

# The Journal



A SHEPHERDESS INTERNATIONAL RESOURCE FOR MINISTRY SPOUSES

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## *I'll Pay You for That!*

A hen trod on a duck's foot. She did not mean to do it, and it did not hurt the duck much; but the duck said, "*I'll pay you for that!*" So the duck flew at the old hen, but as she did so her wing struck an old goose, who stood close by.

"*I'll pay you for that!*" cried the goose, and she flew at the duck; but as she did so her foot tore the fur of a cat who was just then in the yard.

"*I'll pay you for that!*" cried the cat, and she started for the goose; but as she did so her claw caught in the wool of a sheep.

"*I'll pay you for that!*" cried the sheep, and she ran at the cat; but as she did so her foot hit the foot of a dog who lay in the sun.

"*I'll pay you for that!*" cried he, and jumped at the sheep; but as he did so his leg struck an old cow who stood by the gate.

"*I'll pay you for that!*" cried she, and she ran at the dog; but as she did so her horn grazed the skin of a horse who stood by a tree.

"*I'll pay you for that!*" cried he, and he rushed at the cow.

What a noise there was! The horse flew at the cow, and the cow at the dog, and the dog at the sheep, and the sheep at the cat, and the cat at the goose, and the goose at the duck, and the duck at the hen. What a fuss there was!—and all because the hen accidentally stepped on the duck's toes.

"Hi! Hi! What's all this?" cried the man who had care of them. "You may stay here," he said to the hen; but he drove the duck to the pond, the goose to the field, the cat to the barn, the sheep to her fold, the dog to the house, the cow to her yard, and the horse to his stall. And so all their good times were over because the duck would not overlook a little hurt which was not intended.

*"A little explained,  
A little endured,  
A little forgiven,  
The quarrel is cured."*

—Author Unknown  
*Signs of the Times*, September 23, 1903

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## Editor's Musings

First Corinthians 3:9 says, "We are laborers together with God." This inspirational short text from Paul has given me some insights that I believe can be specifically applied to us as ministry wives.

(1) Sometimes, as clergy spouses, we need to remind ourselves that we, too, are "laborers" in ministry. We are not obligated to "serve" the church because we married ministers. God only asks us to serve Him if we love HIM—not because we love the church or love our husbands. We are gifted by God and privileged to use these talents to His glory simply because we love Jesus. If this isn't our motivation, we are walking down a path that has the potential to lead us to bitterness, resentment, and a load too heavy for us to carry.

(2) We are in this together with the Lord. He has not asked us to bear the workload without Him. He desires that He work with and through us. I don't much like dusting our house, and it seems like a full-time job to stay ahead of it. I could look at my dust mitt and demand that it dust the house without my presence, but not a lot would be accomplished. Probably the only place that would be dust-free is where the mitt lay! But by putting my hand into the glove, a lot can be accomplished. We need God to be inside everything we do. Then it will be done to His priorities and accomplished His way.

(3) We are all in this "together." North of San Francisco, California, are the beautiful Muir Woods. Here, great coastal redwoods tower high toward heaven and make a natural cathedral of trees. Many of these trees are more than 1,000 years old. But you don't find them growing in isolation—they are clustered together and actually hold each other up. Most of their roots are entangled, and this network provides them with support during raging storms. This is why they have survived so many years—they have clung together for strength during the bad times. As clergy wives, we need to uphold each other, support each other, and pray for each other.

Let's all hold on to Jesus and hold on to each other so that together we can love Him more and serve Him wisely every day.

### The Journal A SHEPHERDESS

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# What Do You Do All Day?

*Author Unknown*

A few months ago, when I was picking up the children at school, another mother I knew rushed up to me. Emily was fuming with indignation. "Do you know what you and I are?" she demanded.

Before I could answer—and I really didn't have an answer handy—she blurted out the reason for her question. It seemed she had just returned from renewing her driver's license at the County Clerk's office. Asked by the woman recorder to state her occupation, Emily had hesitated, uncertain how to classify herself.

"What I mean is," explained the recorder, "do you have a job, or are you just a ...?"

"Of course I have a job," snapped Emily. "I'm a mother."

The recorder smiled indulgently. Then she wrote: "Occupation: Housewife."

"Oh, now," protested Emily. "I'd rather be listed as a mother."

"We don't list 'mother' as an occupation. 'Housewife' covers it," said the recorder emphatically.

I forgot all about Emily's story until the day I found myself in the same situation, this time at our Town

Hall. The clerk was obviously a career woman, poised, efficient, and possessed of a high-sounding title like "Official Interrogator" or "Town Registrar."

"And what is your occupation?" she probed.

What made me say it, I do not know. The words simply popped out.

"I'm . . . a Research Associate in the field of Child Development and Human Relations."

The clerk paused, ball-point pen frozen in mid-air and looked up as though she had not heard right. I repeated the title slowly, emphasizing the most significant words. Then I stared with wonder as my pompous pronouncement was written in bold, black ink on the official questionnaire.

"Might I ask," said the clerk with new interest, "just what you do in your field?"

Coolly, I heard myself reply, "I have a continuing program of research (what mother doesn't) in the laboratory and in the field (normally I would have said indoors and out). I'm working for my Masters (the whole family) and already have four credits (all daughters). Of course, the job is one

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*This article appeared in the May '98 issue of Helpmate, a newsletter for Workers' Wives of the Upper Columbia Conference in Spokane, Washington.*



of the most demanding in the Humanities (any mother care to disagree?). And I often work 14 hours a day (24 is more like it). But the job is more challenging than most run-of-the-mill careers, and the rewards are in satisfaction rather than money.”

There was an increasing note of respect in the clerk’s voice as she

completed the form, stood up, and personally escorted me to the door.

As I drove into our driveway, buoyed up by my glamorous new career, I was greeted by my lab assistants—ages 13, 7 and 3. And from upstairs, I could hear our new experimental model (six months) in the child-development program, testing out a new vocal pattern.

I felt triumphant. I had scored a beat on bureaucracy. And I had gone down on the official records as someone more distinguished and indispensable to mankind than “just another . . .”

Home . . . what a glorious career. Especially when there’s a title on the door!



## Love Is . . . for the Pastoral Couple

*Karen Holford, with apologies to the Apostle Paul.*

Love is patient, when, after a challenging day, he calls you to say that he’s bringing 12 guests home for supper.

Love is kind. She waits at the end of a tiring day with a mug of hot chocolate, a back rub, and a peaceful smile . . . and he calls when he is going to be home unusually late.

Love does not envy when the church moves him to a new district, away from the best job prospects you have ever had.

Love does not boast, knowing that whatever we seem to achieve, it is only through Christ’s strength.

Love is not proud. It does not have to prove to *anyone* that it can do *everything!*

Love is not rude. It does not make sarcastic comments or snide remarks when it feels let down.

Love is not self-seeking. It does not seek pity when church members are hurting your feelings and thwarting your plans, but just a hug, some understanding, and an armful of prayers.

Love is not easily angered when extra time with a church member interrupts your special plans for the day. Maybe the “interruption” is God’s special plan for the day . . . ?

Love keeps no record of floppy salads, ruined meals, and late arrivals.

Love doesn’t delight in evil, eager to know the latest church gossip . . . but rejoices with the truth when someone has been led to Jesus Christ.

Love always protects a reputation in the midst of misunderstandings and criticism.

Love always trusts that the pay check *will* last until the end of the month! And when it doesn’t, that God will provide, miraculously, for all of your needs!

Love always hopes that your ministry together will be a witness to the world, a special part of God’s eternal plan.

Love always perseveres, especially when it seems that only God is on your side.

Love never fails. It will last forever, into an eternity together with Christ.

May there always be faith, hope, and love in your lives. But may the greatest of these be your love for God, and your love for each other.

Karen Holford is the wife of Bernie Holford, the family life director of the South England Conference. Together they enjoy developing seminars on all aspects of family life. They have three children: Bethany, Nathan, and Joel. Karen has written several books, including *Please God Make My Mummy Nice!*—a warm and humorous look at mothering and what it can teach us about God’s love for our families. She also enjoys crafts of all kinds.

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# Widow's Mite

Rita Stevens

Rita Stevens writes from Albuquerque, New Mexico, where her husband has served as president of the Texico Conference (West Texas and New Mexico) since December 1996. She has two adult sons and works as a medical technologist. She enjoys walking, golfing, reading, baking, traveling, and praying.



My parents really believed “and this gospel shall be preached in all the world” and then participated actively by giving Bible studies and contributing funds to help others do so. So during a visit I mentioned to them that for \$5,000, an entire campaign could be financed in Russia and that we were trying to raise funds in our conference to do so. Little did I know that within a very short time my father would die and my mother would be left a widow.

A few weeks after my dad’s death, my mom said she wanted to give a check to my husband for Russian evangelism. He was shocked (since he was now assisting her with her finances) when he read 5 and the three zeros on the check. “Are you sure you want to do this?” I heard him ask. She said she certainly did. It was a memorial for my father, and she said she knew he would want her to do it. This is the amazing story that followed.

Evangelistic programs were held in the city of Kansk from February 27 until April 8. Six hundred people came every night to the meetings to hear the message of how they could be saved through Jesus Christ. As a result of these meetings 130 people were baptized.

When the meetings began, it was believed that there were no Seventh-day Adventists in that city. The very first night there was an elderly lady that came to the meetings. She had a very interesting history. Her name was Anna Kovalenko.

Anna was born April 19, 1916. Anna was baptized in 1931 at the age of fifteen. In 1936 Anna’s father passed away. That same year Adventist pastors and members of the church began to be arrested. Pastor Raus, who had baptized Anna, was arrested and eventually shot. On June 27, 1936, police searched Anna and her husband’s house. They took all the Christian literature they could find, such as *The Great Controversy*, *Steps to Christ*, and many others. Anna and her husband were arrested. At that time, Anna was expecting a child. On August 14, 1936, Anna gave birth to a baby girl. On August 29, the police came to arrest her again, but when they saw that she had just given birth to a child, they decided not to arrest her. Anna was only 20 years old.

On October 27, 1936, she was arrested with her child. The jail cell was very cold. There was no water, and there was a typhus epidemic. Her little girl, Nadya, could not bear the extreme conditions and died



when she was only three months old. On February 14, 1937, Anna was sent to a prison camp for 10 years without a parole, based on anti-revolutionary acts.

The camp where she was sent was in Siberia. The place where she stayed was not adapted for winter temperatures. The winters were very harsh and cold. Sometimes the temperature would drop down to 50 degrees Celsius. At the same time Anna had no information about her husband who had been arrested in 1936.

Life at camp was very hard. She worked from dusk until dawn. Anna met other women who shared her beliefs. They were allowed to rest on Sabbath. So they met for 10 years in the corner of the house where they stayed every Sabbath. They sang, prayed, and preached to each other.

In 1946 she was freed but could not go back home. She stayed in Siberia in the city of Kansk. She tried to find other Adventists there, but could not because there were none. For 53 years she spent a life of searching. She spent lonely Sabbaths, just her and the Lord.

In 1970, Anna was pardoned. She also received documents of the pardoning of her husband. The same document stated that he was shot in 1937. After 34 years, she finally knew the tragic ending of her husband's life.


People from other denominations tried to get her to go to their churches, but Anna was faithful to the true God and hoped to meet Adventists. She prayed for 53 years asking, "My God, are you really going to let me die without me meeting other Adventists?" I am glad that God heard her prayer.

She finally received an answer to her prayer when Pastor Ivan Tomailo, President of East-Siberian Conference, began evangelistic programs in the city of Kansk. With much

rejoicing and tears, she thanked God that after 53 years, God had created an Adventist Church in her city. When she came to the meetings for the first time, the first thing she said was, "Here is my tithe, I am glad to give this back to God."

A very touching scene was when we had the first communion service at the new church in the city of Kansk. At that time Anna said, "Thank you, God, for letting me

participate again in the communion service after 53 years." She is full of energy, strength, and much enthusiasm as she tells what she went through those 53 years of searching.

Praise the Lord for this wonderful experience of this brave woman, that even under the most adverse conditions she never lost her faith and trust in God and waited for His promise. Praise the Lord for all of the promises He has given us. 

*A poor, blind woman in Paris put 27 francs into a plate at a missionary meeting.*

*"You cannot afford so much," said one.*

*"Yes, sir, I can," she answered.*

*On being pressed to explain, she said: "I am blind, and I said to my fellow-straw-workers, 'How much money do you spend in a year for oil in your lamps when it is too dark to work nights?' They replied, 'Twenty-seven francs.'"*

*"So," said the poor woman, "I found that I save so much in the year because I am blind and do not need a lamp, and I give it to shed light to the dark heathen lands."*

—Author Unknown  
From *Signs of the Times*  
April 14, 1909

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# Helping the Minister's Child Enjoy Church

Nancy Garilva

Many times, pastors' children dread the church services. Their parents often feel everyone is watching the children and they stress to the child what he or she should or should not do during the service. Instead of learning to view church as a blessing, the pastors' children often think of it as a joyless occasion.

This need not be the case. Pastors' children are no different than other children. Parents would do well to keep this in mind.

Begin the Sabbath morning in a calm manner. Children sense when parents are rushed and fretful. Lay out the children's clothing the night before. Make the children a simple

breakfast and encourage them to enjoy God's bountiful food.

Give the children a break between Sabbath School and the Divine Worship service. Take them to the bathroom, let them have a drink at the water fountain. If possible, take them outside for a brief walk. Be careful not to make the break too exciting because the child may have a hard time settling down for the worship service.

Find a good place to sit. Don't worry about where you think some of the church members think you should sit. Rather, locate a place where the child can sit quietly and enjoy the service.

Encourage the child to take part in the worship service. Teach the child the hymns and sing together. Teach him or her to stand or kneel when the congregation does. Make the child feel he or she is an important part of the service.

Depending on the child's age, restlessness may be a problem. Plan ahead and bring a quiet book or toy along to keep him or her busy. An older child might bring a small notebook for recording specific facts of the sermon or tallying the number of times the minister says "love" or "God" or some other word.

Praise the child after the service.

Be cautious about mentioning bad behavior and even slower to punish mistakes. A child who associates church with spankings is not learning to like church. It is better to emphasize what the child did that pleased you. Tell the child, "I was so proud of you when you knelt so quietly during prayer" or "I enjoyed hearing you sing with the congregation."

Remember, attending church is not only a religious experience. It is also a social one. The people we worship with become our friends. Take your children to the social functions of the church so they too can make friends.

Most importantly, accept the fact that children will make mistakes. If a child misbehaves and will not stop when told to do so, take him or her out of the sanctuary until he or she calms down. At such a time, remind yourself that your task is to teach the child how to know God and to worship Him—even if this sometimes may mean "disturbing" older people in the church.

Help your child associate the worship service with the love of Christ. Make sure your child looks forward to spending time in God's sanctuary. Church should be a joyous experience for a child—even a pastor's child!



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Nancy Garilva is from Mountain View College in the Philippines.



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# Making Sabbath Special

*Ardis Dick  
Stenbakken*

*Ardis Stenbakken is the women's ministries director for the General Conference. She and her husband, Dick, have two adult children and one grandchild.*



I settled down in the church pew, ready to enjoy another worship service. As I looked around me, I noticed that in the row ahead of me were several junior-aged young people. Nicely dressed, freshly scrubbed. Ready for church too. But as the service continued, I found that they were not at all prepared for worship, and I doubt that they got anything out of it. Neither did I with all of their whispering, drawing, playing with the bulletins, cars, rubber bands, and throwing papers. It made me think a lot about kids and church.

It has been some time since I have had to deal with this issue myself, but I frequently see young parents struggling, and I remember my experiences.

For all practical purposes, I was a single parent in church because Dick was either gone or on the platform—not much help. But many people were helpful and gave me much practical advice. I would like to share some of that.

Getting youngsters through church successfully starts a long time before 11:00 on Sabbath. It begins at birth, and then early every week.

One of the best things you can do to help children learn to sit still through church is to start when they are born and be in church regularly. Many are tempted to skip church because the children are restless or don't want to go. If you miss once, it

makes it harder to go the next time, and children soon learn that they don't have to sit through a service—they can fuss, parents take them out, and that is the end of that.

It helps too if very soon after baby is born, you begin having regular worship with him or her. You may think the child is not old enough to have it do any good, but children learn a lot, much sooner than we give them credit for. They learn to sit quietly and listen. They learn about the Bible stories and about reverence. They learn how to care for their church papers and Bibles. They learn to participate in singing and prayer. They learn to love the Lord and are then able to worship in a much more meaningful way very early.

If you did not know this and did not get started early, begin now. It is never too late.

When possible, have the children participate in picking out or saving special clothes to wear to church, getting their shoes ready, etc. It all helps to make Sabbath something special to look forward to.

Having a fun worship Friday night gives a good start to the Sabbath. Read special books to the children, sing their favorite songs. Play fun Bible games. And get to bed early enough that everyone can get a good Sabbath morning start. It is always nice to wake up to religious music. It sets the mood for the day.



As I grew up, and then with our family, Sabbath breakfast was special. It was the only day of the week we had sweet rolls and hot chocolate! If possible, there was special fruit too. I still look forward to Sabbath breakfasts although I cheat and have hot chocolate more often now! When the children were small and we had no dishwasher, we used paper plates—everything disposable. After breakfast, with one sweep, the dishes were done. Everyone helped put the food away, and my husband always helped to get our children ready. There was no stress and it took very little time.

So, you see, church is only a part of a special package called Sabbath. One of the best things you can do for successful worship is to get to Sabbath School and church on time. I know from experience that if there is an emergency, or something can go wrong, it will on Sabbath morning. I'm sure that is because Satan knows how important it is to be in church, ready and expecting a blessing.

Children should be started in their own Sabbath School as soon as they can sit up in your lap. They learn very quickly and enjoy all the action, coloring, and singing in their own Sabbath School. You will be amazed how early they will be repeating what they learn everywhere, including Sabbath School! It is good to leave them alone in their division as soon as you can. You will find many times when it is helpful if they have learned to be apart from you. And I know from experience leading children's Sabbath Schools that most children behave better when parents are not present.

I realize that for many military families, having a church at all, to say nothing of a special children's Sabbath School division, can be a problem. Many of you are isolated or near very small churches. Even if there is no adult Sabbath School

because everyone is helping in the children's departments, that is okay; there should be one for the children. For military members, usually there are no other family members to help with children, and you may not have a spouse to help. But do the best you can early and consistently. It will pay off.

Between Sabbath School and church, see that everyone gets drinks, goes to the bathroom, and maybe does a few laps around the outside of the church. This is the time to tell the children that they are soon going into church and that you expect them to sit quietly and that they will not leave the service unless it is an emergency. They are going to spend a special time with Jesus in His house. Then model that behavior yourself.

*This is the time to tell the children that they are soon going into church . . . They are going to spend a special time with Jesus in His house. Then model that behavior yourself.*

You will want to have an exclusive church bag for each child. It will not be used any other time, nor will its contents. It is just for church. It will contain toys and church activities appropriate for the age of the child. Each item chosen should be soft and quiet—something that will not make noise if shaken or dropped. Suggestions are plastic or cloth books for very small children and regular Sabbath books for older children. Activity books—something to lift, move or answer are interesting. Felt items are excellent—animal puppets, pieces of felts that

make pictures and scenes. Christian bookstores have a great variety of possibilities. Soft rubber or plastic toys and a special small stuffed toy or two are good. Religious coloring books are nice when the child is old enough to keep track of the crayons. Connect numbers and quiz books are good for older children. Have your child help pick out items for his/her bag—they will look forward to using it.

If you and others cannot afford to supply such a bag of goodies yourself, ask the church to buy some items and each Sabbath your child could pick out what he or she wants for that week. Or you and some other parents can get together to make or trade off items.

As children grow older, they enjoy listening for and counting certain pre-chosen words. The pastor might help by suggesting a particular word or phrase in his sermon. This helps the child to begin listening.

Other than a bottle, I don't feel that there should be food in church. If a child cannot go two and a half hours without eating, give him or her something between services. Whoever cleans the church will be grateful too.

As much as possible, do not let the child get into the special bag until the sermon starts. During the early part of worship have the child participate—stand to sing, kneel to pray, have some offering to contribute. If your church does not have a children's story, do what you can to get one started. As soon as the child has the idea of reading and begins to be able to follow along, look up the scriptures. In other words, participate in worship. Then when there are longer periods of time such as the sermon, they can engage in their own quiet activities.

As much as possible, have the children do all their activities sitting in the pew beside you or in your lap—never allow them on the floor



except for prayer or a quick retrieval of a dropped item.

Unless children can show that they can sit quietly beside another child, it is best to separate them with adults. When our children showed they could sit quietly with another child we allowed it, but it had to be by us or someone we knew would see that they were quiet. You will find that two children together is about the limit that can keep quiet.

Sometimes emergencies do come up, and a child must be taken out of a service for the bathroom or because of misbehavior. But if you make the trip as quickly as possible and not a time of escape and play, it will not happen often, and you will be able to get much more out of church yourself. I hesitate to recommend spanking for a misbehaving child, but I will say that for our children, being taken out of church was not something for them to look forward to.

When there is going to be a special service such as communion, prepare the children ahead of time. Explain the service and what the symbols mean. Explain that only people old enough to understand and begin participating in church activities fully can partake. Tell them that they can have something special later and be sure there is something special just for them at lunch. Then have them watch the whole communion and talk about it later. You will have to be the judge as to what age your child is ready to participate in communion. If you have prepared them well, it may be long before baptism.

This has been a lot of do's and don't's. But if everyone is prepared, things are made special, and you are not stressed out, I think everyone will enjoy church much more. Good luck. I look forward to sitting beside you and your children some Sabbath soon.



## The National Pastor's Wife



*Esnat Gwashure*

The wife of a pastor plays an important role in the work of God. She is the one who cares for the pastor and enables him to concentrate. Her encouragement brightens his day and helps calm him as he deals with problems that occur in the church. By making the home a place of contentment and peace, the wife permits her husband to find solace in his family. He is able to meditate and study in prayer knowing his home is being well-managed.

The wife of a pastor is an example to those around her. She is her husband's helpmate. Her responsibilities are many and, at times, may seem overwhelming. Excellent counsel may be found by reading good books such as *The Ministry of Healing*. Reading about and meditating upon the lives of the wives and mothers in the Bible can be an inspiration to the pastor's wife.

Ruth, Naomi, Anna, Sarah, Priscilla, Dorcas and Mary, the mother of Jesus, are just a few of the Bible women who can be examples to the pastor's wife.

Martin Luther once said, "There is nothing in the world more tender than a woman's heart in which piety abides." Abraham Lincoln, full of gratitude to his foster mother, said, "All that I am or hope to be, I owe to my angel mother." Proverbs 19:14 says, "A prudent wife is from the Lord." Clearly, women have a great influence over those around them.

The place where the pastor's wife attains supreme importance is the home. There humanity finds its most valuable resources. One of the greatest contributions the wife can make to her husband's ministry is to keep the home orderly and clean. It has been said that cleanliness is next to godliness. When the pastor leaves on a trip, he goes in peace when he leaves a well-organized and well-cared-for home. He does not need to worry about the home fires as he prepares to do God's work in the field.

By caring for her husband and family, the pastor's wife plays an invaluable role in God's work. May God be with every pastor's wife as she works side-by-side with her husband to bring about Christ's soon coming.



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*Esnat is a pastor's wife from Zimbabwe. She and her husband have three children. She enjoys encouraging and helping people seek the Lord's power and guidance.*



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# How to Break the Chronic Worry Habit

Sara Hines Martin

**M**any family members say that if I don't have something to worry about, I'll make something up," a friend said.

"It seems as if something is always nagging at me in the back of my mind," a counseling client reported.

These are traits of chronic worriers, individuals who go around with a dark cloud hanging over their heads.

Some years ago I identified myself as a chronic worrier, alias worrywart. I worked to change that. Here are two examples of crises—one minor, one major—I faced last year with calmness in contrast to the hysterical way I would have handled them some years ago. First, when I called in my secretary to put eight hours of taped interviews for my new book onto my computer, the tapes had nothing on them. Second, a mammogram revealed a lump in a breast when we had no medical insurance. (Later in the article, I'll report on how this came out.)

I was glad I had conquered the chronic worry habit!

## Steps that helped me

Here are some things I have found helpful in breaking that habit.

Attending a 12-step program on a weekly basis for three years and doing what each requires has helped me change my thinking patterns from negative to positive. I attend a

group for Adult Children of Alcoholics (many other groups exist). These groups follow the steps originally developed for Alcoholics Anonymous. The first three steps help especially in this area of turning loose the worry habit.

The first step reads: "We admitted we were powerless over \_\_\_\_\_, and that our lives have become unmanageable." The second step reads: "Came to believe that a Power greater than ourselves could restore us to sanity." The third step reads: "Made a decision to turn our will and our lives over to the care of God."

We worry because we believe we are able to change those people or conditions. Step One helps us clarify areas in which we are powerless over events and especially over people. If I have no power to bring about change, that releases me from the feeling that I should take action.

We can also resist the guilt messages others give us. The family members of a 65-year-old man told his wife she should make him carry out doctor's orders.

Worrywarts have a lot of passiveness and do not see themselves as powerful persons—people who take action and do not waste time on worry. Step One helps us get in touch with our own strengths and lets us know when we can take action.

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When I know what I can't do and what I can do, I then make a choice about what to do. Maybe a particular problem is not mine to solve. I choose how to expend my time and my energy.

Step Two lets me know that when I am powerless, there is Someone who has greater power than I—Almighty God Himself. This lifts my burdens because I know I am not alone. I feel comforted and hopeful.

Step Three comes hardest, but with practice it becomes easier. Chronic worriers are controllers, and it is difficult for them to admit that something is beyond their power to change.

#### **Specific things to do to stop worry**

✿ Start your day with a prayer that God will give you wisdom and help you maintain an optimistic, positive, confident attitude for that day alone. Remember Bible verses and hymns that speak of God's care. A Sunday School teacher had as her motto, "Talk to God before you talk to anyone else in the morning, and read the Bible before you read anything else."

✿ Be still. When I feel anxious, I take deep breaths, praise God, give gratitude for past blessings, and make requests about the current problems.

✿ Remember times when God helped you in the past. My home church, Ebenezer Baptist Church, reminds me that the word "ebenezer" means "hitherto," which assured the Israelites that as God had helped in the past, He would continue to help them in the future. When caught in the grip of worry, I say, "Ebenezer" and "hitherto."

✿ Respect your feelings when a problem arises. Are you feeling anxious? scared? discouraged? overwhelmed? upset? terrified? out of control? angry? Treat your feelings

with respect rather than saying to yourself, "I shouldn't feel this way."

✿ Use positive self-talk. You may say something like "I'm feeling upset, but I really believe that a solution can be found. I know my feeling panicky will not help. I will try to think clearly."

✿ Ask, "What can I do?" If we can take action, we ask God to give us the courage to do what needs to be done.

✿ Take it one step at a time. We make problems bigger than they are sometimes by trying to solve them in one fell swoop. I look at what action, perhaps even a very small one, I can take at that moment.

✿ Look at options. Worriers usually get into a narrow groove in thinking. When we expand our viewpoints, we become more creative in our problem-solving skills and ask, Is there another way to go about this?

✿ Ask for help. It is now habit for me to pray immediately when some problem occurs. I may speak to the Lord as a friend: "Lord, we have a difficult one here. What are we going to do?"

We need to be selective in choosing people to help us: persons who keep confidences when necessary, those who do not judge us and scold us even when we do something stupid, and those who will not take the situation out of our hands and act as if it is their own problem.

✿ Get additional information. When we think, "There is no solution," we need to get all the facts possible. That can change our outlook.

✿ Write down fears. This activity helps us see them more realistically. Maybe things are not as bad as we thought. Writing also helps draw in scattered thoughts that attack the mind like pecking birds and helps a person gain a sense of control over what's happening.

✿ Get a proper perspective. A pastor asks his worrywart wife, "Is it

a matter of life or death?" when she frets. Usually it is not, and she turns loose some anxiety.

✿ Use a God-bag. Write concerns on slips of paper and place them in a paper bag. Agree with God that you are not going to worry about these situations for 30 days. When tempted to do so, remind yourself, "It's in the bag!" Notice at the end of the month how God has worked in that area. Update the bag as needed.

✿ Take a break from working on the problem. Physical exercise such as walking or team sports help, as well as social activities. Reading something far removed from the task at hand gets us onto a different track and gives us a fresh eye. Focusing on a problem too long can cause us to get a distorted focus that can lead to hasty or destructive solutions.

✿ Reprogram negative thinking habits. This is the hard part! Chronic worriers have practiced their habit diligently for a long time.

You can wear a rubber band around your wrist and snap it every time you catch yourself worrying.

The technique called "thought stopping" calls for you to say "Stop" when you get into the groove of thinking negatively.

Ask yourself: Do I want to continue thinking this way? What positive things could I be thinking now?

I say to myself, "W. T. (wasted thought) alert!" I have so many tasks to accomplish each day, I cannot waste my precious thinking time.

✿ Look at the model you are presenting to your children. Most chronic worriers learned that habit at their parents' knees. The children grew up "knowing" this is the way one handles problems.

✿ Look at your if-onlies and what-ifs. Most people spend the majority of their thinking time with regrets of the past (If only I had ...); or fears about the future ("What if I



do this, will things go badly?"). When we stay in the present, we can solve problems more efficiently.

✿ Let go of perfectionistic expectations of oneself. Perhaps the majority of my worries have come from my expecting myself to make a perfect decision in every situation. Now if I make a mistake, I say, "What can I learn from this so that this will not happen again?"

✿ Give up the need to please everyone. Many worries come from our fears that other people will criticize us. We need to make the best decision possible and let people think of us what they need to think. We cannot stop people from gossiping, but we can stop worrying about it.

✿ Recognize the futility of worry. Worry wastes time; it takes a toll on physical health; it makes us unpleasant companions; it accomplishes nothing.

### Report on medical crisis

I promised you earlier I would tell you how the medical situation in my life turned out. I went through the first three steps of Al Anon.

Step One: "I am powerless over my body, and I am powerless over the insurance situation."

Step Two: "I believe there is Someone who can help."

Step Three: That came a bit harder, but I was able to say, "Lord, you know all my work is freelance and that it is important for me to stay healthy. You also know I do not have medical insurance. Whatever happens, I am turning my life and my care over to you."

When I went in for the biopsy, the doctor could not find the lump! The hospital returned the check it required me to bring since I did not have insurance, and I went to eat a delicious breakfast of blueberry waffles. That day, my worries about calories were dismissed! ☺

## Leading With Love

Meibel Mello Guedes



Christ is our model leader. While on this earth, He showed strength, unselfishness, love, and courage.

There is a big difference between a leader and a commander. A leader guides his followers, directs them with love, and stands beside them at all times. A commander guides his followers through fear. He dictates the rules and mandates that the tasks be completed whatever the cost.

One of the greatest characteristics of a good leader is love. The love inherent in a true leader is not an emotion. It is a transference of this love into actions. The followers of a good leader know they are valued. A true leader knows his followers; he understands their difficulties and recognizes their strengths. A good leader is willing to serve his followers and help them reach their goals.

Jesus was once asked, "Master, which is the great commandment in the law?" Jesus responded, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart and with all thy soul and with all thy mind. This is the first and great commandment. And the second is like unto it. Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself" Matthew 22:36-39.

A good leader must adhere to all three parts of true love. He must love God, love his neighbors, and love himself.

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A good leader should love God with all his heart and mind. His followers should have no doubt that their leader's allegiance is to God.

A good leader loves his neighbors. He cultivates friendships without demanding anything in return. He invests time in friendships, maintains interest in others, and is willing to help whenever needed. He treats everyone fairly and equally. He learns the art of listening, compliments and recognizes those who are deserving, and puts others before himself.

A good leader loves himself. When a person totally accepts God's love, he forms a basis for loving himself. Many Christians are taught that being humble is synonymous with thinking little of themselves. Quite the opposite is true. Denis Waitley, an American psychologist, said, "The first and the most kept secret of total success is that we should feel love inside of ourselves for us to be able to give to others." He went on to explain, "If we do not have a profound and deep-rooted feeling of value inside of us, we will have nothing to give and share with others."

If we want projects in our church to be completed, we must learn to lead in love. Such leadership will encourage more participation. If we want our churches to grow stronger and healthier, we must learn to lead in love. Such leadership will encourage others to follow suit. If we want to lead others to Christ, we must learn to lead in love. Such leadership will bring others to God. Love and good leadership—the two are synonymous. ☺



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# God's Hand in My Life

*Netty Rantung*

**I**t was not by chance that I married my husband, Pastor Alex Rantung. Before I met him, I had been fasting and praying for my life-spouse. I prayed that if it was God's will, I hoped to be a pastor's wife. I asked God to give me the best pastor. I did not care if he pastored in a large city or a remote area.

God answered my prayers. I met a young pastor who, after his graduation from college, was placed in a remote area on the Island of Timor. We were married on August 6, 1965. I left my job in the pharmacy of Bangung Adventist Hospital, located in the capital city of Indonesia, and my husband and I went to Timor Island. At that time, it was known as a barren land. It was very hard for Nusa Tenggara Mission to find workers or pastors who were willing to work there.

When I was seven months pregnant, my husband was assigned to hold a public evangelistic effort on another small island called Sabu Island. The island could only be reached once a month by a small ship. While my husband was away, I became very sick. The church elder's wife took me to the hospital. There was no telephone, and I could only communicate with my husband via telegram. I told the church members not to send a telegram to my husband about my condition because I did not want him to be disturbed during his evangelistic effort. Still, one of the church members sent a telegram telling my husband I had been admitted to the hospital.

Fortunately, my husband did not

panic. Rather, he thanked the Lord for the church members who had taken care of me and taken me to the hospital. He continued with the evangelistic meetings and was excited about the many souls who were interested in knowing the truth and desired baptism.

Among those wanting to be baptized was a police officer. He was in charge of the island and had a very strong influence in the community. He and his family attended the meetings every night. They were interested in our beliefs and became good friends with my husband.

Three days after the first telegram arrived, my husband received a second one. It was from the Mission President. It stated that my husband should return home immediately. Pastor Petrus Balo, my husband's assistant, was to finish the evangelistic meetings and do the follow-up. My husband panicked. He immediately thought of me. He thought, "Oh, no, my wife must have died." He ran to the pier to see if there was any ship or boat he could ride on to Timor Island, but there was none. He ran to the other side of the island and saw a small boat about to sail. He asked the people where they were going.

They replied, "Flores Island."

My husband knew that Flores Island was in the opposite direction as Timor Island, but his conscience said, "Go on that sailboat." He asked the owner of the sailboat for permission to join them. After two nights of sailing, they reached Flores Island. There they found a small mission ship of the Catholic Church

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about to leave for Kupang, Timor. My husband went to see the captain of the ship and was allowed to ride on the ship with one condition: No Smoking. He told the captain, "Don't worry. I am the pastor of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. I never smoke."

When he got to the harbor of Kupang, it was Sabbath. My husband prayed, "Lord, where shall I go—to the house or the cemetery?" He asked for a sign from God. He said, "Lord, I'm going to the house now, but before I enter the house, I am going to the kitchen. If I see there is kidney bean soup in the pot, I will know my wife is alive." (We used to have kidney bean soup as our special dish each Sabbath.) He was so happy when he entered the kitchen because he saw a pot on the clay stove filled with kidney bean soup. He said, "Thank you, Lord. My wife is alive." He ran into the room and found me laying in bed.

I was so surprised to see him. After assuring himself that I was okay, he could not help but wonder why the Mission President had sent him a telegram requesting he come home. He became disappointed as he thought of the many people in Sabu who were ready to accept Jesus as their Savior.

That evening, he went to see the Mission President to ask why he sent such a cable. The President was so surprised. The message he had sent was totally different. He showed my husband the draft of his message. It said, "Your wife is fine; she is in good care. Go ahead with your meeting. God bless you."

Because of our disappointment, my husband and I asked for a vacation leave to plan for the birth of our first child. We wanted our children to be born in Bandung Adventist Hospital. I was less than eight months pregnant so our doctor gave us a recommendation letter saying it was okay to travel. Though we could not find a passenger ship, we did find a

cattle ship on which we could sail. We rented one of the cabins. At that time, the voyage took ten days from Timor to Java Island because the ship had to stop in every port. On the fifth day of the voyage, I felt a terrible stomachache. I realized it was not a normal stomachache. It was labor pains. I said to my husband, "I'm afraid I am going to deliver the baby here on the ship."

"What?" my husband exclaimed. "Are you kidding?"

"No, I am not kidding. I am serious. I've got the signs," I said.

"So what shall we do?" my husband asked. I said, "I do not know. Perhaps you need to go to the captain of the ship and ask for help."

He ran to the captain and informed him of the situation.

The captain said, "Wow, you put me in a world of trouble. This is a big problem for me. I have never experienced a woman delivering a child. I have five children and I was not even around for the birth of one of them! I have only seen cattle having babies. The only thing I can do is ask my radio operator to call for a doctor and speed up this ship towards the next port."

My husband and I kept praying. But I knew I could not stop this baby from coming into this world. By the help of the Unseen Helping Hand who helped my husband be the midwife, there in the middle of the Sumba Sea, our first baby, a very tiny, premature baby boy was born safely. The captain named our baby Alvin Lekonardo, from the name of the ship "Leko."

A few days after we arrived in Bandung, while we were watching the television news at my brother-in-law's house, we were shocked to hear the newscaster say the Tenggiri Ship has sunk on the voyage from Sabu Island to Timor. More than 300 people drowned, including the police officer and his troop as well as one

of church elders. It was the ship my husband had planned to ride had he stayed until the evangelistic meetings were over. It was then that we realized that God was the One who had changed the cable message. We praised God for His loving mercy, guidance, and protection.

Yet another miracle occurred a short time later. The Mission Committee assigned my husband to a new location. My husband went ahead and found a house for us. He held the evangelistic meetings and was joyful about the family who had chosen to be baptized. He returned to Timor for me and the baby. While home with us, the Mission President called my husband and said there had been a change of plans. He was not to go to the small island of Alor. My husband inquired about his belongings at the home he had just left. He was assured that the new pastor for that area would pack his things and send them to us. We never did receive those belongings for a big flood rammed over Maumere. The house we were to live in had been swept away along with our belongings. We felt so blessed because we could have been in that house! God is so good.

When we moved back to Timor Island, I taught at the Nusa Tenggara Academy. My husband pastored eight churches in the mountain area. He held many evangelistic meetings and many souls gave their lives to Christ. However, there were some persecutors. One group of people targeted my husband. Their goal was to kill him and destroy our church. They attacked but thank God, no one was killed. The persecutors ran after my husband and burned down our home. My husband was so discouraged. He said, "This is too much. I cannot stand it anymore. Let's leave the ministry and go back to Bandung. You can work at the hospital again."




I looked straight into my husband's eyes and said, "Alex, I married you because you were sent from God. I love you and I love the ministry as well. Don't you love the precious souls who desire salvation and want to be in God's Kingdom? Why should we be discouraged? Go forward. The

Lord will be with us."

During that time of persecution, 107 souls surrendered to Jesus Christ and were baptized. My husband's spirit was renewed. He became the president of Nusa Tenggara Mission when he was only 28 years old. He served as an administrator for about

32 years. Our son Alvin Lekonardo, who was born on the ship, is now a physician. He is married to another physician and both are serving in Bandung Adventist Hospital.

God's hand can be seen in my life, and I praise Him every day! 

## Ten (Almost) Free Ways to Say "I Love You"

Karen Holford



Life gets very busy, and it's often difficult to find special ways to say "I love you," especially on a limited budget. Here are a few ideas. I'm sure you have many more that you could share, too!

- ✿ Try having a candle-lit breakfast. Get up early and make it a special time. Breakfast is simpler and cheaper to prepare than other meals. Also, setting the table and most of the cooking or preparation can be done the night before. Find some exotic fruits, special bread, croissants, or other treats. Wrap a little gift or message, or even put a flower into his napkin. Relax together, and don't forget to light the candles!

- ✿ Put a special message onto a new bookmark. Then slip it into his Bible or current reading book for him to find unexpectedly.

- ✿ When he will be away for a meal, send along his favorite foods. Slip a

card or note of affection or appreciation into the lunch sack.

- ✿ Try to say something positive and encouraging to him every day. He hears plenty of criticism from other people!

- ✿ Have a special meal together one evening. Work out how much you would spend if you ate out, and don't be afraid to make life easy for yourself by buying a special ready-made vegetarian dish and attractive dessert. That way you won't be frazzled by a day in the kitchen. To save time, you can even buy the salad from a supermarket salad bar. Create a special atmosphere with candles and music.


- ✿ Show you care by helping him to keep physically fit. It's more fun to be active together! Go for a walk somewhere new; row a boat on the lake; take a picnic and go for a swim; or try a new sport that neither of you has ever tried before.

- ✿ Take an evening off, and make popcorn and hot chocolate. Play Scrabble, or a Bible board game, or the Ungame. Or make up five questions each, such as "What is your

favorite memory from our time together?" "If you could ask for any gift in the world, what would you ask for?" etc. Learn a new hobby together or rent a Christian video to watch together.

- ✿ Avoid getting into a rut. Be full of new surprises, and just have a good laugh together!

- ✿ Learn how to do as many household tasks as you can, so that you don't have to depend on your husband to change plugs and light bulbs and water-tap washers. The next time he has to do the job, ask him to teach you how. Or learn from a class or a good handyman's textbook. Other useful skills to acquire are unblocking sinks, patching up paint work, recycling junk furniture for your home, and hammering or screwing picture hooks into the wall. Teach him how to sew on a button, stitch a neat hem, iron a shirt, and use the washing machine!

- ✿ Challenge your husband's thinking with new ideas. Help him to grow spiritually and intellectually. Pray *with* him and *for* him, and grow toward heaven together. 

*Karen Holford is the wife of Bernie Holford, the family life director of the South England Conference. Together they enjoy developing seminars on all aspects of family life. The Holfords have three children. Karen has written several books, and she also enjoys crafts of all kinds.*



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# Social Graces? Yes, Please!



*Valerie J. Smetheram*

**H**ave you ever felt invisible? I did recently. I was visiting a large suburban church. A member just home from several months overseas related her experiences. Gloriously attired in that country's national dress, she skillfully held her audience's attention, especially mine because I was once quite familiar with the city in which she was based.

After the services we talked, sharing our impressions of that colorful Asian city. We were deep in conversation when some friends of hers dropped into the seats in front of us, swung around, and rudely interrupted our discussion. Then all three talked "over" me for several minutes as if I had vanished. I thought if I moved away, they probably wouldn't miss me. I did, they didn't (I did excuse myself, but they were too absorbed to hear).

Discourteous? Yes, definitely! Deliberate? Perhaps. I don't like such behavior, but I try to be patient and

move on and talk with others. However, I can't help thinking, What if I were a first-time visitor, a sad lonely person needing comfort, or an earnest truth-seeker? I would have felt disappointed and rejected.

Yet in that same church are a group of people committed to personal ministry. They present a bunch of their own homegrown flowers to every visitor they can find. It's very pleasant to be a recipient. Their social graces leave a highly positive image in many minds. First impressions are so important.

My family and I travel many kilometers every year in our work and visit a large number of churches in the process. We've been surprised more than once to find no one at the door to greet us. Often, we find little knots of people involved in their own interaction in the church building. The message that sometimes comes across is: "You're not a regular and I can't be bothered talking to you." Sad, isn't it?

I realize this pattern occurs in all groups of people everywhere. Of course, it's more noticeable and embarrassing in your own church system. Ministers and their partners are used to searching their congregation each week for new faces. The larger the church, the greater the difficulty. The pastoral

job is assessed on performance, whether we like to admit it or not. This makes clergy couples far more aware of visitors. However, this does not excuse any of us from lack of courtesy, unthinking or deliberate.

As I thought of the lady in the national dress and her friends, I asked myself, "Ouch! Have I been guilty of this sort of behavior?" Almost certainly! "Have I frozen someone out of a conversation?" Probably, though I hope never deliberately.

Recently, on television, our Commissioner of Police addressed the problem of road rage, a problem which is becoming increasingly common in this stressful world. He said how much he would like society to return to the old "pleases" and "thank-yous" an earlier generation had insisted on. (It's difficult to fight when your social interaction is centered in courtesy, don't you think?) It really made me consider my own responsibilities. I determined to be more careful when I interact with people.

Do go and make friends with any new face who visits your church or any other social gathering. Don't be distracted. Give them your undivided attention. Let's all make a greater effort.

Social graces? Yes, please!



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



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# Miracle in the Afternoon

*Adrinnie K. Kanondo*



It was late in the afternoon of October 17, 1996, that I felt a sharp pain in the lower right side of my abdomen. I ignored the pain, hoping it was due to exhaustion after a day's work and that it would clear up after a rest. Fortunately, the pain did subside during the night, and I woke up the following morning looking forward to another day's work. By mid-morning, however, the pain had come on again, but I managed to get through the day.

On Sabbath morning I woke up and began to get ready for church. Suddenly the pain returned, gripping me so hard that I felt nauseated. Faintly suspecting that it could be serious, I asked my husband to drive me to our local health center. After examining me, the clinical officer voiced his suspicion: appendicitis! I got scared. To me, appendicitis was synonymous with operation. The clinical officer assured me that the appendicitis might clear with medication, so he sent me home with an antibiotic and a pain killer.

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## Prayer for a miracle

From that day, I started praying for a miracle—that the Lord would clear the appendicitis so that an operation would not be necessary. Unfortunately the pain persisted and I began vomiting. After four days, I was referred to the local hospital and admitted for treatment. The doctors put me on IV fluids for the vomiting and gave me stronger antibiotics, hoping to clear the inflammation.

For one week, I received dextrose and saline by intravenous drip. During that week, I experienced chills that would leave my body exhausted and my legs sometimes numb. All this time, I continued praying for the miracle to happen, but the pain and the vomiting continued.


## Prayer not answered

My prayers didn't seem to be answered. The miracle didn't happen. Finally, on October 28, the doctor came and told me of his plans to operate the next day to remove the appendix. I felt depression set in. I couldn't understand why the Lord had not answered my prayer. By that time I was feeling weak from vomiting and not being able to eat for a whole week. I didn't think my body would stand the operation.

As I lay there on that hospital bed questioning the Lord, I felt impressed

to recite Psalm 23: "Yea though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil..." This part of the Psalms comforted me and helped lift my spirits. I acknowledged that the Lord was still in control and that He was allowing me to go through the operation for a purpose. On the day of the operation, I felt calm and at peace. The operation took place at 8:30, and the doctors found the appendix swollen.

Recuperating from the operation hasn't been easy. There have been times when I have felt betrayed by my own body. Instead of feeling stronger, I felt very weak, helpless, and in pain. At such times God has seemed far away. Yet Philippians 4:4 and 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18 have been a source of strength. I have found that there is healing in rejoicing in the Lord. Many friends and my family were constantly praying for me, and I know their prayers sustained me even at times when I felt I could not endure the pain any longer.

I have learned a very big lesson in this experience. All we need to do is surrender our lives to the Lord. He did answer my prayer and performed the miracle of healing me. As I continue recuperating, I know He is with me. I thank the Lord that I belong to God's family. 



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# Excuses, Excuses!

John Rhodes

**P**salms 2:4 says, “The one enthroned in the heaven laughs.” If God so chooses, He could laugh at our flimsy excuses for our actions and see through the shame we so often offer to Him and to each other. But thankfully, His judgment is too merciful to overlook the real reasons for failure. However, He is also too just to overlook our sham and pretense. First Samuel 16:7 tells us that “Man looketh on outward appearance” but fortunately for us, God does not.

Isn't it time for us to remove the veil from our eyes so that we might see ourselves as we really are?

The self-justification instinct seems almost innate in all of us. We want to justify our actions as holy and good. We would like both God and man to think that some of the things we say are reasons; not excuses.

We should begin each morning by looking at ourselves in a true light. Our past shows that we are all too eager to explain away our actions and justify our behavior. We are quick to echo the Egyptian hieroglyphic that says “I never did it.”

## The Excuse of False Blame

Genesis 3:12 says, “And the man said, the woman whom thou gavest to be with me, she gave me of the tree, and I did eat.” Adam tried to fool God and place blame on anyone but himself.

In the phrase “the woman that thou gavest me” is a poignant phrase that foreshadows a tragic experience. Eve had fallen to sin. Adam, self-

willed and sympathetic to his wife, also partook of the apple. We find Adam and Eve hiding in the cool of the garden from the Lord. For the first time, they sense their nakedness. When questioned, Adam is quick to defensively reply, “the woman whom thou gavest me.”

Wanting to put the blame on someone else other than himself, Adam blames the woman, but indirectly blames God. In essence, he is saying, “God, you ought to talk to Eve about this. You gave her to me. It's really your fault.”

Six or seven millenniums haven't changed man very much. Man is still offering this same excuses. “I would get to Sabbath School on time, but this woman causes me to be late. I would join the church but my boss insists I must work on the Sabbath.” Friend of mine, quit blaming others for your mistakes and accept your own guilt. We sin of ourselves. Rather than place blame on others, seek God's forgiveness and mercy.

## The Excuse of Coincidence

“And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it to me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf” Exodus 32:24.

And there came out this calf. This text gives us a lame answer to a ticklish problem. Aaron had lost control of the Israelites and had weakened to the pressures to make a golden calf. The Israelites said, “Moses brought us out here to die; he's been gone so long on the

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mountain, let us make a golden calf and worship it." Aaron weakened. When Moses returned from 40 days and nights with God, he saw the sin and immoral rites being performed about this calf. Moses threw the tables down and asked for an explanation. Joshua replied, "And I said unto them, Whosoever hath any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it me: then I cast it into the fire, and there came out this calf."

Such a weak excuse. It is like the man who had feelings toward a certain woman in the church and kept finding "reasons" to stop by her house. Though she was a married woman, he found himself justifying his visits. "I need to give her a quarterly." "I think this book would bring her closer to God." The excuses continued. Before you know it, a home was broken. Both parties countered, "I don't know how it happened, the situation just happened."

Sin. We need to recoil from it. Just as Aaron, if we relent enough to put in the broken gold, we will have the golden calf experience come out.

#### The Excuse of Inability

In Exodus 4:10, Moses says to the Lord, "O my Lord, I am not eloquent, neither heretofore, nor since thou has spoken unto thy servant: but I am slow of speech and of a slow tongue."

God's call is the promise of His enabling. We immediately picture Moses out on the Gideon Plain. God has spoken to him. Moses immediately expresses his hesitancy to do the work of God. He offers what seems to be valid excuses.

Moses apparently had a speech impediment, and here was a ready answer when called into service. Get someone else. At nominating committee time, we hear this excuse. "Get someone more qualified, Lord. You know I can't do this job."

No doubt, there is always someone more qualified to do anything we

might be asked to do for God, but that is no real reason to back away from responsibility. When God leads others to ask us to serve, we should do our humble best to accommodate the request. Be assured of this, God's call is His enabling. He says, "Without me, you can do nothing." God can and will use you if you only allow Him to.

If we choose to be like Moses and take stock of our weaknesses and our inabilities, we too might quake with fear. It is important to remember the Bible verse that says, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

When Moses expressed doubt about his ability to speak, God said, "Now therefore I will be with thy mouth and teach thee what thou shalt say."

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Luke 9:59 tells how one man answered God's call by saying, "Lord, suffer me first to go and bury my father." The Lord knew this was an excuse and not a real reason for declining the offer to follow him. Perhaps the man wanted to stay behind to inherit his father's earthly belongings. We really don't know what his motives were; we just know Christ saw through the excuses.

Have you used such excuses?

"When I get a new job, I'll be able to keep the Sabbath." "When I get a pension next year, then I'll quit and keep the Sabbath." "As soon as I get these bills paid up, I'll pay tithes." And so the excuses continue. Excuses the Lord is not interested in. When He says, "Follow me," don't delay. Heed the verse in Matthew 6:33 that says, "But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you."

#### The Excuse of Good Intentions

"And Saul said unto Samuel, Yea, I have obeyed the voice of the Lord, and have gone the way which the Lord sent me, and have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. But the people took of the spoil, sheep and oxen, the chief of the things which should have been utterly destroyed to sacrifice unto the Lord thy God in Gilgal. And Samuel said, Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams" I Samuel 15:20-22.

Saul, the first king of Israel, had what seemed to be good intentions in circumventing a direct command of the Lord. He had been given instructions to destroy the Amalekites, to destroy their cattle and sheep and goats, to wipe them off the earth.

The soldiers were to take no loot from the battle, but Saul couldn't resist taking a few of the beautiful sheep and goats. He wanted to give them to King Agag as a token of his victory. He said to himself, "I'll use these in sacrificial offerings at the temple."

The prophet replied, "To obey is better than sacrifice, to hearken than the fat of rams." God is far more impressed with obedience than He is with good intentions.



### Excuse of Procrastination

"And as he reasoned of righteousness, temperance, and judgment to come, Felix trembled, and answered, Go thy way for this time: when I have a convenient season, I will call for thee" Acts 24:25.

Felix said, "Lord, you know I'll follow you some day, but not just now." Felix was almost persuaded, but he put off his decision and, tragically, never did accept Christ. Felix saw what a sinner he was yet never surrendered. How many have good intentions of giving up some pet sins in their lives but want to do it in their own time? Time has a way of disappearing.

### Excuse of Flattery

"There was a man of the Pharisees, named Nicodemus, a ruler of the Jews. The same came to Jesus by night, and said unto him, Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher come from God: for no man can do these miracles that thou doest, except God be with him. Jesus answered and said unto him, Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born again, he cannot see the kingdom of God" John 3:1-5.

Perhaps this is the most deceptive excuse of all. Flattery is like soft soap—98 percent lie. Christ sees through flattery and does not fall for such tactics.

Such excuses are used by many would-be converts and not a few backsliders. To evade the issue at hand, they will resort to flattery, thinking thus to excuse or cause one to forget their sins. A backslider will say, "My, I sure enjoy your preaching." However, he still doesn't attend church. A would-be convert may say, "Well, you Adventists are good people. I sure admire you." But when it comes to pinning them down to action and obedience, you will see that their words are simply flattery; there is no substance.

We all need what Nicodemus needed. We need a new birth experience, a change of heart, a turn around. The Lord wasted no time in listening to further flattery but came to the point. He said, "Listen, Nicodemus, you need to be born again." This seems almost blunt and tactless, but God could read the heart. He knew Nicodemus' motives in flattery. He knew Nicodemus needed conversion.

### The Excuse of Occupation and Possessions

"And he said, This will I do: I will pull down my barns and build greater; and there will I bestow all my fruits and my goods" Luke 12:18.

This man was a busy landlord—a fruit and vegetable wholesaler. Here is a picture of occupational hazard. A man becomes a success and to him is added riches; then he loses sight of the One who gave him power to get wealth. When asked by the church to serve or give, he replies, "Why, it's going to cost me so much to build this bigger barn, I just can't afford to give right now" or "I'm so tired taking care of my estate or little mansion that I can't take on any responsibility in the church." Just an excuse, sure, but God knows the heart. Christ said, "Beware of covetousness, for a man's life consisteth not in the abundance of things which he possesseth." The Lord calls such a man a fool. "This night shall thy soul be required of thee." Don't let your job, your possessions, your vocations or avocations stand between you and God. If you are too busy to pray, to help in the church, or to study your Bible, you are too busy.

### The Excuse of the Majority


A lot of us use the excuse, "Well, everybody else does it, why shouldn't I?" Here is the text for you to study. "And they all with one consent began to make excuse. The first said unto

him, 'I have bought a piece of ground, and I must go look at it; I pray thee have me excused'" Luke 14:18.

Don't you know that making such excuses is contagious? First you stay home from prayer meeting, then someone else says, "Well, he never goes, so why should I?" One person decides to quit the choir, then another, then another. One family decides not to send their children to church school, then another makes the same decision. It's like a domino effect. A dangerous trend develops. People follow the crowd instead of thinking for themselves. Too often the crowd doesn't know the facts and, what's more, they often get a distorted picture of the truth.

Don't sell out to majority thinking—think for yourself. Follow what is right and reasonable. God made us as individuals and not puppets. Be a thinker and not a mere reflection of other people's thoughts.

We all make excuses. There is the excuse of false blame—it's not my fault; the excuse of coincidence—well, it just turned out that way. I wasn't to blame; the excuse of inability—I'm not qualified; the excuse of personal need—I'm needed at home, I have to take care of my obligations first. There is the excuse of good intentions—I really meant what I did for the good of the cause; the excuse of procrastination—when the season is more convenient; the excuse of flattery—if I flood you with enough soft soap, the suds will obliterate your vision of my faults; the excuse of occupation—I'm just too busy, Lord, surely you'll understand; and of course, the excuse of the majority—if no one else does, why should I?

Such excuses are weak reasons for justifying our selfish way of life. When asked to serve God, don't say "I can't." There is no excuse for turning down God. 



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# Three Red Triangles

*Priscilla Adonis*

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One morning as we were driving to Sabbath School, I noticed a sticker on the back of a bakkie (pickup truck). It read:

**Be Prepared**

**Be Polite**

**Be Patient**

To the left of each phrase was a red triangle that stands for caution in road safety. Long after the truck was gone, I was still pondering how the messages of the caution triangles paralleled the practices in our homes. If the traffic department and the National Road Safety Association saw the need of courtesy on the roads, how much more should courtesy be practiced in our Christian homes?

## **First Triangle—Be Prepared**

Lord Baden-Powell, founder of the great Scouts movement, adopted this motto for himself and for all his followers —“Be Prepared.”

Do you leave from home the same time that your appointment is scheduled and then chase as fast as you can, trying to overtake all the traffic in front of you? Driving like this is not only dangerous, it is also offensive. Put your notepad, pen, keys, wallet, eyeglasses or whatever you may need in a designated place so that you don't have to look all over for them before leaving the house. See that you have enough gas in your

tank so you don't have to fill up when you're already late for your appointment. Don't wait until the last minute to prepare for your outing. Set all your things in order as soon as possible.

What impressions are we giving others? Can they learn from us? Do they notice that we are well prepared for the jobs we do? Can they say we are polite to each other and to others? Are we patient with one another or only with those outside the home? Are we totally impatient with people and pride ourselves with the fact?

To be prepared means to take precaution, make arrangements, have forethought. In the Bible we read in John 14:1-3, that Jesus has gone to prepare a place in heaven for us. What happens if we are not prepared? We are worried and upset and Jesus tells us in verse 1 not to be worried or upset. Let's be prepared for our mansion in Heaven. “The family here must, as far as possible, be a model of the one in heaven” Ellen G. White, *Adventist Home*, p. 146.

“I urge you to prepare for the coming of Christ in the clouds of heaven. Day by day cast the love of the world out of your hearts. Understand by experience what it means to have fellowship with Christ. Prepare for the judgment, that when



Christ shall come to be admired in all them that believe, you may be among those who will meet Him in peace" (*Ibid*, p. 550).

### Second Triangle—Be Polite

Recently I mentioned to a single mother that her son is always extremely polite. I went on to tell her that he is always most courteous, well mannered, well behaved, and respectful. She said very humbly, "Thank you."

He is not handsome as some would judge by outward appearances, but handsome in his ways and actions! Her son did not know that I took notice of his good behavior and of his politeness. His wonderful, humble, Christian mother taught him that courtesy begins at home.

After Paul gave his testimony to Agrippa, he and other prisoners were handed over to Julius, a centurion. In Acts 27:3 (KJV) we read, "Julius courteously entreated Paul and gave him liberty to go unto his friends to refresh himself." When we are courteous, polite and well mannered, people take you as a friend and recommend you to others.

First Peter 3:8 (KJV) says, "Finally, be ye all of one mind, having compassion one for another, love as brethren, be pitiful, be courteous."

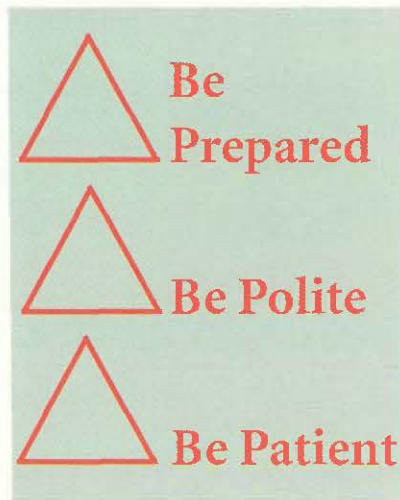
"If we would have our children practice kindness, courtesy, and love, we ourselves must set the example. Courtesy, even in little things, should be manifested by the parents toward each other. Universal kindness should be the law of the house. No rude language should be indulged; no bitter words should be spoken. . . . Your courtesy and self-control will have greater influence upon the characters of your children than mere words could have" *Adventist Home*, p. 421.

How can this be attained? "Christian politeness is received only under the working of the Holy

Spirit" (*Ibid*, p. 422). God will help you use your speech in a Christlike manner, if you pray for it and ask Him to help you.

"True politeness, true courtesy, is a kindness shown to all, high or low, rich or poor. The essence of true politeness is consideration for others" (*Ibid*, p. 423).

When Peter hung around before Christ's crucifixion, a servant girl recognized him and asked him if he was one of Jesus' disciples. Peter swore and said that he didn't know Jesus. Later the girl told Peter that



his speech betrayed him; he talked like a Galilean. Are we sometimes like Peter and say a wrong or ugly word under pressure? As Christians, may we always act politely in every circumstance.

### Third Triangle—Be Patient

Patience is a virtue. Galatians 5:22, 23 says, "But the fruits of the spirit are love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self control."

In Proverbs 16:32 we find another illustration of patience: "Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city." To be patient means to be calm, to have an

uncomplaining nature, to have your spirit under control.

The Scriptures and the Spirit of Prophecy give us a good deal of admonition to be patient. "Speak gently. Never raise your voice to harshness. Keep yourself calm . . . Be patient with them (your children) in their trials, which may look small to you but which are large to them" (*Ibid*, p. 436).

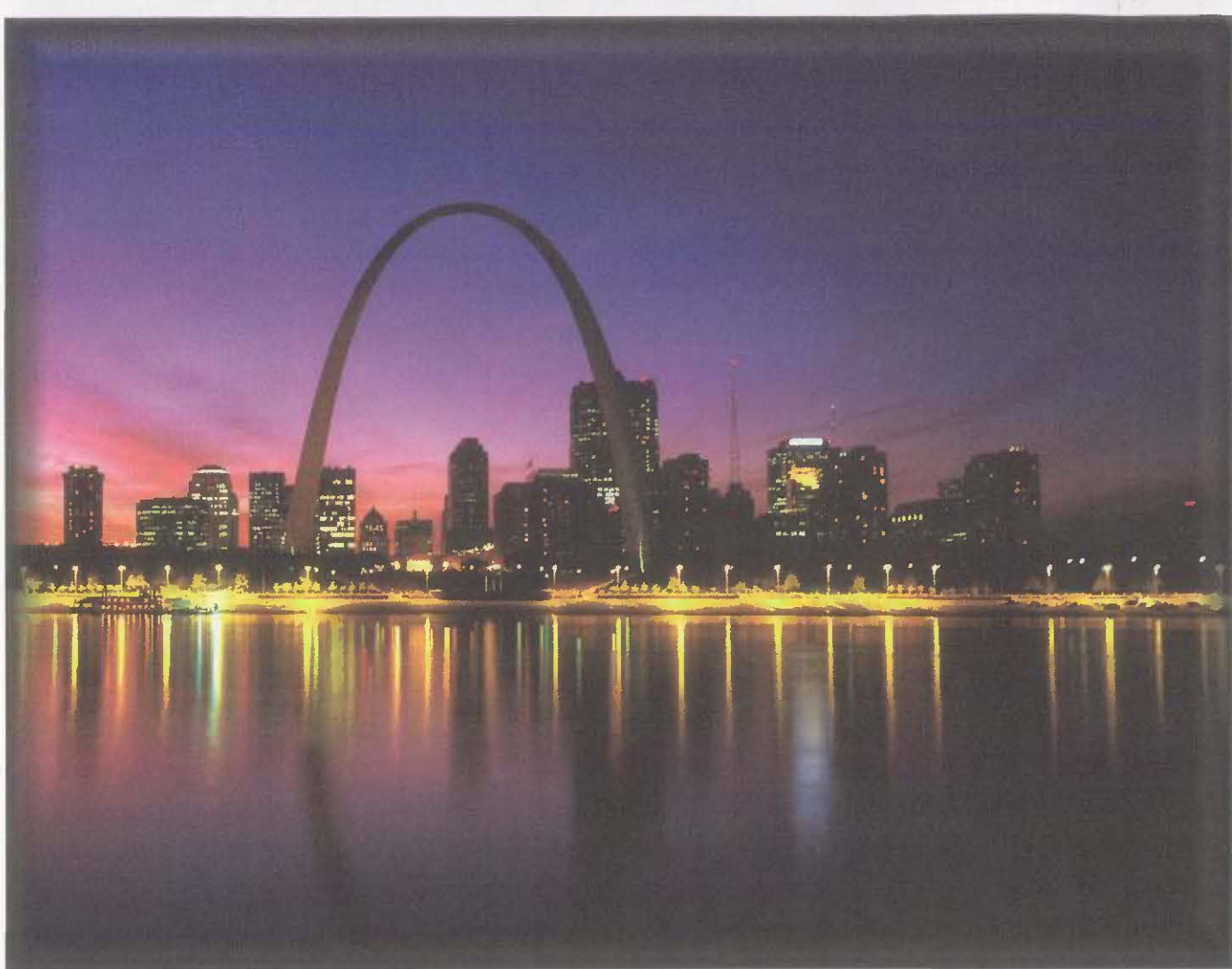
"Look unto Jesus at all times and in all places, offering a silent prayer from a sincere heart that you may know how to do His will. Then when the enemy comes in like a flood, the Spirit of the Lord will lift up a standard for you against the enemy. When you are almost ready to yield, to lose patience and self-control, to be hard and denunciary, to find fault and accuse—this is the time for you to send to heaven the prayer, 'Help me, O God, to resist temptation, to put all bitterness and wrath and evil speaking out of my heart. Give me Thy meekness, Thy lowliness, Thy long-suffering, and Thy love'" (*Ibid*, p. 214).

Let every family seek the Lord more earnestly as we travel the road to Heavenly Zion by being *prepared*, being *polite* and being *patient*. We should practice these virtues not only with visitors and strangers but also with our dear, precious family. May we strive daily to show God's love in our everyday lives. ☞

*It is not by driving  
away our brother  
that we can be alone  
with God.*

—George MacDonald,  
*Signs of the Times*  
July 1994





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*Wednesday, July 6 - "Transformed by Grace for Service"*

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