All one body. Rom. 12; 1 Cor. 12.
- Self-control: Esther, David in the cave with Saul. Gal. 5:22-23.
- Leadership: Moses, Jesus. 1 Tim. 3:1-13.
- Peacemaking: Abigail. Matt. 5:9.
- Choosing happiness: Paul. Phil. 4:4.
- Comforting others: Jesus, Ruth and Naomi. Rom. 12:15.
- Perseverance: Noah, Moses, Job. 2 Pet. 1:5-8.
- Patience: Job, Hannah. Gal. 5:22-23.
- Courage: Daniel, Noah. Josh. 1:9.
- Honesty: Ananias and Sapphira. Eph. 4:15.
- Forgiveness: Parable of the unforgiving servant. Col. 3:13
- Obedience: Samuel. John 14:15.
- Generosity: Wise men. 2 Cor. 9:6-11.
- Wisdom: Solomon. Proverbs. James 1:5.

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“Whatever It Takes”



SOME YEARS AGO, a friend was sharing with me about some deep and profoundly painful struggles she had been experiencing. One thing after another was falling apart in her life—her health, her dreams for a family, her church relationships. And then she said the strangest thing.

“I can trace it all back to the day I prayed one single prayer: *Lord, I want to be Yours. I want to be in heaven with You. Please do whatever it takes to get me there.*”

Whatever it takes.

Whatever pain. Whatever loss. Whatever challenges or struggles or anguish.

Lord, you know my heart better than I know it myself. You know what lessons I need to learn. You know what rough edges need to be chiseled away. You know how hot the fire must be to refine me into pure gold.

I remember sitting there with her and thinking to myself, *Am I brave enough to pray that prayer?* What if I do, and then everything

*“Lord, I want to be Yours. I want to be in heaven with You.
Please do whatever it takes to get me there.”*

goes crazy? Can I handle it? Would it destroy me? Am I strong enough?

But then, I also found myself wandering down another line of questions—equally disturbing and perhaps even more urgent.

What if I *don't* pray this prayer? What if my fears of the unknown cause me to settle for a life of mediocrity and insignificance? Does clinging to the status quo mean I am actually setting limits on my own potential for spiritual, emotional, and relational growth?

And so I chose to be a little bit brave. Just courageous enough to squeak out the words: *Whatever it takes, Jesus. Do whatever it takes.*

It's a prayer I've prayed at the beginning of each year since. *Let this new year be about You, not about me. Help me to absorb and internalize the lessons You have for me in this new year. Please don't let me convince myself that I have it all together, or that I'm doing okay without You, or that I don't need Your daily guidance.*

Last year was a tough one, I won't deny it. Last year brought some of

the most devastating realizations and the most overwhelming temptations of my adult life. But Jesus doesn't quit when we're devastated or overwhelmed. Those moments are when His strength is most profound. If only we are willing to get out of His way, He will do His work in our hearts and souls.

Praying like this doesn't mean we automatically have all the answers. As someone who *really* likes to have all my ducks color-coded and organized by height in a neat little row, that's hard for me to accept.

Praying this prayer *does* mean that we give God permission to crank up the thermostat on our lives until He gets us at the optimal temperature for refining. And if I strip away all the other nonsense, refining *is* what I want—deep down inside.

Because, more than anything else, I want to spend eternity with Jesus. And so, again this year, I'm praying, *Whatever it takes, God. Whatever it takes.*

Will you be praying it too? ■

Sarah K. Asaftei is a mother of two and is married to Marius, senior pastor of the East Pasco Church near Tampa, Florida. Her marketing and film production company, skaMEDIA productions, provides development and social media support for the GC Ministerial and Revival & Reformation initiatives. Raised a missionary kid, Sarah loves international travel, languages, and photography.

Spending Time With Jesus— Your Best Forever Friend!

JESUS MADE YOU, HE LOVES YOU, AND HE HAS AMAZING IDEAS AND STORIES TO SHARE WITH YOU. HE EVEN HAS SOME SPECIAL WORK FOR YOU TO DO, SO MORE PEOPLE CAN DISCOVER HOW MUCH HE LOVES THEM, TOO.

WHEN WE HAVE A SPECIAL FRIEND, WE LOVE BEING WITH THAT PERSON. HERE ARE SOME GREAT WAYS TO SPEND TIME WITH JESUS, YOUR BEST FOREVER FRIEND.

THE CHALLENGE

Spending time with Jesus can change your life! Try spending 5-10 minutes a day reading your Bible, doing something you enjoy based on what you have read, and praying to Jesus. Do it for a month, and look for the difference it makes in your life. It can help you to be a better friend; make wiser choices; and feel happier, more thankful, and less worried.

FIND A BIBLE

One of the secrets to spending special time with Jesus each day is having a Bible you understand and enjoy. Some Bibles have more pictures, some have activity ideas, and some have questions and stories to think about. Go to a store with your parents and look at the Bibles until you find one you like best.

DIY WORSHIP KIT

Ask your parents to help you make a do-it-yourself (DIY) worship kit. Buy a box of index cards and divide them into two packs. Write creative ways of exploring a Bible passage on half the cards. Write Bible passages or story references on the other cards. Each day pick one card from each pack and do whatever the cards say. If the combination won't work, pick another card.



DIARY DATES

Find a diary or calendar with little spaces to write in every day. Fill each space with three things you're thankful for and one new thing you learned about Jesus. If it's hard, keep thinking and praying, and Jesus will help you know what to write. Or choose a favorite Bible verse each day and add it to your diary. Add a star or sticker to your calendar every time you spend time alone with Jesus.



EXPLORING STORIES

Here are some ways to bring Bible stories to life and imagine you're really there:

- Make or draw a scene from a Bible story. Use toy people and bricks to make Bible scenes, and tell the story to your family.
- Draw a picture of your favorite part of the story. Then write a few lines about why you chose this part. Keep your pictures in a journal or folder.
- Imagine that you are really in the story and think about what you would see, hear, smell, feel, and taste.
- Write a short journal entry as if you were watching Jesus perform miracles and tell stories. What would you say to Jesus? What questions would you like to ask Him, and how would you want to praise Him?
- Think about the characters in the story. Who made good choices and who made bad choices? How can they help you to make wise choices in your life?
- Ask yourself, *How does this story inspire me to be kind and loving to someone else?* Think of one thing to try, and then do it.

TALK TO JESUS

Make your prayer time more interesting with these simple ideas:

- Simple prayer outline:
 - Tell Jesus how much you love Him.
 - Thank Him for at least three things He has given you today.
 - Say you're sorry for at least one thing you have done wrong today.
 - Ask Him to help you, your family, and at least one other person.
 - Tell Him again how much you love Him!
 - Tell Jesus 26 things you're thankful for—one for each different letter of the alphabet.
- Fill a bag with different things that remind you to pray for people you know or for things your family needs. Choose one object each day and pray for the person or situation.

Spending Time With Jesus—Your Best Forever Friend!

JUST A VERSE OR TWO

Pray a simple prayer before you start reading. Ask Jesus to be with you as you read and to help you learn more about Him. Ask the Holy Spirit to guide you and inspire you. Then read a few verses each day. Read slowly and carefully. Think about what each verse means. Read until you find a verse that says something special to you.

Then try one of the following activities:

- Imagine you're designing a poster with that Bible verse on it. Find a picture that really helps to illustrate the verse. Or design your own poster using your favorite art, collage, and drawing techniques.
 - Write the verse on a card or in a notebook. Then answer the following questions on the card or in your book:
- Imagine you're trying to explain this verse to someone who speaks another language. What pictures would you draw, or what action would you do, to help the person understand the Bible verse? Show your ideas to your family, or act out the verse and see if they can understand what it means.
 - Find some objects that illustrate a verse and place them in order. Then see if your family can guess the verse you've chosen. For example, you could illustrate Psalm 119:105 by arranging a Bible, a torch, some shoes, and a map. (Can you guess which verse this is without looking it up?)
 - Create your own secret code and write your verses in code.
 - Cut the words and letters for your verse out of newspapers and magazines, then create a collage.
 - Write a Bible verse on a small card and carry it in your pocket. If you're learning the verse, write it in code—just the first and last letter of each word—to help you remember the words.
 - Choose a small object to remind you of a Bible verse, then carry it in your pocket. Think about the verse when you're walking, waiting, and resting. Listen to what Jesus wants to say to you. 7



Karen Holford loves to find creative ways to make worship a happy time for children and their families.

FOR EXTRA HELP AND IDEAS TRY THESE RESOURCES:

100 Creative Prayer Ideas for Kids, Karen Holford, Pacific Press, 2003.

100 Quick and Easy Worship Ideas for Kids, Karen Holford, Pacific Press, 2004.

100 Creative Ways to Learn Memory Verses, Karen Holford, Review and Herald, 2010.

TIPS TO SURVIVE

THRIVE

Here is a tip that has helped me, although I cannot recall where I read it.

A particular ministerial spouse would go to the church when it was empty, sit in an empty pew, and pray for the people who sat there during church services (whether regular members who sat in the same pew each week, members who sat in different pews each week, or visitors). I have done this myself, and it lifts me up. Sometimes I know of particular needs to include in my prayer, and other times I do not. Just praying for another person helps.

I have taken this further, and some years ago I started praying for vehicles. When I would see a vehicle on the road that I knew a church member owned, I would pray for that person or family. Soon I realized that not every member had a car, so when I saw a bus, I would pray for members taking public transportation.

Both of these ideas have increased my prayer outreach and given me survival benefits.

Mary Sailo

Pastoral spouse in SNEC

Have a survival tip that someone shared with you once upon a time, or that you have learned along the way? Send it in to share here at: development.gc.ministerial@gmail.com

Special Quotes

“The idea that prayer is not essential is one of Satan’s most successful devices to ruin souls. Prayer is communion with God, the Fountain of wisdom, the Source of strength, and peace, and happiness.”

Child Guidance, p. 518

“Let the members of every family bear in mind that they are closely allied to heaven. The Lord has a special interest in the families of His children here below. Angels offer the smoke of the fragrant incense for the praying saints. Then in every family let prayer ascend to heaven both in the morning and at the cool sunset hour, in our behalf presenting before God the Saviour’s merits. Morning and evening the heavenly universe take notice of every praying household.”

Child Guidance, p. 519

“Before leaving the house for labor, all the family should be called together; and the father, or the mother in the father’s absence, should plead fervently with God to keep them through the day. Come in humility, with a heart full of tenderness, and with a sense of the temptations and dangers before yourselves and your children; by faith bind them upon the altar, entreating for them the care of the Lord. Ministering angels will guard children who are thus dedicated to God.”

Child Guidance, p. 519

God is Crazy *About You!*

SOMETIMES IT'S HARD, even now, to look back at where I came from. I was the second child of teenage parents who struggled with addictions, pain, and dysfunction. They were unable to love me or provide a safe environment for my siblings and me. Because of her own brokenness, my mom survived by taking out her hatred and anger on me. My dad was caught molesting me the first time when I was three months old. I have no idea what it feels like to be in a normal house with parents who love you or have your best interests at heart.

By age 13, I was on the streets of Los Angeles. For the next 10 years I saw, and was involved in, some incredibly twisted things. But they were less damaging than my home life had been because, by then, I didn't even expect to be loved or cared for. When I was introduced to drugs, for the first time in my life, I didn't feel like killing myself. It was

unbelievably powerful. If I took enough drugs, I felt I could survive anything.

Underneath it all I deeply longed for someone normal, for a safe place to belong, to be loved. At age 23, I had a gun in my face during a drug deal gone bad, and I felt grateful! I'd been trying to kill myself since I was eight years old. In a couple of seconds all the pain would be over. When I realized he was just trying to scare me, I wanted to scream, "My next breath scares me! Please pull the trigger!" But he didn't. And I had to breathe.

I spent the next few days in a daze. I went to see my mom, hoping for a reason to live, but nothing had changed in her attitude toward me. However, she was excited. She'd gone back to school . . . for a degree in social work! I couldn't breathe. I'd spent my whole life trying to get her to even touch me, and now she was going to teach people how to care for each other? I felt like screaming! But I just said politely, "You'll probably do a great job. I gotta go." She told me she had something for me. She handed me a manila envelope, and I left.



I was done. I went back to the drug house where I lived at the time, intending to kill myself. I walked in past the naked guy, high on PCP, in the living room. Someone had just shot up heroin in the bathroom and thrown up all over. I found some syringes, thinking I could pump air into my veins until my heart exploded. The manila envelope I had thrown on the bed caught my eye. I wanted to rip it into a million pieces, rip it until my hands bled. I didn't want to hear one more time how I had ruined my mom's life.

And then . . . God showed up.

I don't know how I knew it was Him, but for the first time in my life, I felt safe. And loved. I just sobbed. God impressed me to take the papers out of the envelope. Across the top of my mom's term paper was a note: "Please give this to Cheri."

I struggled to read the words, the story of how her mom had abandoned her as a child, of her own molestation, of my father's abuse. At the top of the third page were the words, "The only reason I survived was I took all my anger and hatred out on my second child, and I ruined her life."

God gently said to me, "This was never about you, and if you trust me, I can change your life." This may sound crazy, but I think He gave me a glimpse of who I will be the day after resurrection—an innocent and beautiful child. I had never felt innocent. I heard Him say, "I've never seen you any other way."

Not long after, God brought a mentor into my life, and through her unconditional love He showed me He is crazy about me and He delights in me. She told me the story of Mary Magdalene, the despised prostitute. I so related to Mary! When she lay on the ground, waiting for her accusers to stone her, I saw myself lying there. I knew

exactly how she felt: dirty and shameful. But in Jesus' incredible, tender response to her, I began to see that God knows about all my junk—all the broken, twisted mess inside me—and He loves me anyway. He longs to heal me! And He *is* healing me. Not all at once. But He's hung in there with me through my many years of recovery. Through struggles, discouragement, fear, relapse, rejection, and mistakes, He's gently, patiently loved me. And I've fallen in love with Him!

I began to dream of doing ministry. I wanted others to know He's crazy about them, too. I was invited to share my story at church. Afterward, I was amazed at how many people came to me with stories of brokenness. My story was published in the book *Miracle From the Streets*. Since then I've been invited to speak all over the world. Everywhere I go, I see the same thing: People are broken. They *so* badly need to know that God loves them even in their mess and that He delights to heal them.

I've seen that the brokenness is as great inside the church as it is on the street. It touches all of us, and until we find healing ourselves, we have little to give anyone else. But I've also seen the amazing results when a church experiences God's healing and then opens their doors and their hearts to bring healing to their community.

Your church needs that experience! That's why my team at True Step Ministries has developed the *Celebrating Life in Recovery* program. This is friendship ministry at its best—caring for the world's most crying need: to be loved enough to heal. Our 14-week program is based on our recovery edition of *Steps to Christ*, which presents Jesus, our Healer, in recovery language, with the 12 steps of recovery. The resource kit for this program contains everything you need to host a recovery program. Those who have used it say, "Anyone can do it!"

Join me in sharing with your church and your community what God shared with me: That He's crazy about us, that He delights in us, that He's bigger than all the abuse, dysfunction, molestation, rebellion, addiction—all our junk—and that if you give Him a chance, He will change your life. ■

Cheri Peters is the founder of True Step Ministries, helping people to step into recovery.



Tribute to Denise Ratsara

“He will wipe every tear from their eyes, and there will be no more death or sorrow or crying or pain. All these things are gone forever.”

Rev. 21:4, NLT

ON BEHALF OF PASTORS’ SPOUSES in the Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division (SID) and around the world, we pay tribute to the late Denise Ratsara. SID has lost a godly woman who understood that “all who work for God should have the Martha and Mary attributes blended—a willingness to minister, and a sincere love of the truth” (*Christian Service*, p. 27).

Denise was spiritually alive in Christ, a woman of the Word, and a woman of prayer. She had a self-sacrificing missionary spirit. She understood that a pastoral team can endure together if they both want to do good for Christ’s sake. She worked unitedly with her husband even when there were trials and disappointments. She truly believed in team ministry.

Her work as the Shepherdess coordinator and sponsor for SID became her greatest passion. She invested tireless effort and energy, serving with dedication, grace, and dignity. She raised funds to improve education for pastors’ spouses, and the Shepherdess work in SID is what it is today because of Denise.



We saw her suffer in pain, yet with a beautiful smile she encouraged us to remain faithful to God. As a woman of faith, she truly believed that God was with her, that she could pass through the raging waters of her illness and not drown. We have sweet memories of her as an



organized pastor's wife who left a legacy of positive attitude, faith, courage, and confidence in Jesus.

The SID office will not be the same without her. We will miss her great laugh, the healthy dishes she prepared for social meetings, her beautiful voice as we sang together, and her willingness to pitch in and do whatever was needed. We will remember her for her compassionate, generous soul. Denise never met a person in need that she did not find some way of helping.

Our hearts go out to her family. We will continue to pray for Pastor Ratsara and the children, Mary, Paul, Jr., and Moise, and the rest of the Cangy family.

We are comforted in the hope that we will all be united with our loved ones and the hope that we will see Denise Ratsara again. Until then, may we all remain faithful to God's call. ■

Nomthandazo Papu
SID Ministerial Associate



Dear Abigail,

My husband and I, like most ministerial families, are very active. In the beginning, it seemed as if we were closer . . . more connected. Our intimate life is satisfactory (at times), but our spiritual connection time “together” is lacking so much that I am not satisfied anymore.

I have talked with other ministry friends, and they have noticed this undesirable trend in their own marriages.

It didn't happen all at once. Honestly, I'm not sure where things “got off track” for us. We both have an individual connection with God, but I really miss our “together” time as a couple, even as a family. I really need some advice to reignite our spiritual atmosphere as a couple and a family in ministry. It feels as if we're just going through the motions. I know God wants us to do better; I'm just not sure where to begin.

Sincerely,
Concerned and “In-a-Rut”



Dear Concerned,

The situation you describe is all too common. No ministerial family is immune, whether your spouse just entered the ministry or retirement is looming.

I could mention a dozen benefits of prioritizing time and managing the “busy-ness” of pastoral ministry. We're all familiar with this challenge, yet we all struggle to find the balance we dream about. So instead of addressing balance, I will offer some practical advice that can work at any stage of ministry.

You and your husband should immediately begin praying together. I'm not talking about prayers at mealtime or bedtime prayers with your children (although these should be included).

Got a question for Abigail? Write her at dear.abigail.letters@gmail.com

Prayer is a “non-negotiable” for the ministerial couple. Believe it or not, many couples don’t pray together. It may seem awkward at first, but pray anyway. The enemy knows that if he can “divide and conquer” our spiritual time together as a couple, we won’t be fortified in God’s strength.

You know the old cliché: “The family that prays together stays together.” But it’s true! As you make this commitment together, other things that are lacking in your spiritual and physical time as a couple will reignite.

I love this passage in 2 Chron. 7:14: “If My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land” (NKJV).

God wants so much to be glorified through our marriages. He wants to heal every area in our lives that doesn’t reflect His character. Praying together and reconnecting spiritually will break any stronghold the enemy has imposed on your time together as a couple.

Another important thing? Don’t spend one more moment reflecting on your lack of spiritual connection as a couple. Instead, start today and the New Year with prayer individually, as a couple, and with your family. Then watch God bless and connect you as you serve faithfully together!

Abigail



FROM THE FIELD

East-Central Africa Division

BURUNDI UNION

Pastors, spouses, and leaders of the newly organized Burundi Union met at Kivoga Adventist Secondary School for a one-week seminar including an ordination service and holy communion. Participants left feeling refreshed and ready to go forward for the Lord.

EAST CONGO

East Congo started the year with an ordination service for young pastors, an appreciation service in honor of mature pastors, and a jubilee celebration in honor of 105-year-old Silas Monga, a retired pastor who was accompanied by many family members. Following a sermon by Pastor Mwangachuchu, more than sixty people gave their hearts to Christ.



Seated is retired pastor, 105-year-old Silas Monga. His son, also a retired pastor, is at the microphone.

Southern Asia Division

EAST CENTRAL INDIA UNION

The East Central India Union conducted a training program under the leadership of former Shepherdess director Sulochana Victor. Rose Christo, SUD Shepherdess coordinator, gave presentations about united prayer and the challenges of pastoral families, relationships, and parenting.



Participants attended a training program in Andhra Pradesh, India, in January 2013.

Southern Asia-Pacific Division

NORTH PHILIPPINE UNION CONFERENCE



More than 100 PKs attended a conference in South Central Luzon Conference.

The North Philippine Union Conference held their Pastoral Partners Continuing Education Program in September 2013. This ongoing series of seminars equips pastoral spouses to meet the demands of their various roles. Topics included crisis ministry by Mark Pastor Monreal and Jay Fajardo, communication skills by Joyce Mondejar-Dy, and prayer ministry by Delba de Chavez.



NORTHERN BANGLADESH MISSION
Bangladesh pastors' wives meet together.

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division

MALAWI UNION

Patricia Papu, SID Shepherdess coordinator, recently met with 205 pastoral wives at Salima Technical College near Lake Malawi. The group celebrated the 25th anniversary of Shepherdess support with a beautiful cake. Please remember this special group of ladies as they face the many challenges in their area.



After a seminar on the power of prayer, each woman received the booklet *Praying for Rain*. They are grateful to have this powerful tool to help them study more and teach their fellow church members.

SOUTH AFRICAN UNION

In September 2013, South African Union retirees and their children met together in Mosselbay for a weekend.



Mrs. Liywalii ended her closing remarks with the words, "To God be the glory."



ZAMBIA UNION CONFERENCE

Zambia Union Conference pastors' spouses held public meetings for two weeks in August and September 2013. V. Kapambwe preached each night on the theme "Campaign for Christ," and the co-speaker was Mrs. Isiteketo. As a result of the meetings, 21 people were baptized.

Support staff included other pastors' wives: Liywalii (Zambia Union Conference coordinator), Mukabila (ZBUC treasurer), Chibala (ZBUC secretary), Muyunda (WZF sponsor), Kayongo (WZF coordinator), Mutemwa, Ilukena, and Situmbaeto.

In addition to preaching the gospel, the women followed in the footsteps of Jesus by meeting the physical needs of community members. Some patients who needed evacuation were taken to Lewanika General Hospital. The women also assisted area families with clothing and food.



Pastoral spouses donate food to the elderly in Angola.

ANGOLA

For the Mission to the Cities initiative, SID chose Luanda as the focus city. There were 55 evangelism sites with speakers from Brazil, USA, and SID, including Patricia Papu, SID Shepherdess coordinator. Baptisms totaled 25,000. Elders' and pastors' wives also met together, visited hospice, and donated food and a Hope Channel dish.

Always remember that God is
crazy about you... me too?
~Cheri Peters

Now, go
tell someone else.



Celebrating Life in Recovery
resource kit

Steps to Christ
recovery edition

Cheri's story

Order from **True Step Ministries** at truestep.org

