

The Journal

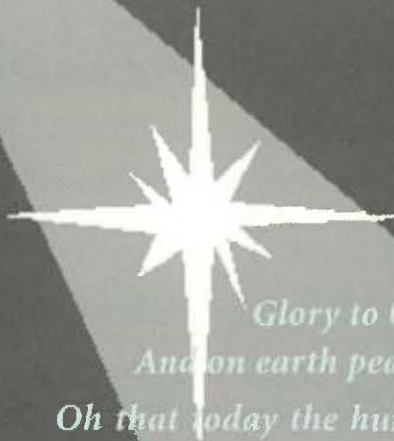


A SHEPHERDESS INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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*Glory to God in the highest,
And on earth peace, good will toward men.*

Oh that today the human family could recognize that song! The declaration then made, the note then struck, will swell to the close of time, and resound to the ends of the earth. When the Sun of Righteousness shall arise, with healing in His wings, that song will be re-echoed by the voice of a great multitude, as the voice of many waters, saying, 'Alleluia: for the Lord God omnipotent reigneth.'
Rev. 19:6

. . . Heaven and earth are no wider apart today than when shepherds listened to the angels' song. Humanity is still as much the object of heaven's solicitude as when common men of common occupations met angels at noonday, and talked with the heavenly messengers in the vineyards and the fields. To us in the common walks of life, heaven may be very near. Angels from the courts above will attend the steps of those who come and go at God's command.

The story of Bethlehem is an exhaustless theme.

—Ellen G. White

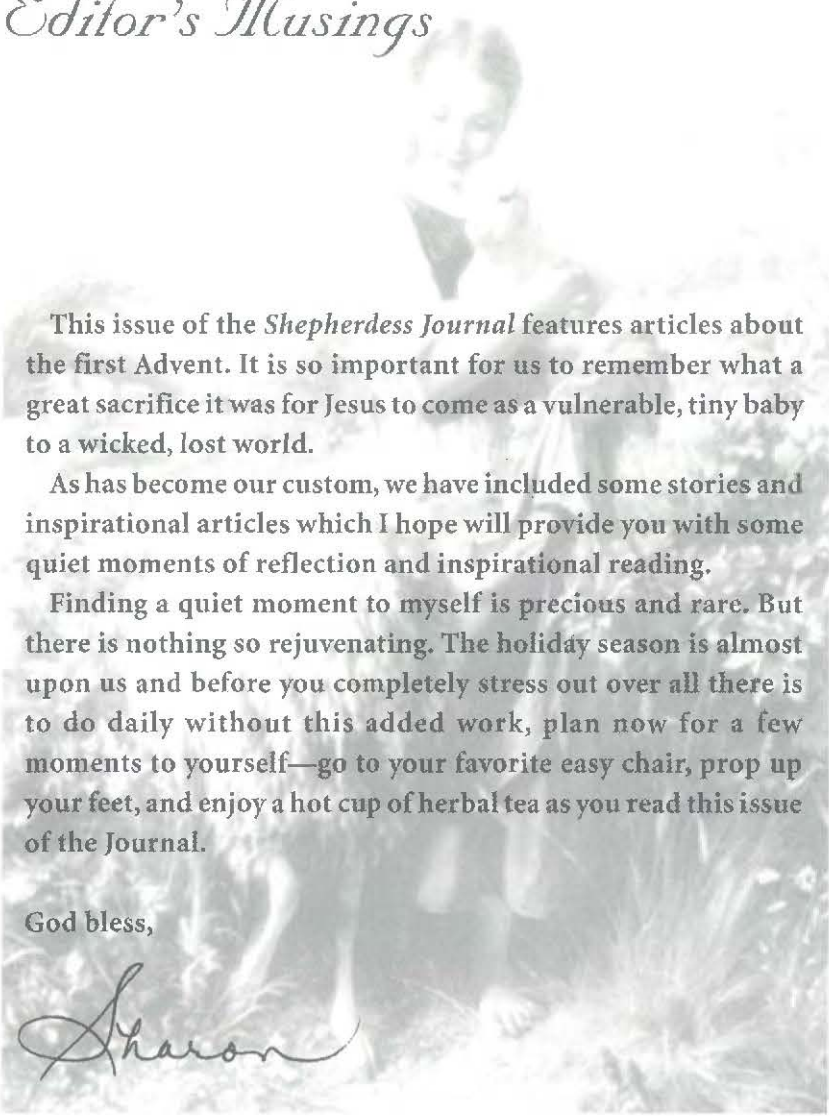
The Journal

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Editor's Musings



This issue of the *Shepherdess Journal* features articles about the first Advent. It is so important for us to remember what a great sacrifice it was for Jesus to come as a vulnerable, tiny baby to a wicked, lost world.

As has become our custom, we have included some stories and inspirational articles which I hope will provide you with some quiet moments of reflection and inspirational reading.

Finding a quiet moment to myself is precious and rare. But there is nothing so rejuvenating. The holiday season is almost upon us and before you completely stress out over all there is to do daily without this added work, plan now for a few moments to yourself—go to your favorite easy chair, prop up your feet, and enjoy a hot cup of herbal tea as you read this issue of the Journal.

God bless,



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My Most Remembered Thanksgiving

J. Grant Swank, Jr.

*Forgiveness—
God's Healing
Secret*

*Grant Swank is
pastor of the
New Hope
Church in
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Maine.*



Jesus tells His children of grace to forgive. Jesus makes it serious business. He gives us this counsel in what has been called The Lord's Prayer.

Yet forgiveness is hard at times. There is so much injustice in our spiritually fallen world. However, God's grace can see it through for two primary reasons.

The first is because Jesus has forgiven us of our awful, atrocious, self-centered sins. All of us have fallen short. All. Either sins of the flesh or sins of the spirit or both have separated us tragically from the Father above; no one is exempt. Yet this kind God has forgiven us simply on the line of our repentance and confession from sincere hearts.

Second, when one does come upon divine grace by which to forgive another, then the healing secret is out. Further, that secret flows in two directions: toward the one forgiven and just as powerfully toward the one who has extended the forgiveness.

This reminds me of a Thanksgiving season when my family was swindled out of thousands of dollars by a first-class con artist who was dying of a slow-moving cancer. I befriended this young, skinny fellow as he lay in a hospital bed with tubes in his arms.

"If I could only have a piece of homemade apple pie," he said one morning when I made a pastoral call. It was in short order that John had his apple pie—the whole pie.

And so it was that over months of visiting him that he and I became fast friends—more glued than I had wished later. Nevertheless, in naivete over time I handed over monies for investments to this self-proclaimed financial wizard.

He claimed to have all sorts of money connections, for example having worked professionally for a national pizza chain, inspecting worldwide their newly constructed buildings and so on. Further, he said he served on this board and that regarding sound financial holdings.

It turned out to be a very long and sad story. However, I found out too late that his employment with the pizza firm proved bogus when they discovered that he was a fraud. They had failed, however, to check out thoroughly his application form where he had listed a wife, children, education, degrees, titles—none of which he had! In the end, nothing—even to his name, address, social security number, etc.—was certain about this mortal but that he was male.

Near to the close of our friendship, he was placed in my home for several

days' stay in order for him to relocate for further rehabilitation before he breathed his last.

It was then in the middle of one awfully dark sleepless night that it came to mind that several factors related to me by John simply did not add up.

The next morning, I confronted John with my quizzings regarding this and that. In an instant, he turned into a bizarre creature—fierce and unbridled. Then I knew that I had been had—royally.

I gave John his breakfast, then told him I would be back at the house within minutes. I had an errand to run at the church nearby. In moments, I got through to the pizza firm's vice president, only to learn in quick order that I had been taken, just as their firm had been taken. Indeed I was dealing with a man wanted by the FBI.

I phoned the police. In minutes, a plain-clothesman was in my living room, questioning a bathrobed John seated on my sofa. By noon, John was behind bars. But I was out of my money. He put it far behind him in one purchasing job or another so that it was impossible to retrieve what I had given him in good faith.

My mind was reeling. My body was numb. My family was taken aback at what we faced come Thanksgiving and Christmas seasons. How could all of this have happened to us when simply going out of our ways to minister to a young fellow dying of cancer?

But it did happen.

Then came Thanksgiving Day itself. As I thought of our own festivities—the comforts, luxuries of our culture, food upon food platters to satisfy the most hungry, relatives and friends gathering for celebrations—I thought of John in the county jail.

"John," I greeted him.

In shock, he lifted his head, looking

into my face as if in unbelief. "What are you doing here?" he asked, startled beyond belief.

"I thought that I would visit you today. You know—have some prayer and then read some from the Psalms—like before. After all, today is Thanksgiving and you have no one to be with you for this special day."

He motioned for me to have a seat there alongside him on the bench. So I did.

And to my amazement—utter amazement—I discovered a new part to my heart. There was simply no rancor present, no hope for revenge, no inkling at all for getting even or settling some score. None. And, with me, all of those notable qualities of character do not come naturally, nor swiftly. (I have a hunch that some others have a make-up similar to mine.)


"I will be praying for you, John, whether I see you again or not." And with that, I waved him good-bye.

Within days, he was moved out of state. I kept in touch with him via the local police station's computer system's info of such persons held in custody. But then the years wore on so that I almost forgot his name.

Yet to this day, I must admit that that Thanksgiving has become the most remembered one in all my life. I don't try to figure out the reasons for that, except to start to understand that it was the opening up of a new room in my heart. Really.

It taught me how to say "Thanks" in a very special way—particularly to the Lord above who counseled me gently how to find forgiving another as the secret key to heaven's healing door.

With that, I learned also that it is a healing which flows in two directions—to the one forgiven and to the one who extends the forgiveness.

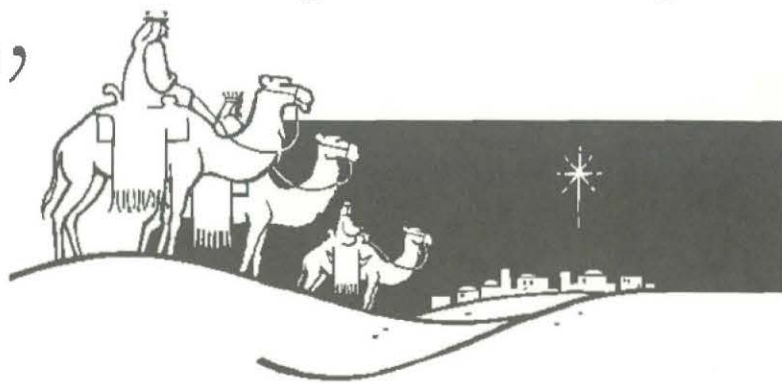
It is nothing short of divine grace. Thank God. 

*O Give thanks unto the Lord,
for he is good: for His mercy
endureth for ever. Oh that men would
praise the Lord for his goodness, and for his
wonderful works to the children of men! For he
satisfieth the longing soul, and filleth the hungry
soul with goodness. And let them sacrifice the
sacrifices of thanksgiving, and declare his works
with rejoicing.*



—Psalm 107:1, 8-9, 22

Gifts From a Neighboring "Wiseman"



Rian B. Anderson

Pa never had much compassion for the lazy or those who squandered their means and then never had enough for the necessities. But for those who were genuinely in need, his heart was as big as all outdoors. It was from him that I learned the greatest joy in life comes from giving, not from receiving.

It was Christmas Eve 1881. I was fifteen years old and feeling like the world had caved in on me because there just hadn't been enough money to buy me the rifle that I'd wanted so bad that year for Christmas.

We did the chores early that night for some reason. I just figured Pa wanted a little extra time so we could read in the Bible. So after supper was over I took my boots off and stretched out in front of the fireplace and waited for Pa to get down the old Bible. I was still feeling sorry for myself and, to be honest, I wasn't in much of a mood to read scriptures. But Pa didn't get the Bible, instead he bundled up and went outside. I couldn't figure it out because we had already done all the chores. I didn't worry about it long though, I was too busy wallowing in self-pity.

Soon Pa came back in. It was a cold, clear night out and there was

ice in his beard. "Come on, Matt," he said. "Bundle up good, it's cold out tonight." I was really upset then. Not only wasn't I getting the rifle for Christmas, now Pa was dragging me out in the cold, and for no earthly reason that I could see. We'd already done all the chores, and I couldn't think of anything else that needed doing, especially not on a night like this. But I knew Pa was not very patient at one dragging one's feet when he'd told them to do something, so I got up and put my boots back on and got my cap, coat, and mittens. Ma gave me a mysterious smile as I opened the door to leave the house. Something was up, but I didn't know what.

Outside, I became even more dismayed. There in front of the house was the work team, already hitched to the big sled. Whatever it was we were going to do wasn't going to be a short, quick, little job. I could tell. We never hitched up the big sled unless we were going to haul a big load. Pa was already up on the seat, reins in hand. I reluctantly climbed up beside him. The cold was already biting at me. I wasn't happy. When I was on, Pa pulled the sled around the house and stopped in front of the

woodshed. He got off and I followed. "I think we'll put on the high sideboards," he said. "Here, help me."

The high sideboards! It had been a bigger job than I wanted to do with just the low sideboards on, but whatever it was we were going to do would be a lot bigger with the high sideboards on. When we had exchanged the sideboards Pa went into the woodshed and came out with an armload of wood—the wood I'd spent all summer hauling down from the mountain, and then all fall sawing into blocks and splitting. What was he doing? Finally I said something, "Pa," I asked, "what are you doing?"

"You been by the Widow Jensen's lately?" he asked. The Widow Jensen lived about two miles down the road. Her husband had died a year or so before and left her with three children, the oldest being eight. Sure, I'd been by, but so what? "Yeah," I said, "why?" "I rode by just today," Pa said. "Little Jakey was out digging around in the woodpile trying to find a few chips. They're out of wood, Matt." That was all he said and then he turned and went back into the woodshed for another armload of wood. I followed him. We loaded the sled so high that I began to wonder if the horses would be able to pull it.

Finally, Pa called a halt to our loading, then we went to the smoke house and Pa took down a big ham and a side of bacon. He handed them to me and told me to put them in the sled and wait. When he returned he was carrying a sack of flour over his right shoulder and a smaller sack of something in his left hand.

"What's in the little sack?" I asked. "Shoes. They're out of shoes. Little Jakey just had gunny sacks wrapped around his feet when he was out in the woodpile this morning. I got the children a little candy, too. It just wouldn't be Christmas without a little candy."

We rode the two miles to Widow Jensen's pretty much in silence. I tried to think through what Pa was doing. We didn't have much by worldly standards. Of course, we did have a big woodpile, though most of what was left now was still in the form of logs that I would have to saw into blocks and split before we could use it. We also had meat and flour, so we could spare that, but I knew we didn't have any money, so why was Pa buying them shoes and candy? Really, why was he doing any of this? Widow Jensen had closer neighbors than us. It shouldn't have been our concern. We came in from the blind side of the Jensen house and unloaded the wood as quietly as possible, then we took the meat and flour and shoes to the door. We knocked.

The door opened a crack and a timid voice said, "Who is it?" "Lucas Miles, Ma'am, and my son, Matt. Could we come in for a bit?" Widow Jensen opened the door and let us in. She had a blanket wrapped around her shoulders. The children were wrapped in another and were sitting in front of the fireplace by a very small fire that hardly gave off any heat at all. Widow Jensen fumbled with a match and finally lit the lamp. "We brought you a few things, Ma'am," Pa said and set down the sack of flour. I put the meat on the table. Then Pa handed her the sack that had the shoes in it. She opened it hesitantly and took the shoes out one pair at a time. There was a pair for her and one for each of the children—sturdy shoes, the best, shoes that would last. I watched her carefully. She bit her lower lip to keep it from trembling and then tears filled her eyes and started running down her cheeks. She looked up at Pa like she wanted to say something, but it wouldn't come out. "We brought a load of wood too, Ma'am," Pa said, then he turned to

me and said, "Matt, go bring enough to last for awhile. Let's get that fire up to size and heat this place up." I wasn't the same person as I went back out to bring in the wood. I had a lump in my throat and, much as I hate to admit it, there were tears in my eyes, too.

In my mind I kept seeing those three kids huddled around the fireplace and their mother standing there with tears running down her cheeks and so much gratitude in her heart that she couldn't speak. My heart swelled within me and a joy filled my soul that I'd never known before.

I had given at Christmas many times before, but never when it had made so much difference. I could see we were literally saving the lives of these people. I soon had the fire blazing and everyone's spirits soared. The kids started giggling when Pa handed them each a piece of candy and Widow Jensen looked on with a smile that probably hadn't crossed her face for a long time. She finally turned to us. "God bless you," she said. "I know the Lord himself has sent you. The children and I have been praying that he would send one of His angels to spare us."

In spite of myself, the lump returned to my throat and the tears welled up in my eyes again. I'd never thought of Pa in those exact terms before, but after Widow Jensen mentioned it I could see that it was probably true. I was sure that a better man than Pa had never walked the earth. I started remembering all the times he had gone out of his way for Ma and me, and many others. The list seemed endless as I thought on it. Pa insisted that everyone try on the shoes before we left. I was amazed when they all fit and I wondered how he had known what sizes to get. Then I guessed that if he was on an errand for the Lord that the Lord would make sure he got the right sizes.

Tears were running down Widow Jensen's face again when we stood up to leave. Pa took each of the kids in his big arms and gave them a hug. They clung to him and didn't want us to go. I could see that they missed their pa and I was glad that I still had mine. At the door Pa turned to Widow Jensen and said, "The Mrs. wanted me to invite you and the children over for Christmas dinner tomorrow. The turkey will be more than the three of us can eat, and a man can get cantankerous if he has to eat turkey for too many meals. We'll be by to get you about eleven. It'll be nice to have some little ones around again. Matt, here, hasn't been little for quite a spell." I was the youngest. My two older brothers and two older sisters were all married and had moved away.

Widow Jensen nodded and said, "Thank you, Brother Miles. I don't have to say, 'May the Lord bless you,' I know for certain He will."

Out on the sled I felt a warmth that came from deep within and I didn't even notice the cold. When we had gone a ways, Pa turned to me and said, "Matt, I want you to know something. Your ma and me have been tucking a little money away here and there all year so we could buy that rifle for you but we didn't have quite enough. Then yesterday a man who owed me a little money from years back came by to make things square. Your ma and me were real excited, thinking that now we could get you that rifle, and I started into town to do just that. But on the way I saw little Jakey out scratching in the woodpile with his feet wrapped in those gunny sacks and I knew what I had to do. So, Son, I spent the money for shoes and a little candy for those children. I hope you understand."

I understood, and my eyes became wet with tears again. I understood very well, and I was so glad Pa had

done it. Just then the rifle seemed very low on my list of priorities. Pa had given me a lot more. He had given me the look on Widow Jensen's face and the radiant smiles of her three children. The rest of my life, whenever I saw any of the Jensen's, or

split a block of wood, I remembered, and remembering brought back that same joy I felt riding home beside Pa that night. Pa had given me much more than a rifle that night, he had given me the best Christmas of my life.



Have a Beautiful Thanksgiving!

Even though I clutch my blanket and growl when the alarm rings,
Thank you, Lord, that I can hear. There are many who are deaf.

Even though I keep my eyes closed against the morning light as long as possible,
Thank you, Lord, that I can see. Many are blind.

Even though I huddle in my bed and put off rising,
Thank you, Lord, Lord, that I have the strength to rise. There are many who are bedridden.

Even though the first hour of my day is hectic, when socks are lost, toast is burned and tempers are short, my children are so loud,
Thank you, Lord, for my family. There are many who are lonely.

Even though our breakfast table never looks like the pictures in magazines and the menu is at times unbalanced,
Thank you, Lord, for the food we have. There are many who are hungry.

Even though the routine of my job often is monotonous,
Thank you, Lord, for the opportunity to work. There are many who have no job.

Even though I grumble and bemoan the fate from day to day and wish my circumstances were not so modest,
Thank you, Lord, for life.

—Author Unknown



Christmas Stolen

Karen Igla

Karen Igla passionately enjoys being a pastor's wife of nearly ten years, home educating their three children, and freelance writing. Besides wielding the pen, she also enjoys brandishing a shovel in the garden and the power drill for an occasional remodeling project at their home in Overland Park, Kansas. This article first appeared in the November/December 1999 issue of *Women Alive!*.



Why do I always get in the check-out lane that has a problem? This time the checker was a trainee. His trainer, a pretty girl whose face was pinched with the strain of her patience, was meticulously checking each price entry he made. Trying to restrain my own impatience, I dug in my purse for my shopping list. I had spent too much time in this hobby store. Thinking of the other stores I wanted to go to, I noticed it was already dark outside.

"That comes to \$34.17," she said.

Though I had bought the least expensive of the choices, the total was still more than I should have spent. *I'm supposed to watch my budget better than this*, I thought, as I tucked the receipt into my purse. I picked up my two small plastic bags of Christmas tree decorations and walked to my husband's worn but faithful '87 Sentra.

I set the bags on the passenger seat and drove to the grocery store. I got out, leaving the car unlocked, as I normally do. Then I hesitated. A thought grazed my mind. *What if someone should steal those bags?*

That is ridiculous, I thought. Who would expect anything worth stealing in this old car? Besides, it's so dark no one would see the bags anyway.

When I returned to the car with my groceries, the bags were gone.

"I can't believe it!" I slapped my palms on the steering wheel. With disgust, I thought about the person who would steal Christmas decorations. Well, there was no use broiling in my anger, I reflected. I knew God would fix whoever had been so brazen.

Immediately, I felt chagrin for having ignored the Holy Spirit's prompting to protect those bags.

"I'm so sorry I was careless with your things, Lord," I said in genuine repentance.

Wearily, I finished my other shopping before returning to the hobby store to purchase more of the same items. I had my cart half full when I spied the girl who had been training the checker.

"Do you remember me?" I asked. "I was here earlier buying these things. Now, I'm back because someone stole them from my car."

"No, I don't remember you," she said. Then, peering into my cart, she exclaimed, "It's the same stuff!" Turning, she headed to the back of the store. "Wait here," she called over her shoulder. "My manager needs to talk to you!"

Soon she returned with a tall, young man. "Are you buying these things?" he asked.



"Yes, I am," I said, and told him what had happened.

"A woman was in here just a little while ago trying to return these items. She insisted that she had just been through the line.

"Is she still here?"

"No, she left. They always get nervous when you ask them about the receipt. She said she would be back tomorrow." He looked at the items in my cart. "Well, I have your stuff."

Did I hear right?

"I have your stuff," he repeated.


"Well, I have the receipt." I dug into my purse and produced the proof of purchase.

The manager examined the receipt. "Wait here. I'll be back with your stuff."

"Oh, thank you, Lord!" I burst out. "God took care of me. God watched out for me!"

Smiling, the checker returned to her register. People in line looked in my direction. They could not know that the geyser of joy springing from my heart was only partially due to having my things restored. The overwhelming sense that God keeps charge over all that concerns me caused that fountain.

I winged home. I briskly hung the lights, the ornaments, and last of all, the plastic crystal star. At that moment, my three children arrived home. They squealed with delight when they saw the newly adorned tree.

"Listen! Let me tell you what God did for us tonight!" After I related the story, we gave thanks and admired the tree. The decorations were the cheapest the store offered, but to me they will always be priceless. 

Ten Commandments for Christmas

1. Thou shalt not leave Christ out of Christmas.
2. Thou shalt not value thy gifts by their costs.
3. Thou shalt give thyself with thy gifts.
4. Thou shalt not let Santa Claus take the place of Jesus Christ.
5. Thou shalt spend sensibly and responsibly.
6. Thou shalt not neglect the church.
7. Thou shalt not forget the needy.
8. Thou shalt experience Christmas as a little child.
9. Thou shalt prepare yourself spiritually for Christmas.
10. Thou shalt give to missions.

If you try to keep these ten commandments this Christmas, you will experience the true joy and love that the Christ of Christmas offers.



The Gold and Ivory Tablecloth

Howard E. Schade

At Christmas time men and women everywhere gather in their churches to wonder anew at the greatest miracle the world has ever known. But the story I like best to recall was not a miracle—not exactly.

It happened to a pastor who was very young. His church was very old. Once long ago, it had flourished. Famous men had preached from its pulpit, and prayed before its altar. Rich and poor alike had worshiped there and built it beautifully. Now the good days had passed from the section of town where it stood. But the pastor and his young wife believed in their run-down church. They felt that with paint, hammer, and faith they could get it in shape. Together they went to work.

But late in December, a severe storm whipped through the river valley, and the worst blow fell on the little church—a huge chunk of rain-soaked plaster fell out of the inside wall just behind the altar. Sorrowfully, the pastor and his wife swept away the mess, but they couldn't hide the ragged hole.

The pastor looked at it and had to remind himself quickly, "Thy will be done!" But his wife wept, "Christmas is only two days away!"

That afternoon the dispirited couple attended an auction held for the benefit of a youth group. The auctioneer opened a box and shook out of its folds a handsome gold and ivory lace tablecloth. It was a magnificent item, nearly 15 feet long. But it, too, dated from a long-vanished era. Who today, had any use for such a thing? There were a few half-hearted bids. The pastor was seized with what he thought was a great idea. He bid it in for \$6.50.

He carried the cloth back to the church and tacked it up on the wall behind the altar. It completely hid the hole, and the extraordinary beauty of its shimmering handiwork cast a fine, holiday glow over the chancel. It was a great triumph. Happily he went back to preparing his Christmas sermon.

Just before noon on the day of Christmas eve, as the pastor was opening the church, he noticed a woman standing in the cold at the bus stop.

"The bus won't be here for 40 minutes!" he called, and he invited her into the church to get warm.

She told him that she had come from the city that morning to be

interviewed for a job as governess to the children of one of the wealthy families in town, but she had been turned down. A war refugee, her English was imperfect.

The woman sat down in a pew and chafed her hands and rested. After a while, she dropped her head and prayed. She looked up as the pastor began to adjust the great gold and ivory lace cloth across the hole. She rose suddenly and walked up the steps of the chancel. She looked at the tablecloth. The pastor smiled and started to tell her about the storm damage, but she didn't seem to listen. She took up a fold of the cloth and rubbed it between her fingers.

"It is mine!" she said. "It is my banquet cloth!" She lifted up a corner and showed the surprised pastor that there were initials monogrammed on it. "My husband had the cloth made especially for me in Brussels! There could not be another like it!"

For the next few minutes, the woman and the pastor talked excitedly together. She explained that she was Viennese and that she and her husband had opposed the Nazis and decided to leave the country. They were advised to go separately.

Her husband put her on a train for Switzerland. They planned that he would join her as soon as he could

arrange to ship their household goods across the border.

She never saw him again. Later she heard that he had died in a concentration camp. "I have always felt that it was my fault to leave without him," she said. "Perhaps these years of wandering have been my punishment!"

The pastor tried to comfort her, and he urged her to take the cloth with her. She refused. Then she went away.

As the church began to fill on Christmas Eve, it was clear that the cloth was going to be a great success. It had been skillfully designed to look its best by candlelight.

After the service, the pastor stood at the doorway; many people told him that the church looked beautiful. One gentle-faced, middle-aged man, the local clock and watch repairman, looked rather puzzled.

"It is strange," he said in his soft accent. "Many years ago my wife, God rest her, and I owned such a cloth. In our home in Vienna, my wife put it on the table," and he smiled, "only when the bishop came to dinner!"

The pastor suddenly became very excited. He told the jeweler about the woman who had been in the church earlier in the day. The startled jeweler clutched the pastor's arm. "Can it be? Does she live?"

Together the two got in touch with the family who had interviewed her. Then, in the pastor's car they started for the city. And as Christmas Day was born, this man and his wife, who had been separated through so many saddened Yuletides, were reunited.

To all who heard this story, the joyful purpose of the storm that had knocked a hole in the wall of the church was now quite clear. Of course, people said it was a miracle, but I think you will agree it was the season for it!



There Never Was Another

There never was another
who was a human child and also
a divine son.

There never was another
who was wounded by Satan and who,
at the same time, crushed Satan.

There never was another
who walked the earth before He was born;
who was as old as His heavenly Father
and ages older than His earthly mother;
who wrote a law and 2,000 years later
came under that law;
who was judge of men, yet was led as
a felon from one court to another.

There never was another
who was Lord of the Sabbath, and yet accused
of being a Sabbath breaker;
who was appointed Saviour of humanity,
yet crucified by humanity.

He was the King of Glory,
but He wore an earthly crown of thorns.

He was the Prince of Life—dead.
Victim of a Roman Cross
Victor of a Jewish Grave.

The Creator,
a creature.

The Saviour,
a servant.

The Son of God,
a baby in Bethlehem.

—Author unknown



Christmas Blesses Small



J. Grant Swank, Jr.

In an age of monster houses and humongous malls, it is a breath of fresh air to come upon Christmas.

In a time of church-growth-regardless and humans-turned-into-stats, it is such a break from the religious strain to come upon Christmas.

After all, Christmas offers nothing but small.

There is a loft at the end of a horse-parking lot outside a non-descript tourist home. Nothing impressive, really.

There are inside that loft a few roosters and chickens, some hay rats playing tag and a few donkeys ignoring it all. Not all that chic.

There is alongside the donkey a cow's trough filled with sticky straw, scratchy-and-all-that to the human flesh. Not all that bed-n-breakfast variety, actually.

There is inside that cow's trough a tiny baby—making funny faces, sleeping on occasion, crying some, goo-gooing into His mother's kind eyes and then scanning this foster

father's rough beard. Not really a royal Kodak moment.

There is nothing Trump Tower about this whole scene, let alone Crystal Cathedral or St. Peter's in Rome.

Nevertheless, there it is—plain and simple—and small, small, small.

Which brings to my memory a little church atop a village hill in Nova Scotia. Plus a suburban church outside Boston where a couple dozen gather faithfully. Still another typical New England sanctuary in hamlet Monson.

Not much on the charts. Not much to report for the figures. Not much to write up in the annals of numerical catalogs.

Just a humble spot here and there—small.

It is not that "small" is more holy than large. It is just that God has a particular liking for small. And humble. And out-of-the-way. And at times even downright scuttle-butt, like Nazareth.

Yet what marvel is wrapped up in small when God takes hold of the trimmings! From a manger comes the King of Kings and Lord of Lords. From the stable comes the name Mary, a Jewess remembered for all time for her lowliness. Plus a carpenter Joe who has been

especially revered by men world-'round—generation upon generation.

It reminds me of people I've met in my own sojourn. They were usually the peasant types, poor and not that much into worldly power or prestige. You might call them "small."

Yet out of those broken, nobody-from-noplace lives have come such utter kindness, sacrifice and wisdom that would set any Bethlehem head aspinning.

That's why I tend to gravitate toward the border people, that is, those who are often lined up against the wall, sometimes even dumped out because they don't count.

I find them particularly jeweled inside, where it counts. I have discovered that God does, too.

So the next time that you are tempted to be enamored by the large, big, blown-out-of-proportions religious this-or-that, why not count yourself out for a change?

When you do, you may just find yourself all the way back to Bethlehem. And what a blessing you will come upon—roosters, shepherds, hay and all.

Please start this Christmas. In so doing, you will come upon God's real Christmas—your reason for breathing.



Grant Swank is pastor of the New Hope Church in Windham, Maine.

A Small Child Shall Lead...

Gloria Neidigh

The evening is cold and damp; the earlier sun has slid behind gathering rain clouds. I pull on my black wool coat. I have been tired and rushed most of the day. After all, it is Friday and I've had many things to accomplish. Unfortunately deadlines have been missed and I've had to make hurried last minute phone calls. I had planned to get everything done but my strength has run out. When my strength leaves me, I have to stop and lie down. Deadlines have to wait.

Dealing with chronic illness often leaves me depleted of needed vitality. Normal events often challenge me. Though my mind is willing, my body is not.

Tonight I feel like a frazzled chewed up slipper. Someone has suggested to me that I need to be wrapped in a soft gauze, put in a warm jar; and placed on a high shelf where all of life can pass by without touching me. At this moment, the idea sounds most peaceful.

My husband is a minister. Tonight is a special night for he will baptize two wonderful ladies. We have eagerly planned a nice dinner for them. All has gone well. Now it is time to go to the church for the baptismal service, but my energy is gone. Can I make it through three more hours of driving across town, leading out in song service, visiting with

the family members, and driving back home. My exhausted body is demanding to lie down; I want to pull the covers over a pounding head and close my tired eyes.

Instead I grab my gloves, button my coat, smile at the hollow reflection of myself in the mirror and pray, "God, please give me strength for the next few hours."

The song service goes well. As each candidate enters the baptismal water, I quietly reflect on my own commitment and baptism as a child many years ago. With a grateful heart, I thank God for my son's recent baptism.

The benediction brings the service to an end. Family and friends gather in a most celebrant and festive mood. There are hugs and tears and more hugs.

Towards the rear of the sanctuary, I notice Rick, a single father, sitting alone with his small son, Nicholas. How faithful and supportive he has been while attending Sabbath services this past year with his two sons.

I make my way back to this little family. Five-year-old Nicholas is sitting on his father's knees looking intently towards the baptismal area. Touching his tousled blond hair where cowlicks play in jest, I say, "Hi Nicholas." This momentarily brings his attention away from the front of the church.

Gloria Neidigh is a pastor's wife living in Tillamook, Oregon. She lives in a beautiful country setting by the bay. Gloria enjoys all kinds of weather and she enjoys writing as she listens to the rain pelt her window panes.



"You won't believe what Nicholas just asked me!" his father speaks incredulously.

"What?" I inquire, knowing that anything might be possible from Nicholas.

"He's asked if he could be baptized."

"Really?"

Nicholas's father continues to tell me that he asked his son if he knew what it means to be baptized. Nicholas had looked into his father's eyes and responded, "Yeah, it is when I am dunked in the water and come up with Jesus. Jesus takes away my sins."

Absorbed in our conversation, we don't notice that Nicholas is walking up the aisle. Needing to see more, he climbs up onto the pastor's platform chair. Standing on tippy-toes, he is peering into the watery baptismal area.

The head deacon remains busy cleaning up the pews, while his wife nervously watches as Nicholas looks into the baptismal tank.

"Look at Nicholas." I say to his father as I point to the platform area.

His father begins a quick approach maneuver to rescue and remove one small son from one pastor's large chair.

At that same moment, my husband takes in the scene from across the room. He sees a small child with a heart looking for Jesus. Intercepting the fast approaching father, my husband whispers, "Let me talk to him about baptism."

Going to the large chair where Nicholas continues to stand on tippy-toes, my husband says, "Would you like me to show you how people who give their hearts to Jesus are baptized?"

With eyes wide as saucers, Nicholas' small hand reaches out as he responds, "Yeah."

My heart rejoices and I feel strong again.



Just Yesterday

Norene Lyon Creighton

Just yesterday, it seems, they were here,
All sitting in their places,
Sweetly lighting up the pews
With their happy, eager faces.

Now a dimness and a darkness
Seems to hover in the aisles.
The sparkle is all missing;
Gone the youthful smiles.

We thought we were an active church.
The Board and Dorcas met
And talked of things that could be done,
And many plans were set.

The building fund was mentioned —
The investment program too,
Ingathering had its moment.
Oh, so many things to do!

But it was all a little difficult
When all the talk was done
To plan for hikes and socials
That would give the youth some fun.

We let them pass out papers.
(We wished they had more zeal!)
But we failed to plan for programs
With special youth appeal.

We tried to make our church increase,
And searched for souls afar,
While the young people were departing
Through the back door left ajar!

So now they're gone! We wonder why
We've lost our precious youth.
Could it be we were too busy
Merely talking about the truth?

Norene Lyon Creighton writes from the South Pacific Division.

Ministering to the Undermined

Muriel Larson

The water level at Lake Hartwell was down four feet, and I now found a good walking beach. On my hike I noticed how deeply some banks had been eroded by high stormy waters. Tree roots lay exposed. Then I saw a tall, thick-boled pine tree blocking my way. Its top disappeared far out in the water; only one brown-needled branch could be seen. Looking at its exposed roots, I saw the red clay on them had hardened like a little dish I once made.

Smaller trees pulled down by the big one still showed life, because they were still partly rooted. As I climbed over the pine tree, I saw a remarkable thing. A rhododendron bush covered with pink blossoms sat on a big piece of ground that had been dislodged by the falling pine.

Its beauty touched me with sadness; for that lovely bush would be covered with water when the lake level rose. And the busy and young trees would suffer because the big tree's roots had been undermined by stormy waters during years gone by! As I looked closer, I noticed that one of the rhododendron's branches had rooted, making a new plant. With a stick, I dug out that little plant. I thought, "This bush may die, but its offspring may live in my back yard."

As I continued walking, I thought of five backslidden professing Christian campers I had met and talked to about the Lord that week. "They have been undermined by the trials and temptations of this life," I thought, "just as that pine tree was undermined by stormy water."

Those of us who serve the Lord in Christian education or pulpit have often felt discouraged as various people have dropped out. We may send them cards, call, or visit them, but for one reason or another we may never discover why they no longer come.

I drew those five campers out, however, and discovered why they had fallen away. Knowing these reasons may give us insight to help restore others and reduce the most frequent causes of missing members in our classes and churches. With the Lord's help, we may bring back some of these straying ones, just as I saw a way to perhaps save something of that beautiful rhododendron. Also, by being aware of these pitfalls, we may be able to prevent some from falling into dangerous places.

Galatians 6:1 says, "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness, considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted"

Muriel Larson is a pastor's wife who has authored 17 Christian books, numerous articles, and 22 songs. She enjoys reading, gardening, camping, and traveling.



(KJV). We who serve in Christian education or pulpit are in the best positions possible to know and minister to others and understand their problems. Christians usually look up to their teachers and pastors and respond readily to their concern for them.

Let's look at why those campers dropped out of church.

Looking at People

Roy had come to the campgrounds ahead of his family and I had helped him back his large RV through the pine trees. As we chatted, I learned he was a Christian, but no longer attending church. What had caused Roy to fall away?

He had stumbled over a fellow Christian. "The Lord saved my cousin out of a bad life," he told me. "But then he zealously condemned everyone who didn't measure up to his new standards. I got tired of it, so I dropped out of church. Figured I could be just as good a Christian without going."

Faulty reasoning of course. But many Christians do stop worshiping and serving the Lord because they look at people or their actions and get offended by them instead of keeping their eyes on the Lord. Had Roy's Bible teacher visited Roy in his home, he might have learned of this cause and offered to have a friendly talk with his cousin about his over-zealous attitude. Though Roy may have fallen short as a Christian in some areas, as long as he was coming to church, the Holy Spirit could have dealt with him through the preaching and teaching of God's Word and in answer to his teacher's prayers.

Circumstances

Susan and Robert fell away from church because of circumstances. When they married, they moved to a distant town. They tried several

churches but didn't get attached.

I've known a number of people who have fallen away from serving the Lord after moving to a new location or taking a job requiring night shift work or Sunday work. Others have been washed away by weekend pleasure trips.

Hebrews 10:24, 25 says, "And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the day approaching" (NIV).

When the members of our class or church move away, our influence on them may be limited. On the other

they also had a problem that may have undermined the musical ministry they once had.

When I asked Dorothy if she was a Christian, she said she wasn't sure. So I asked her if she had received Christ as her Savior.

"Oh, yes, I have," she declared, "but you can see, I smoke!" She waved her cigarette in the air to emphasize her point.


Being enslaved by cigarettes, alcohol, or something else is only one aspect of worldliness. Pride is even worse, for it causes many to hold grudges, refuse to forgive other people, seethe with bitterness and resentment. So they may either drop out of the fellowship—or tear it apart.

How Can We Help


How can we reach people who have fallen away from the Lord and the church? By consistent love and consistent prayer. As we pray for them, the Lord will work in their lives to draw them back to Himself, through trials, through sending messengers to them, through speaking to their hearts.

James wrote, "My brothers, if one of you should wander from the truth and someone should bring him back, remember this: Whoever turns a sinner from the error of his way will save him from death and cover over a multitude of sins" (James 5:19, 20, NIV).

Just as I tried to save a remnant of that beautiful bush doomed to die, so we can help brothers and sisters coming back to the Lord. We can do this by showing them love, by following the leading of the Spirit in speaking to them, by praying for them. And we can retain people in our classes and churches by being friendly with godly love and Christ-like spirits. A friendly church draws people to its heart, just as Jesus drew us to His.



*How can we reach
people who have fallen
away from the Lord
and the church?*



hand, we could contact a church in the area to which they have moved and ask that they be visited and invited to church. Furthermore, in our mobile society, people regularly move into our church's neighborhood. By visiting such people, we can encourage them to come to our church. Non-Christians need to be reached for Christ; fellow Christians need our concern and care (Galatians 6:10).

Worldliness

Dorothy and John fell away from the Lord because of circumstances, but

Ministering in the Home



Sylvia Muvuti

Ministering in the home is vitally important if we want our children to be children of the covenant. As shepherdess/clergy families, we must take seriously our commitment to working together as parents to care for our little ones.

As a parent I have found myself ministering in the home in various ways. Through Bible story-telling, I am able to teach my children the value of obedience, truthfulness, patience and kindness. I constantly endeavor to “make home a little heaven on earth.”

My efforts to evangelize the children have not been without challenges. Perhaps you can relate to some of the stories below.

We started singing to our children when they were just a few days old. In fact, the picture of Jesus was introduced to Faith, our daughter, shortly after she was born. When Faith turned two, her father began telling her a story that demonstrated Jesus’ love. He explained that Jesus is always inviting His people to Him. Towards the end of the story he showed Faith the picture of Jesus and said, “Jesus is stretching His hands and is inviting you to come to Him.” Faith was so touched that she stood up and said, “I want to go to Jesus now. Tell me how.”

At this, her father and I became tongue-tied. We realized Faith’s

genuine cry needed to be answered. Her father took Faith into his arms and promised he would answer her question the next day. We prayed for the words to answer our precious two-year-old and we realized the importance of evangelizing to our young daughter at an early age. Jesus was real to her and she wanted to be with Him.

Apart from lecturing to our children about heaven and its beauties, we are striving to make our home a little heaven on earth in the way we relate to one another in our conduct and conversation. We want to do nothing that will make them doubt the sweetness, reality and beauty of heaven. Ours is the work of consolidating what the Sabbath School and Adventurer teachers have taught them and to ensure that they put into practice the good things learned.

The unexpected occurrence of a fire at our home on October 10, 1996, gave us the opportunity to teach our children about the second coming, about heaven and the destruction that is going to be here when Christ comes.

We were dressed in our work clothes when the fire began. Two of our children did not even have shoes on and Tino’s trousers were torn. Once the fire began, we immediately ran out of the house. As we were watching the blazing house, I turned

Sylvia lives in Zimbabwe, Africa and has worked as a school teacher for 10 years. She and her district pastor husband have three children: Faith, 9 years; Tino, 7 years; and Delight, 2 years. Sylvia enjoys music and spending time with her family.



to my children and said, "Jesus will come unexpectedly just like the fire did. How will you feel if the state of your heart is like the state of your dress today?" It was a good analogy for the kids and they immediately threw the question back to me.

When they questioned why God would allow the fire incident, I said, "Do not think that bad things will only happen to others. Instead we must be prepared for the pain by living in faith and gratitude to God each day. Also, it is important to realize that God will be with us in the middle of our trials and problems. He will comfort and lead us." God's way may not be easy but it is the best. Our response should be to trust and obey.


We have stressed the importance of giving to God and mankind. We have made our kids believe that if one gives to God a tenth of his income, his resources will never dry. And it has worked. Faith and Tino have tried to be faithful in their tithes and offerings and since then they have never had their coffers dry. This has increased their trust in God. After discussing the importance of giving to the needy, our children began giving a small amount of money to the blind in our community. One day as we passed through town, I overheard them whispering to one another, "Why doesn't Mum give to the blind?" I realized I had not been exemplary. I had told my children of the importance of giving but I had not been an example to them. I realized that ministering is not "do as I say" but rather "do as I teach." By the example we set we exert an influence that will not be banished from our little ones' minds.

Our daughter Faith has an angel stuck on her coat-bed. She knows the importance of guardian angels and realizes the good angels do. Yet she has questions we will soon have to grapple with. After reading the story about Passover, she and her brother

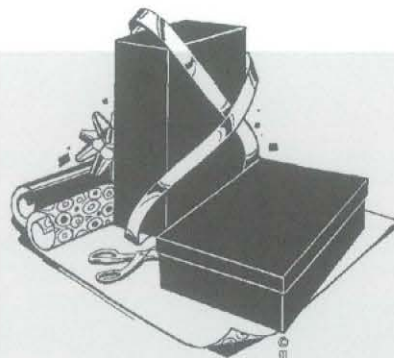
took some red food coloring and marked the door. They had inscribed these words above the door. "Please angel, do not kill us or me." God, in His wisdom, will help me answer the questions my children ask. The work of ministering at home has just begun.

To avoid misleading them by wrong examples, home should not be the place to discuss people, be they church leaders or members. Children should not overhear conversations about others as this may breed a hatred and lack of trust and faith within them regarding the church and its members.

I want to challenge you moms and dads, minister to your children while

they are still young before those years come when they are unpredictable, defiant and moody. The younger they are, the sweeter and more compliant they are. So minister to them in song and Bible story telling. Create a Christ-like home environment where the angels love to be. Be exemplary in your speech, your dress and your deportment. And when all is said and done, we may proudly say to Christ, "Here are the children that you entrusted into my hands, so that also it may be said, thou good and faithful servant. You've been faithful in little things. Enter now into the joy of your Lord." 

Gifts



Rich gifts wax poor when givers prove unkind.

—Shakespeare

Gifts

To your enemy, forgiveness.
To an opponent, tolerance.
To a friend, your heart.
To a customer, service.
To all men, charity.
To every child, a good example.
To yourself, respect.

Charity is a virtue of the heart; not of the hands.

—Unknown

You give but little when you give of your possessions. It is when you give of your heart that you truly give.

—Kahlil Gibran

Rings and jewels are not gifts, but apologies for gifts. The only gift is a portion of thyself.

—Ralph Waldo Emerson

Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting.

—Elizabeth Bibesco

Give what you have. To someone it may be better than you dare to think.

—Henry Wadsworth Longfellow

If instead of a gem, or even a flower, we should cast the gift of a loving thought into the heart of a friend, that would be giving as the angels give.

—George Macdonald

God Hears Prisoners

Olga Murga

Fifty prisoners of the Bucha prison do not come to breakfast, miss lunch and ignore dinner. Even though the food is not very good, it is almost impossible to get through the day without sustenance. The prison work program consists of hard physical labor. The prison officials are worried about this food strike. Fifty prisoners refusing to eat is unheard of.

These fifty convicts have little in common. They are sentenced to different amounts of prison-time, they have different life stories, they come from a variety of backgrounds. Many of them grew up in orphanages and have never seen their families. Some of them are hard-time criminals while others happened to make one mistake that started their lives rolling downhill. Because of their crimes, these prisoners are parted from their wives and children. They are sentenced to an empty restricted life in prison without any comfort. These people have never heard anything good about God and religion.

One day there is an unknown visitor. A Seventh-day Adventist pastor, Alexei Antonovich Sytnik, comes to visit the prison. This pastor is filled with God's love; he wants to share the Good News to all people, especially those who are suffering. Pastor Alexei takes Jesus Himself to every visit.

Every Sabbath the pastor happily preaches a sermon in his church in

Barovary, near Kiev. He shares his experiences with people from different prisons with his congregation.

When Alexei visits the prison, the rude prisoners' faces grow kinder, their hearts become soft and they respond openly to God's love. Many of them accept Jesus as their Savior. Right on the prison's grounds a baptistry is built. The first men, former prisoners, but now forgiven by Christ, enter the water. A new church community is organized at the Bucha prison.

During one visit, Pastor Alexei brings bad news. His wife Yekaterina is seriously ill. She has been taken to a hospital and the doctor diagnosed a heart attack. She is getting worse and worse. The pastor now has many dedicated, faithful friends at the prison. He shares with them about his trouble and asks them to pray for his wife. He does not expect that his problems will be taken so close to heart by his friends. They remember all the times when Alexei's wife had to stay home alone with her little baby because her husband went and visited the prisoners. They decide not to just pray for the pastor's wife, but also to fast. Now you know why fifty prisoners refuse to eat for twenty-four hours. It is not a political protest, it is an act of unity with their pastor.

God hears the prayers of these faithful people. Yekaterina is released from the hospital and her condition improves.

Olga Murga lives in the Ukraine. She is an evangelist as well as a pastor's wife. Her husband serves as Secretary of the Ukraine Union. Olga has three children and two grandchildren.

But there is someone at the Bucha prison who is very unhappy with the success of God's work. The enemy of Christ, Satan himself, is working there. He begins to influence those criminals whose lives are ruined so badly, those who do not unite with God. They behave in a very rude way. They try to cause the Christian prisoners to use force and foul language. Jesus Himself has to teach the believers and give them strength to keep calm and be kind to others. The anti-Christians do all they can to make the believers turn away from their path, but all their attempts fail.


They are torn apart with anger. "Are you trying to play saints here, in jail? It's impossible!" But there is nothing impossible for the Lord. He strengthens His followers and helps them throughout their lives.

When the followers of the evil understand that they are too weak to desecrate the souls of God's children, they decide to do the extreme. They desecrate the baptistry, the baptistry built with love by the believers. There are more people who wish to be baptized, but now they have no place for baptism. The demons rejoice. They think that even if the baptistry is cleaned up, it will be impossible to fully cleanse it and people will hesitate to get baptized in it. The pastor is worried. But those who have experienced the power of prayer, start praying to God and asking for His help. They pray that God will bring disgrace upon those who desecrated the baptistry.

The pastor goes home and asks his wife to pray with him about the newborn prison's church community. And God answers their prayers in a wonderful way. On Sabbath, November 11, 1994, the pastor shares with his congregation the following information.

The officials of the Bucha prison decided to get rid of the old baptistry; those who participated in

its desecration were ordered to dig a new one. The new baptistry was soon able to be used by those who wanted to be baptized. Perhaps, among them

there were those who thought that evil-doing could stop the good news brought to the prisoners by the kind pastor. 

Christmas Everywhere

Phillips Brooks

Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!
Christmas in lands of the fir tree and pine,
Christmas in lands of the palm tree and vine,
Christmas where snowcaps stand solemn and white,
Christmas where cornfields lie sunny and bright,
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

Christmas where children are hopeful and gay,
Christmas where old men are patient and gray,
Christmas where peace, like a dove in its flight,
Broods o'er brave men in the thick of the fight,
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

For the Christ Child who comes is the Master of all,
No palace too great and no cottage too small;
The angels who welcome Him sing from the heights,
"In the City of David, a King in His might,"
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

Then let every heart keep its Christmas within,
Christ's pity for sorrow, Christ's hatred for sin,
Christ's care for the weakest, Christ's courage for right,
Christ's dread of the darkness, Christ's love of the light,
Everywhere, everywhere, Christmas tonight!

Phillips Brooks (1835 - 1893) was an American author, poet and clergyman. He is perhaps best remembered for his Christmas hymn, "O Little Town of Bethlehem."

Tim the High-Flier

Grenville Kent

My mother-in-law Ann . . . No, gentle reader, don't think that bitter twisted thought! You'll get no in-law jokes from me. Mine's lovely—even if she does have tattoos and ride a Harley. She didn't mean to run over the guide dog. We get on well: when she visits my house, I don't try to run her life, and I don't try to run my life.

Seriously, she's a lovely woman.

She was out walking and saw a baby bird lying on the footpath. It had one eye, no feathers, and an army of hungry ants swarming all over it.

High above was a nest, and a mother feeding chicks. Ann guessed that this little fellow had hatched with one eye, and the mother had squawked "Reject!" and thrown him out of the nest to die. He was weak but his face looked determined. He wasn't getting ready to tell his social worker about his rough childhood. He was thinking, *I've got not time to be a victim—I'm gonna have a life!*

As ants bit him, even crawling into his throat, he was wriggling in a huge effort to survive. Ann's maternal instincts clicked on. She has sympathy for strays—which is why she let me near her daughters. She *had* to take him home.

She picked off all the ants with tweezers and fed him warm water and honey, then Weet-Bix and milk, then mashed egg. He hoed in with great gusto, and even tried biting the spoon.

The kids named him Tim after a favorite uncle, but as he grew it became clear that he was not a fancy parrot with a flashy designer wardrobe. He was growing boring brown and grey feathers typical for plain old sparrows. Luckily no-one told him he was ordinary.

Tim had no bird example to copy, so he thought he was human. This gave him great confidence, but it meant he didn't use the feathers he was growing—he only walked. Ann decided to teach him to fly. She's a Qantas Frequent Flyer. (Please note I said nothing about broom-sticks—you don't make those jokes when your mother-in-law has Mafia connections.)

But how do you teach a bird to fly? Ann held him high and dropped him. He probably thought, "Oh, no—another mother is throwing me away," but even in his panic he tried. He flapped like made from instinct until she caught him just above the floor. He would hang on like mad. ("No., no, please—not that again.") Gradually it became a game. He got used to the feel of the wind and learned to slow his fall, then lift his body weight on his wings, then to make short hops. Ann watched with awe and a little envy as he discovered the mystery of flight.

Eventually Tim became a seasoned stunt pilot. He could land gently on moving heads (the avian equivalent of an aircraft carrier landing in a storm by night). He could even

Pastor Grenville Kent is creative director at Adventist Media in Sydney, Australia and a traveling speaker at youth outreaches. He and his wife Carla enjoy surfing, reading and the novelty of parenthood (daughter Zoe is 4 months old).



manage low traction runways on bald heads without using his claws.

Tim became family. He flew down at 6 a.m. to pull the curls behind Ann's ears and chirp, "Get up, get up! Feed me! It's time to live again! Whoopee!" When Ann and Mike went for a walk, he went for a fly beside them. He would come to the beach and play in the trees until the family shouted, "Come on, Tim!"; then come down and ride home on someone's head in the car.

When visitors came, Tim landed on the knee or arm of each one in turn, and sang a conversation. No one could believe that "just a plain old sparrow" had so much personality. Mike said that if we think plain, ordinary people aren't worth our time, we miss out on a lot. He'd repeat Jesus' words: "You can buy two sparrows for a dollar but I'm telling you that when one of them dies, God Himself notices. So relax, you're worth even more than sparrows."

Once a cat stalked Tim as he chattered away on Mike's finger in the garden. Mike was studying intently and Tim lacked peripheral vision, so they knew nothing until the moggie launched, its claws ripping across Tim's belly, opening up a huge gash, and finally stopping deep in Mike's finger.

Mike yelled and gave the cat a flying lesson over a fence. Tim's intestines were hanging out in loops onto the ground and he had his tough, determined face on.


Mike rushed next door to a retired medical missionary. He had no medical supplies, but he found a needle and thread in his wife's sewing kit and cleaned it with methylated spirits. As Mike held Tim's innards in, he carefully sewed. Then he gave Mike some attention. Tim had no time to be a victim—he was flying again in 15 minutes.

One spring, Mike and Ann went on holidays for a week. The neighbor

bird sat him lovingly, but he fretted for his people. As they went for a walk/fly, Tim saw his first female sparrow. *Hoomba, hoomba!* It was like he had flown into a window. As he flew to her singing, the neighbor almost heard Adam's words, "At last—this is flesh of my flesh!"

The neighbor watched, worried that she might reject him for his missing eye, but Tim was as confident as ever, singing with great brio ("I only have eye for you"). He won her heart and after a farewell victory lap, he went off with her.

When Mike and Ann came home, they were happy for him, but worried that he had no skills to survive in the wild. But Tim built her a masterful nest in the local dairy. Occasionally they'd see a one-eyed sparrow rushing around finding food for the love of his life and their six perfect young.

Now, what was a I complaining about? 



"... Unto you is born this day in the city of David a Saviour, which is Christ the Lord" (Luke 2:11).



Shepherdess Reflections from the Toronto World Ministers Council



Shepherdess leaders from around the world who serve our ministry families

It is all over now, but the memories of Toronto in June and the pastors' wives who came together for four days of inspiration and fellowship will continue to bring a smile each time I remember the good times we shared.

For those of you who were there, you carry with you your personal experiences. For those of you who were not, following is a brief description of our fellowship.

Approximately 2,500 Shepherdesses from all parts of the world attended the World Ministers Council June 25-29. Special meetings and seminars ministered to the specific concerns and challenges and blessings that come with being "married to the minister"!

Morning meetings purposefully began at an hour that enabled the whole family to participate together in worship and was followed by a special presentation on clergy family life by Dr. Archibold Hart.

After lunch each day there was a Shepherdess Plenary meeting. Special guest speakers included Kari Paulsen,

Kathleen Hart, Mary Barrett, Netty Rantung, and Sandra Pearson. Rae Lee Cooper stimulated our muscles and rejuvenated us with a special stretch and exercise time. Afternoon seminars followed. Praise music was provided by Jim and Marsha Teel, a pastoral couple from Marietta, Georgia; Renee Baker, a pastor's wife from Illinois; and Rick Ferret, a pastor from Australia.

For Shepherdesses wanting a moment of solitary peace or a quiet refuge from the crowds for a conversation with a friend and a cup of herbal tea, the Shepherdess Living Room, hosted by Judy Osborne provided the perfect ambiance. Pacific Press generously hosted this lovely area with complimentary herbal tea, inspirational books, and soft CD's playing in the background.

Programming geared to PK's each afternoon provided the opportunity

for individual members of the pastor's family to participate in an activity designed just for them.

Enjoy the few pictorial highlights included here:



Kari Paulsen opened the first Shepherdess Plenary with a heart warming affirmation of ministry wives and shared her personal testimony and love of Jesus with us. It touched the hearts of all of us.

Netty Rantung's stories of her mission experiences kept us on the edge of our seats.



Frances McClure (at the pulpit) and division coordinators acknowledge the women from their territories.

Rae Lee Cooper kept us physically in shape with her daily exercise time.



Stretching and exercising with Rae Lee kept us alert and better focused!



Kathleen Hart talked to us about actions and reactions.

Mary Barrett spoke about coping in the ministry family and gave us courage and hope despite the despair we may experience.



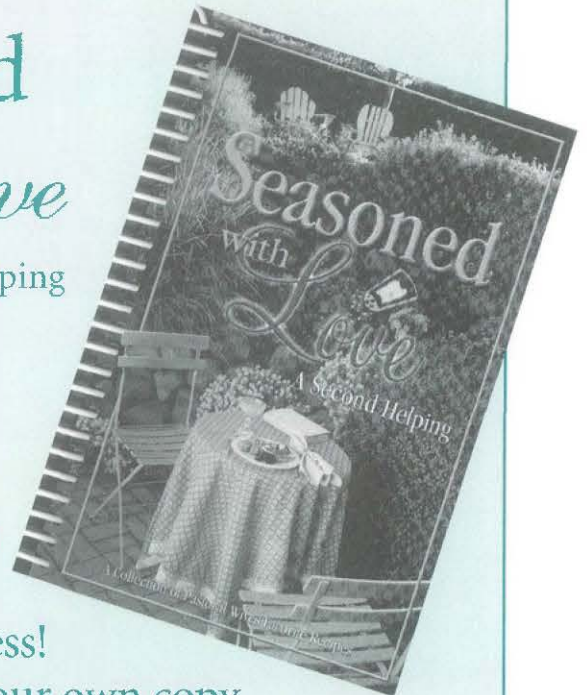
Sandy Pearson's devotional came from her heart and ministered to our souls.

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