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HOSPITALITY



ON THE COVER

What do hospitality and friendship evangelism really involve? A “picture-perfect” house and gourmet meals? Read this issue to discover what God is actually calling us to do and the type of true friendship people are looking for. It’s something we can all offer!



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THE POWER OF A CHILD'S PRAYER

"If we love one another, God abides in us, and His love has been perfected in us."

1 John 4:12b, NKJV

WE WERE NEW to the neighborhood, and as we got to know the neighbor across the street, he shared that he had grown up in an Adventist home. He had hated it! His father was strict and unloving and often beat our neighbor and his siblings as they grew up.

The beatings included lectures; he told his children that they had to be good or God would not save them. There was no example of a loving and merciful God—just rules and sternness.

Jerry and I were so sad that our loving God had been so misrepresented by an unconverted father who had never experienced the love of Jesus.

Our neighbor was married and had two small children. Jerry and I started praying for him to come to know God as a God of love. We also prayed that our neighbor would bring his family to church.

We decided to invite our neighbor and his family over for a late Friday-afternoon dinner. I prepared the only meal that I'm really good at making—haystacks. The true North American Adventist meal! It was fall, so I also bought apples and fresh apple cider. The cider was available only in the fall.

That afternoon I was busy in the kitchen when Jerry said, "Janet, sundown will happen about the time we finish eating. We'll need to have the beginning of Sabbath worship while our neighbors are here. What should we do?" I said, "Jerry, I have cleaned the house, bought the food, and now I'm preparing it. I think it would be nice if you plan the sundown worship."

Jerry took our 4-year-old son, Zachary, into the bedroom and told him, "We

need to have the beginning of Sabbath worship while the neighbors are here." He then explained to Zachary the importance of helping this family learn about our loving God. Then Jerry prayed with him.

I later learned that Jerry prayed that God would help our neighbor see that he should begin taking his children to church and that he would realize how important it was to teach his children about Jesus.

Our neighbor came with his little boy. His wife was not feeling well, and she stayed home with their baby. I served my gourmet haystacks and freshly made apple cider. Jerry was enjoying the haystacks with lots of chili beans. Plus, he really loved the apple cider and drank glass after glass of it. Maybe a little too much!

When the meal was over, Sabbath was beginning. Jerry called us all to the living room to have sundown worship. He asked our neighbor if that was OK, and he politely obliged.

Jerry read a Bible story and then asked Zachary to pray. We all knelt down. Zachary's prayer was the exact words his daddy had prayed with him earlier. "Dear Jesus, You know our neighbor did not have a good religious experience growing up. He needs to know that You are a loving and caring God. He needs to take his children to church so they will be ready to meet Jesus when He comes. Please help him to take his children to church. In Jesus' name, amen."

We slid up on our chairs. No one said a word. I was very embarrassed and afraid we had ruined any kind of relationship with him. I looked at Jerry,

hoping he would say something to help the situation. His face looked drained, whiter than white. He then excused himself to go to the bathroom.

I sat there mortified, not knowing what to say. More silence. It seemed that Jerry was gone a long time.

Finally, our neighbor said, "I think we better go home and see how my wife is doing." He thanked me for the meal and said to tell Jerry goodbye.

Later, I found out that as Zachary started praying, Jerry was suddenly hit with severe stomach cramping and was desperate for Zachary to finish praying so he could get to the bathroom. Perhaps a mixture of too many beans and too much fresh apple cider can be dangerous!

Jerry felt as if he had really messed up with our neighbor because of Zachary repeating his prayer. To our surprise, however, the very next Sabbath our neighbor brought his family to church, and he continued to do so!

We never know how God will use our children for His kingdom work. The important thing is that we do reach out in love. It is not about having the perfect food or house or words but about loving others. I know I need to earnestly pray for God to teach me how to love my neighbors to Jesus. And even when we make mistakes, God still works!

I pray that the articles about hospitality in this issue will give you some ideas for reaching out!

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



HOSPITALITY MADE *Practical*

WE LIVE IN A WORLD influenced by social media. Picture-perfect table settings and staged homes abound on Pinterest, Instagram, and Facebook. Pretty napkin holders and place cards are strategically set next to the delicious-looking food that must have taken hours to prepare and to plate so meticulously. And then there's the decorating for themed parties, bridal and baby showers, and wedding receptions that could have come right out of a Hollywood movie!

When I talk to others about it, they all seem to express the same thought: such perfection in hospitality is not attainable, so why even try?

I remember taking a spiritual-gifts tests when I was a teenager and scoring high in the "hospitality" category. It sparked an interest in me that still exists all these years later.

So what is hospitality, and why is it important? Does it have anything to do with those picture-perfect tablescape? And is everyone called to show hospitality, or is it just me?

HOSPITALITY AND THE BIBLE

Consider these Bible texts about hospitality:

"Do not neglect to show hospitality to strangers, for thereby some have entertained angels unawares" (Hebrews 13:2).

"And breaking bread in their homes, they received their food with glad and generous hearts" (Acts 2:46).

"For I was hungry and you gave me food, I was thirsty and you gave me drink, I was a stranger and you welcomed me" (Matthew 25:35).

“Show hospitality to one another without grumbling” (1 Peter 4:9).

“Contribute to the needs of the saints and seek to show hospitality” (Romans 12:13).

“A new commandment I give to you, that you love one another: just as I have loved you, you also are to love one another. By this all people will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another” (John 13:34, 35).

“She opens her hand to the poor and reaches out her hands to the needy” (Proverbs 31:20).

Since the Bible speaks so clearly about the importance of showing hospitality, I not only want to practice it but to help others do so as well.

HOSPITALITY MYTHS

Many myths regarding hospitality need to be dispelled. Here are a few:

Myth 1: You have to have a perfect home to be hospitable. More important than a “perfect” home is an open heart and open hands. Your home does not have to look magazine-worthy, but it should be filled with genuine love. Also, hospitality is not limited to our homes. We should constantly be aware of those around us and do what we can to help meet their needs.

Myth 2: Hospitality is to be extended only to friends and family. Hospitality, instead, is for everyone.

Myth 3: Hospitality requires great amounts of time, meticulous planning, and the best version of myself. Instead, hospitality requires vulnerability and obedience. Some of the best and most memorable visits are messy and unexpected. Sometimes showing hospitality is even unwanted! Although the practice of hospitality requires time and resources, it’s rewarded with great joy. Few things are more energizing and fulfilling than serving others. You just need to be willing.

Myth 4: Hospitality is synonymous with entertaining. There is no mention of Pinterest or picture-perfect table spreads in any definition of hospitality. There is, of course, nothing wrong with making things look attractive for our guests, but on its own, that’s not true hospitality. Remember: entertaining is to impress, but hospitality is to bless.

Myth 5: Hospitality is a spiritual gift. Hospitality can be risky, and it’s asked of all of us (remember those verses above?). While some of us may find hospitality easier to do than others, we are all called to show Christ’s love and hospitality.

Myth 6: Hospitality is merely about sharing a meal or a bed. Strive to do more than just meet physical needs. When we are hospitable, we reach others on a personal level. Think of the lonely, the unloved, and others in need. Be bold and do what you can to help draw others closer to Jesus. Hospitality helps to show God’s love to others.

PRACTICAL HOSPITALITY

Here are a few practical tips:

Create a warm atmosphere. While fresh flowers and candles can help create a warm and welcoming atmosphere, nothing is as refreshing as a loving smile and a willingness to serve. That being said, light some candles and cut some fresh flowers for your guests to enjoy as well! It’s simple and makes a great impact. Welcome everyone into your home. Let them feel loved, not only by you but also by God.



Be aware of those around you and their needs. Hospitality is not limited to inside your home. Pay attention as you interact with others, and don't let anyone go unnoticed. Take time out of your day to encourage or pray with someone and show kindness.

Make sure your houseguests have everything they need and that they feel comfortable enough to ask for anything they don't have. For overnight guests especially, make everything as accessible as possible. Have warm drinks and water easily available, and stock the bathroom and guestroom with towels, toiletries, and other essentials.

Serve meals with love. Meals don't have to be extravagant or consist of expensive ingredients. Make simple meals with love and don't feel pressured to

make something new or complicated (there's always the danger that something new will flop anyway!). Your guests are not there to judge your cooking. They are there to be blessed by you (whether they know it or not). Pray that when they leave, instead of particularly remembering the spectacular meal you served, they will instead remember how you served their souls.

What's most important is to build a relationship with those around your table and to talk about things that truly matter. Like John, our motto should be: Less of me, more of Jesus. Our purpose is to be a blessing to others. **J**

* All Bible texts are taken from the English Standard Version (ESV).

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Special Quotes

When you give a dinner or a supper, do not ask your friends, your brothers, your relatives, nor rich neighbors, lest they also invite you back, and you be repaid. But when you give a feast, invite the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind. And you will be blessed, because they cannot repay you; for you shall be repaid at the resurrection of the just.

—Luke 14:12-14, NKJV

[In reference to the Bible text above:]

These are guests whom it will lay on you no great burden to receive. You will not need to provide for them elaborate or expensive entertainment. You will need to make no effort at display. The warmth of a genial welcome, a place at your fireside, a seat at your home table, the privilege of sharing the blessing of the hour of prayer, would to many of these be like a glimpse of heaven.

—*The Adventist Home*, p. 448

The privilege granted Abraham and Lot is not denied to us. By showing hospitality to God's children we, too, may receive His angels into our dwellings. Even in our day angels in human form enter the homes of men and are entertained by them. And Christians who live in the light of God's countenance are always accompanied by unseen angels, and these holy beings leave behind them a blessing in our homes.

—*The Adventist Home*, p. 445

Christ keeps an account of every expense incurred in entertaining for His sake. He supplies all that is necessary for this work. Those who for Christ's sake entertain their brethren, doing their best to make the visit profitable both to their guests and to themselves, are recorded in heaven as worthy of special blessings.

—*The Adventist Home*, p. 450

As those whom God has called and chosen, we are under obligation to become intelligent in regard to the difference between eating to live and living to eat. Look at the world and see the worship that is paid to eating, drinking, and dressing. It is carried into every phase of life. Needless worries and burdens are brought upon the family by wishing to be hospitable in entertaining visitors. They overwork to prepare a great variety for the table. An overabundance is eaten. The digestive organs are given too large an amount of work to do. The distended stomach cries out for relief, "Hold, hold, put no greater burden upon me than I can carry;" but the protest is unheeded. These dinners and teas and suppers are a burden and an injury.

—*Letters and Manuscripts*,
vol. 14, letter 123



BROKEN-RECORD *prayers*

RECENTLY, I'VE BEEN CHALLENGED to put my "broken-record" prayers aside and replace them with something else. Honestly, even though I'm tired of voicing the same old thing—as if God had not heard my past pleadings—I'm used to the song, familiar with the sound, and comfortable with asking the same thing again and again. Some of these prayers I've uttered year after year from my weary heart, and I've wondered whether the sound of my voice rises farther than my ceiling! I recently expressed this frustration to a friend.

My friend had just read that morning from the book *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence*, by Sarah Young. Sarah hears Jesus talk to her (in her heart) and writes those thoughts in this book.

When you bring Me prayer requests, lay out your concerns before Me. Speak to Me candidly; pour out your heart. Then thank Me for the answers that I have set into motion long before you can discern results. When your requests come to mind again, continue to thank Me for the answers that are on the way. If you keep on stating your concerns to Me, you will live in a state of tension. When you thank Me for how I am answering your prayers, your mind-set becomes much more positive. Thankful prayers keep your focus on My Presence and My promises.¹

This thought is confirmed again and again in Scripture:

- "Our God says, 'Calm down, and learn that I am God! All nations on earth will honor me' " (Psalm 46:10, CEV).²
- "Never give up praying. And when you pray, keep alert and be thankful" (Colossians 4:2, CEV).
- "Be happy in your hope, stand your ground when you're in trouble, and devote yourselves to prayer" (Romans 12:12, CEB).

I like what Mrs. White shares:

Take the word of Christ as your assurance. Has He not invited you to come unto Him? Never allow yourself to talk in a hopeless, discouraged way. If you do you will lose much. By looking at appearances and complaining when difficulties and pressure come, you give evidence of a sickly, enfeebled faith. Talk and act as if your faith was invincible. The Lord is rich in resources; He owns the world. Look heavenward in faith. Look to Him who has light and power and efficiency.³

I've been trying to exchange my "broken-record" prayers for my new hope-filled praises! I've been thanking Jesus for His attention to my heartfelt concerns, despite my not seeing any evidence of change. This change in focus also impacts my attitude of trust in a Savior who is more concerned over my repetitive prayers than I would have ever imagined. Won't you join me in this step of faith? 1

¹ Sarah Young, *Jesus Calling: Enjoying Peace in His Presence* (Nashville, Tenn.: HarperCollins Christian Publishing, Inc., 2004), p. 12.

² Scripture quotations credited to CEB are from the *Common English Bible*, copyright 2011. Used by permission. All rights reserved.

³ Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons*, p. 146.

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TIPS TO ~~SURVIVE~~ THRIVE

FRIENDSHIP AND HOSPITALITY EVANGELISM

First and foremost, pray daily for the Holy Spirit to live in your heart. When He is revealed through our words and actions, our ministry will be far more effective (see Zechariah 4:6). Ask the Lord to guide you into how to best serve Him. Some of the following suggestions may seem more or less attractive to you. The ones that seem most attractive will probably be your spiritual gifts, because “His biddings are His enablings.”

- Pray for opportunities to speak lovingly of God and Jesus.
- Greet at church, or at least be aware of visitors and help them to feel at home.
- Be sure the various places in church are clearly marked, such as restrooms, children’s Sabbath School rooms, classrooms, etc.
- Give a simple welcome gift to visitors (such as an inexpensive mug with mints, tea bags, hand sanitizer, pen/pencil, or other items you feel visitors would like). Include a welcome note and an invitation to visit “our church” again. Make several of these ahead of time and store them at the church.
- Greet and welcome those who attend fellowship meals. Be sure no one sits alone.
- Become friends with neighbors; when you learn of their needs, pray with them.
- Become involved in community projects.
- Do acts of kindness for others. One pastor’s wife, who lives in a cul-de-sac, clears all her neighbors’ sidewalks with her snowblower when it snows. Neighbors come out to thank her and get to know her.
- If your neighbors don’t reach out to you when you move in, reach out to them. Make cookies and take them to their homes and introduce yourself.



- After people visit your church, visit them at home to thank them for coming and invite them to return. When possible, take along your spouse, an elder, a deaconess/deacon, or someone else interested in welcoming visitors.
- If you don’t enjoy entertaining at home, invite someone to go out for tea or lunch.
- If you’re a young mom, invite the moms in your neighborhood and their children to your home/library/park. This can be a “play date” for the kids while you chat with the moms.
- Take soup, fruit salad, bread, etc. to neighbors, church friends, or members when they return home from the hospital or have been ill at home.

TRAIN CHILDREN AND YOUTH TO BECOME INVOLVED IN CHURCH

- Have them bake and decorate cookies, then take the cookies to neighbors of the church or residents of nursing homes.
- Involve young people in writing encouraging cards/notes to service members, visitors, or people who are lonely.
- Help children/young people learn to be greeters by having them greet with you. 1

Evelyn Griffin is a retired pastor’s wife. She and her pastor-husband have four children and 14 grandchildren.

REGAINING THE FAMILY *Balance*

THE BIBLE MAY BE THE UNEXPECTED SOLUTION FOR PARENTS STRIVING TO RAISE CHILDREN TO BE FUNCTIONING, CONTRIBUTING ADULTS.

THE TITLES OF SOME RECENT BOOKS say it all: *The Collapse of Parenting*, *Toxic Childhood*, and *Spoonfed Generation*. In spite of our all-consuming desire to give our children the perfect childhood, we seem to be raising a generation that is, in many respects, ill-equipped for life in the real world.

The problem is not that we lack information but that parents to-

day have lost sight of the big picture. We could happily tell you our views on childcare, spanking your children, screen time, or too much sugar, but very few of us could tell you exactly what we're aiming for or how we plan to get there. We can become so preoccupied with the daily details and dilemmas that we get out of tune with the bigger purpose of parenting.

At a time when I was a particularly anxious, aimless parent, I turned to the Bible. Its ancient wisdom turned out to be the perfect antidote to the problems that plagued me. When we step back to see the Bible's big vision for parents and children, we can get our parenting back into harmony with our God-given purpose. But the Bible also confronts us with some hard truths.



Putting our children “second” will actually benefit them in the long run.

WE ARE RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CHILDREN’S MORAL EDUCATION

When our second son had just started preschool, I was chatting with the mother of one of his classmates. She said the preschool had raised concerns about her son’s “antisocial” behavior. Toward the end of the year, I asked how things were going; she told me her son’s behavior had not improved. What surprised me was what the boy’s mother said next. She blamed the preschool teachers for the lack of improvement and wondered, “What have they been doing about it all year?”

In today’s world, parents are taking less and less responsibility for their children’s moral education. In our busy lives, we struggle to commit the time and energy that the task demands. Modern parents have a growing expectation that other people—such as teachers—will pick up the slack.

In a recent American study called “The Children We Mean to Raise,” 80 percent of the young people surveyed said they valued their personal achievement or happiness above showing concern for others. This came as a complete shock to their parents, who believed the opposite. It’s one thing to hold certain values yourself, but quite another to pass them on to your children.

The Bible describes children as those “who do not yet know good from bad.” It’s parents—not anybody else, including teachers—who bear the *primary* responsibility for teaching them. But what are the key morals or values we ought to pass on? According to the Bible, the most important

thing to teach our children is to love God and to love (that is, do good to) other people.

But how do we teach our children these things? How do we pass on our values? The Bible encourages us to do it through:

- our example
- our words: we teach, encourage, and correct them
- training: we give them opportunities to practice doing good
- setting boundaries: we clearly explain our expectations ahead of time
- discipline: sometimes we let our children experience negative consequences for doing the wrong thing

This kind of moral education is not something that can be rushed. It requires the most precious thing that modern parents have to give: our unhurried time and attention. And, of course, our motivation is love: we love our children so much that we want them to mature into adults who know right from wrong.

WE ARE NOT RESPONSIBLE FOR OUR CHILDREN’S PERPETUAL COMFORT

I know all too well that it’s easier to buy a cheap toy than to endure the tantrum of a child who’s disappointed; it’s easier to switch on a flashing screen than to listen to the whining of a child who’s bored; it’s easier to hand out another snack than to put up with the complaints of a child who is hungry.

But trying to shield our children from every unpleasant situation results in anxious parents and children who lack resilience. When we overprescribe the drug of instant comfort, we deny our children the chance to strengthen their immunity to hardship. By contrast, the Bible prioritizes the development of a godly character and godly values over comfort. The whole project of passing on our values—teaching our children to love God and love others—is summarized by the word *discipline*: “[Our fathers] disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, in order that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:10, 11, NIV).

Hardship can be a powerful tool in our children's moral education. Some values, such as patience and perseverance, can only be learned the hard way. Our job is not to steer our children around the difficulties of life but to walk alongside them through the difficulties. When we purposely allow our children to experience small doses of hard things—disappointment, frustration, boredom, or delay—we're helping them to develop their resilience to these things in later life.

PUTTING OUR CHILDREN'S DESIRES FIRST IS BAD FOR EVERYONE

Modern parents tend to put their children's desires before anything else, including their marriage. When we expend all our time and energy trying to please our children, we have nothing left to give to our spouse at the end of the day. We talk to each other as "Mom and Dad," exchanging information about the kids, but we don't take time to talk as husband and wife, sharing our joys and burdens.

Putting our children before our marriage results in parents who feel disconnected and taken for granted, and children who always expect to be the center of attention. Of course, very small children have legitimate needs that require our attention throughout the day. But as children grow, they need to begin seeing themselves as part of a larger community, in which their needs and desires must be balanced with those of the people around them.

The Bible teaches that the surest foundation for family life is a healthy marriage. In psychologist and parenting expert Steve Biddulph's book *The Making of Love*, researcher Moira Eastman observes: "The parents are the architects of the family system.

Their relationship is the foundation stone of the whole family's wellbeing. In the happiest families, researchers found a unique bond of love between the spouses—a relationship of equals who genuinely respected each other. The marital relationship was the strongest bond in the family."


If our marriage is to survive—and thrive—once we become parents, we need to give it the attention it deserves. This means spending time together, working hard at communication and conflict resolution, and making sure that we are parenting as a team.

Building a strong marriage sometimes means putting our children's desires second. It means saying "No" to children who want to interrupt our adult conversation. It means saying "No" to children who want to stay up late when we had planned some couple time. It means saying "No" to that extra kids' activity if it puts too much strain on our family.

Putting our children "second" in this way will actually benefit them in the long run. They will grow up seeing what a healthy marriage looks like, secure in the knowledge that their parents are committed to each other for the long haul.

DON'T FORGET THE GOOD NEWS!

Parenting is a weighty task: we bear the primary responsibility for our children's moral education. This sometimes involves letting them experience difficulties; it sometimes requires putting their desires second to our marriage.

We will never do any of this perfectly—we can only ever hope to be "good enough" parents who keep striving to live in harmony with our God-given purpose. When we fail, we can run like little children into the arms of *our* loving heavenly Father and rest in His inexhaustible forgiveness and strength. And we don't have to do any of this alone. We are part of God's big family of faith—a whole community longing to see the next generation loving others for the love of God. 

Harriet Connor lives with her husband and three sons on the Central Coast of New South Wales, Australia. She is the author of Big Picture Parents: Ancient Wisdom for Modern Life and has degrees in languages and theology. This article originally appeared at www.mumsatthetable.com.

THE FIVE-MINUTE WITNESS

DURING MY DAILY COMMUTE to work in Moscow, Russia, it takes just five minutes from the moment I hop onto the subway escalator until I emerge onto the street above. A lot can happen in five minutes, especially if you're praying.

One morning, I joined the rush-hour crowd at the bottom of the four escalators, clutching the book *New Ways to Tell the Old, Old Story* by H.M.S. Richards, Jr., and agonizing about why my spiritual life seemed stuck in a rut. "Jesus, help me," I prayed.

Less than 30 seconds into the ride I found the answer. Prayer and Bible study are essential, but my life was missing the third key ingredient: "Those who are wise will shine like the brightness of the heavens, and those who lead many to righteousness, like the stars for ever and ever" (Daniel 12:3, NIV). Jesus wanted me to witness.

Joy at the discovery quickly evaporated into doubt. *I'm soft-spoken and shy, not an evangelist*, I thought. *Moreover, a good witness needs a compelling story to share. How can I start experiencing compelling life stories if my life is stuck in a rut? Whom would I witness to?*

I glanced at the metro passengers packed on the escalators: two escalators charging up, two others going down. Parallel to me on the next escalator stood a young Black man.

"Witness to him," a voice seemed to say.

Never, I thought. *How would I witness to a complete stranger? What would I say?*

"Witness to him," the voice said quietly, incessantly.

I began to waver. *Jesus, if I'm supposed to witness, let that man turn right when he gets off the escalator.* I was going right.

The man reached the top and turned right. *Fine, but if I'm really supposed to witness, let him turn right when he exits the metro.* Many people turn left.

The man turned right.

I walked next to him. *Now what am I supposed to say, Jesus?*

"Where are you from?" I blurted out.

The man kept walking, giving no indication that he had heard me.

"Where are you from?" I said again.

The man looked at me, still walking. "Why should I tell you where I'm from when I don't know you?" he said, gruffly.

He thinks I'm crazy, Jesus. Perhaps I am. Now what?

"I asked because I was born in Zambia," I said. "My name is Andy."

The man looked surprised. His eyes softened. "I'm from Nigeria," he said.

"Several people at my church are from Nigeria," I said.

Wow! It was easy to introduce You into the conversation. But why did I mention Nigerians at church? Who attends church from Nigeria? I can't think of any except one, and he died of pneumonia last winter. I'd better not mention that.

"Really, from Nigeria?" the man replied. "Which church do you go to?"



"Moscow International Seventh-day Adventist Church. What about you?"

The man named a nondenominational Protestant church.

At that moment we reached the end of the underpass. I had to climb the steps to the left. My new acquaintance headed for the steps on the right.

"It was good to meet you," he said, smiling broadly. "My name is . . ." his voice dropped off, and I didn't catch his name. But he pulled a business card out of his pocket with the address of his church. "Come visit us sometime," he said.

I don't have a business card for my church. Anyway, wasn't I the one who was supposed to be witnessing?

"I'm glad that we met," I said, returning his smile. "God bless!"

Jesus showed that I could witness if I surrendered just five minutes of my walk to work. Imagine what He could do if given an hour, a week, a lifetime. **1**

Andrew McChesney currently works with Adventist Mission. This article originally appeared on Adventist Review Online, October 28, 2010, when he was a journalist in Russia.

LEARNING IS NOT JUST FOR KIDS!



HAVE YOU EVER WISHED YOU could learn something new?

Perhaps you wanted to understand the computer or your iPhone better. Or to learn how to change a flat tire. Or you've wished you could develop a new skill such as public speaking, playing a musical instrument, speaking a new language, becoming more efficient at your job, or giving a Bible study.

Maybe you've longed to try something just to bring joy and relaxation into your life, like a new hobby.

Many of us are acquainted with the phrase "You can't teach an old dog new tricks," which usually implies the human adult brain cannot process and absorb new information like that of an impressionable child's brain. As a result, we're tempted to think that there's no use putting in time and effort to become a student once again.



SHE LEARNED TO READ AT 90.

Priscilla Sitienei, a midwife from Ndalat in rural Kenya, grew up in an era when primary schooling was not available for girls. All during her growing up years and her busy adult experience of raising 10 children and caring for community

women, she longed to be able to read and write. The desire continued just as intensely during her senior years until the age of 90. She was then finally allowed to enroll in classes at the local school, along with six of her great-grandchildren, creating quite a sensation within the school, her family, and community circles.

Current studies by psychologists and neuroscientists now reveal that the brain is indeed amazingly capable of learning and mastering new skills at any age, even at 90 years old.



YOUR BRAIN WAS BUILT FOR CHANGE

Learning a new skill has a definite effect on the brain. Simply put, when impacted with new information, the brain responds by creating new neuron connections, thus replacing some that we lose over time. In addition to new connections, contacts between existing neural pathways can be made stronger or weaker. Myelin—a fatty substance in the brain that signals and enhances movement between connections in the neurons—is increased, thus improving and strengthening those new connections. Myelin efficiency is enhanced when a new experience is repeated or practiced a number of times. These changes are called "brain plasticity." Like plastic, over time the brain can be molded into many different shapes based on the new information and stimuli it's exposed to.

On the other hand, research also shows that by not stimulating the brain periodically with new information, by not engaging in new experiences, individuals can become bored and lethargic. Over time, this can lead to potential health problems. Heart disease rates can increase to more than double compared with people who do not report chronic boredom. Brain function can also slow down, which can encourage the early onset of dementia diseases.

The more we learn during our lifetime, the more “plastic” the brain becomes, thus maintaining and enhancing our overall cognitive, social, psychological, and physical health.



OTHER BENEFITS WORTH CONSIDERING

Learning and mastering something new brings added quality and joy to life. It:

1. Lessens stress by reducing our focus on complicated life routines and patterns. Life becomes more interesting and full.
2. Improves mental health by providing a satisfying sense of achievement.
3. Develops service abilities. We can become more effective in helping others within our church and community.
4. Improves socializing, as we now have new skills and experiences to share.
5. Increases our sense of fun and joy, not only in discovering what we are capable of achieving but also in broadening our understanding of new subjects.
6. Improves memory. The act of learning and repeating something new can aid in improving our overall recall ability.
7. Inspires others by setting an example. Enthusiasm and excitement are contagious, and our story of achievement can inspire and encourage others.

MANY OPPORTUNITIES ARE AVAILABLE

Classes in a multitude of topics are available online, at local schools or colleges, from

“Anyone who stops learning is old, whether at twenty or eighty.”

Henry Ford

community organizations, and from private instructors. Reading is another way to learn new skills and stay current on the latest ideas. Attend a lecture; visit a museum; or join a craft class, book club, or Bible study class. Or sign up with a tour group.

THE REST OF THE STORY

Priscilla Sitienei, now 92, and her great-grandchildren are attending the Leaders Vision Preparatory School near Ndalat, where she is described as a model student. She participates in all student activities, even physical education classes.

She has her own special dorm room with a sign above the door that reads: “Education has no age limit.” She encourages both boys and girls in the school to study faithfully and do their best. The students love her and especially enjoy the stories she tells them. There is a constant friendly competition between her and her young classmates for the best grades, and often, to their amazement (and embarrassment), she outdoes them all.

Priscilla’s goal is to be able to read her Bible and learn how to write down the herbal remedies and techniques she uses when delivering babies. She also strives to inspire children and adults everywhere to take advantage of educational opportunities.



Learning Is Not Just For Kids!



SUMMARY

Probably most of us are leading very busy lives, which means our brains are already overloaded with the information we need just to get through the day. So if we are doing all right, why bother trying to learn something new?

Besides keeping the mind active and sharp, there is also that satisfying sense of self-worth that results from achievement. Feelings of joy and wonder are experienced as new worlds open up before us—renewing appreciation and gratitude to our loving heavenly Father, the source of all true knowledge and blessings.

As we age, it doesn't matter if we move more slowly, don't hear as well, and take a little longer to absorb new information. Just think of Priscilla Sitienei, and be encouraged to never stop learning and never stop growing. ■

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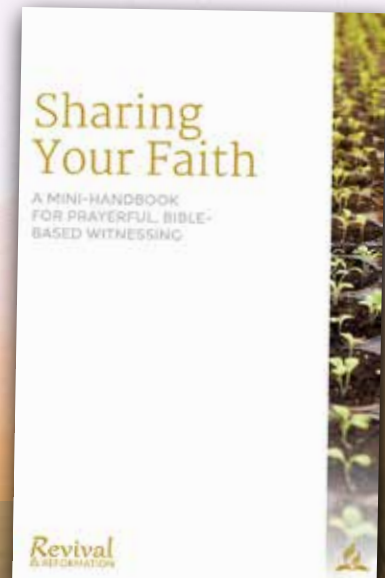
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Rae Lee Cooper is a registered nurse. She and her husband, Lowell, have two adult married children and three adorable grandchildren. She spent most of her childhood in the Far East and then worked as a missionary with her husband in India for 16 years.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

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Dear Deborah,

We recently moved to a large, new church with an “anti-evangelism” mindset. Unfortunately, my husband didn’t handle it very well when the elders informed him they wouldn’t support Bible prophecy meetings at our church. Many of the members told us, “Evangelism doesn’t work here anymore.” My husband and I are both passionate about sharing the love of Jesus via evangelism meetings and planned great things for our new church! Did we misread God’s will and move to the wrong place? We’re praying daily for God to change the hearts of the congregation, especially the church leaders. Any suggestions as to what we can do while we’re waiting—and frustrated?

*Sincerely,
On Our Knees*

Dear On Our Knees,

Clearly, you’re both disappointed and surprised at the same time. Make no mistake, God has great plans for you and your husband, even if evangelism doesn’t happen in the way you’re normally accustomed to.

You may need to spend some time listening. Perhaps members are spiritually discouraged themselves and need revival before preaching the Word to their neighbors. Maybe past evangelism efforts have not included adequate preparation, prayer, or followup. Your church members need your enthusiasm and vision, but you also need their lifelong understanding of the community they serve.

In the meantime, evangelism can be integrated into everyday church and community life. You may have heard it referred to as friendship evangelism. In fact, this type of evangelism was demonstrated by Jesus during His earthly ministry. He spent time in people’s homes and even touched the untouchable. Some also refer to this as “building bridges.” Before you know it, others will notice and want to be included in outreach!

Below are a few ideas to inspire your church members and benefit the community you serve:

1. Bottled-water giveaway at a local community festival or fair with a label attached connecting people to your church.
2. Umbrella escorts in your downtown area on a rainy day.

3. A free children’s clothing pop-up event (“boutique-style”) hosted by your church.
4. Walk-through nativity events with refreshments and literature.
5. One-day VBS programs for children who live near your church.
6. Free health clinics.
7. Free car wash with “drive-through” prayer station.
8. Brainstorm more ideas with members!

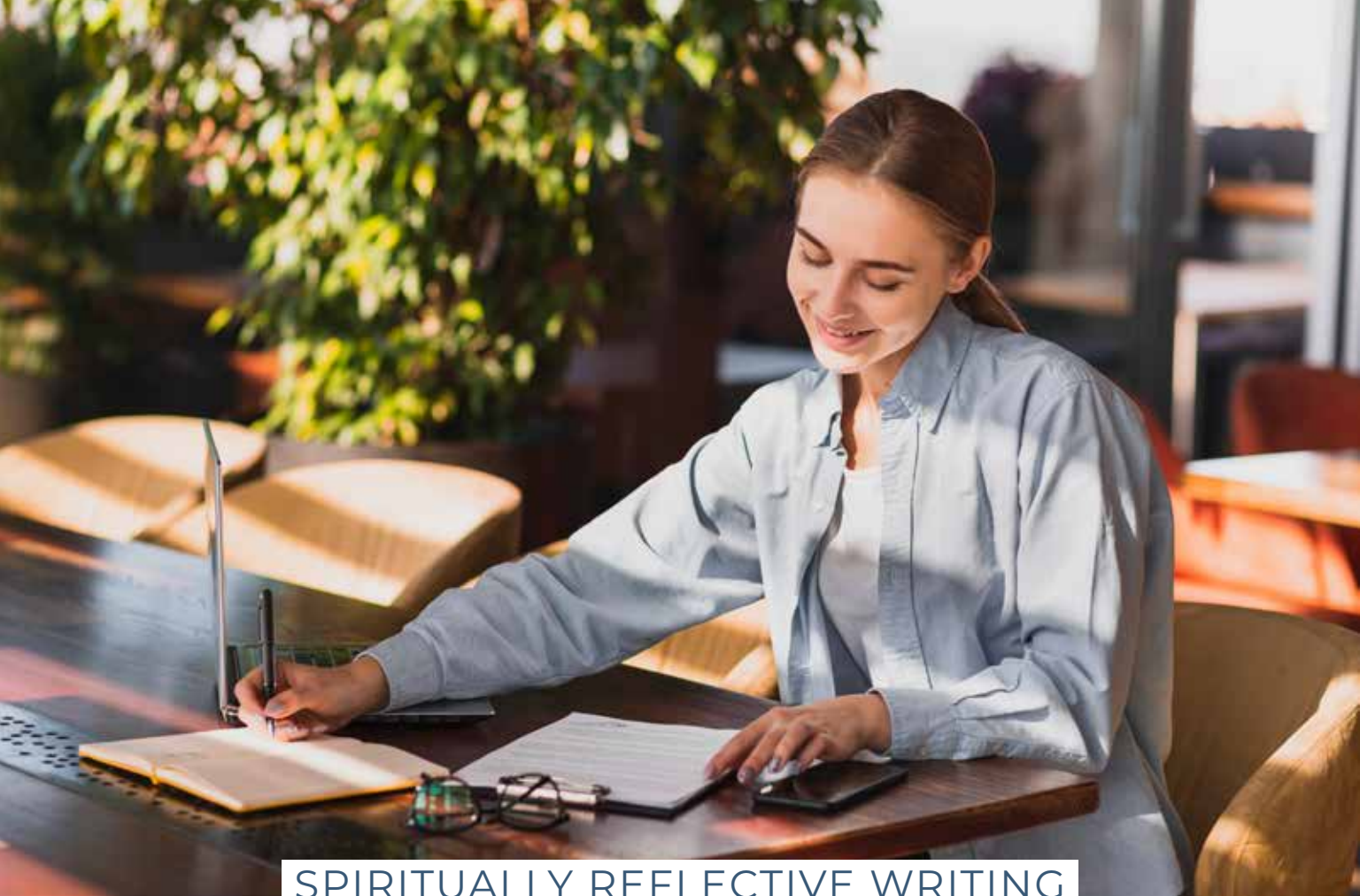
You may have heard this saying: People don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care. And I believe that’s true. When people see your church genuinely caring for them and their needs, they are more likely to be interested in your faith.

Even though Jesus was a wonderful teacher, He loved spending time with people. As He did that, He could easily issue this invitation: “*And He said to him, ‘Follow Me.’ So he arose and followed Him*” (Matthew 9:9, NKJV).

God loves people more than anything, and we should too.

Pray and enthusiastically share the above ideas and many more with your church, and expect God to bless your evangelism efforts—friendship-style!

Praying,
Deborah



SPIRITUALLY REFLECTIVE WRITING

Journaling Your Thoughts to God

JOURNALING IS USUALLY DEFINED as reflective writing. For some people, it's their way of spiritually connecting with God through writing.

For Anne, it's "when I practice remembering the events and meaning of the day. It is a simple way of helping me pay attention and discern what is happening." Jemma shares that her "journal is a record of landmarks in my spiritual life. It is full of my psalms to God. Some are full of discouragement, where I plead with God to help me cope; others are purely for praise and thanks." June's journal is "a way of confirming a decision or keeping a record of how God has guided me. It is a means of listening to God, a tool for growth."

In other words, journaling can mean whatever you want it to mean. Bryan Hughes, in his book *Discipling, Coaching, Mentoring*, lists a number of benefits from spiritual reflective writing. He says that some people find writing helps them:

- Concentrate better while praying.
- Enhance their personal devotions by keeping a record of their spiritual life.
- More clearly recognize God's guidance as they list reasons for and against decisions and present them to God in prayer.
- Focus on the meaning of living for God one day at a time. By praying about that day's activity, there is no time to worry about tomorrow.

“As the deer pants for the streams of water, so my soul pants for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. When can I go and meet with God?”

Psalm 42:1, 2, NIV

- Work through issues such as relationships, breakdowns, and loss or pain such as bereavement.
- Increase learning about themselves. In presenting their strengths and weaknesses to the Lord, He is able to help them grow more like Him.
- Have a positive, disciplined way of creating time management.
- Express the deeper thoughts of the heart.

Whether you write daily or weekly, the following outline may help you develop your own individual style of journaling:

- a. Praise God for who He is,
- b. Admit sins to Him on a daily basis,
- c. Request of Him and believe that He hears and answers, and
- d. Thank God daily for everything.

Then listen to Him, recording messages from Him found in sermons or other inspirational messages, Old and New Testament readings, and reflections from the book of Proverbs.

Another format to follow is that of Chuck Swindoll, who has these questions in mind while he journals:


- What am I trusting God for today?
- What are the joys and stresses in my key relationships?
- In what ways am I experiencing inner peace? In what ways am I lacking?
- What are my three most significant prayer requests?
- Am I entertaining any fears at the moment? What are they?
- Is there any measure of discontent? Describe it.
- What has made me laugh recently?

Mary Barrett, in her book *When God Comes to Visit*, notes:

Each one of us has to find the method that best deepens a relationship with God. I find that I need to read the Bible slowly, dwelling on the thoughts God is sharing with me. I ask Him to stop me at the parts that speak to my needs. I then write those verses in a spiritual journal and examine further how they apply to me. I also concentrate on what those verses say about God. The primary purpose of my time with Him is not to go away with solutions to my problems but to see a deeper aspect of His character.

At the end of each chapter, I summarise it as this helps to clarify in my own mind what the passage in the Bible is actually saying. After I have summarised it, I examine the chapter again to see what it is saying to me as an individual. Once again, I sum up what that passage is also saying about God. Once I have condensed the whole book, I put a short sentence after the title of the book so that I will know where to go when I have a particular need. For example, the book of Philippians speaks of joy despite circumstances. I have simply written that at the side of the title. When I need to be reminded of joy, I just read that book.

Reading the Bible in such a way has made a tremendous difference to my relationship with God. His Word has become a power, an inspiration, a mirror for God, and a tool for change. My time with Him is exciting, refreshing, and satisfying as I am learning more and more about the incredible love He has for me.

Whatever way you enjoy your spiritual reflective writing, one thing you can be assured of: it will bring you into a deeper personal relationship with your Lord. 

This article is reprinted from the Prayer as Ministry Manual published by the British Union Conference in 2012.

Heather Haworth was the prayer ministries coordinator for the British Union Conference at that time and compiled the information. Here is the link for original booklet: <https://adventist.uk/fileadmin/shared-data/resources/prayer-ministries/BUC-Prayer-as-Ministry-MANUAL.pdf>



Surviving Holiday Stress

IT'S CHRISTMAS, Thanksgiving, New Year's Day, or maybe a family reunion. Three generations of in-laws will spend a week parked in every corner of your home so everyone can have fun together—well, everyone except you. Your spouse is busy with extra church services and community outreach. You're working full-time. Your freezer is too small for all the food you'll need. You're coordinating the children's program. And your chances of having any fun during the event are about 0.01 percent.

Perhaps holidays aren't such a big thing in your culture, but there are other massive events in your church to manage, or big family gatherings that put pressure on your relationships.

How can you put loving God and loving others at the top of your priority list? How can you focus on what's most important, lower your expectations, share the load, and reduce each other's stress?

SPIRITUAL REFLECTION

It's easy to get carried away with elaborate menus, decorated homes, idealistic expectations, and unnecessary traditions. Create a mini-retreat for yourself so you can reflect on the meaning and purpose of this celebration or family reunion. For Thanksgiving, focus on gratitude, study thankfulness in the Bible, and list your blessings. If you're focusing on Christmas, read the stories in the Bible, imagine the scenes, and focus on the key values of faith, hope, courage, hospitality, and generosity. Pray that your time together will be a refreshing blessing for everyone, including yourself, and ask God for His wisdom and balance.

FOCUS ON VALUES RATHER THAN OBLIGATIONS

How can you reduce your workload? What can you and your family leave out and still make the celebration special? Set a price limit on gifts, or agree to donate money to a charity instead. Choose simpler menus, make simpler plans, work together on baking and decorating projects, and invite lonely people to join your family. Ask yourself how each activity helps you to experience and/or share God's love, and use that as your benchmark to guide your plans.

MARRIAGE STAFF MEETING

Plan to support each other by having a marriage staff meeting when you're both relaxed and comfortable.

- Tell each other your hopes and concerns for the upcoming holidays.
- Mention appreciation for each other's support during previous holidays and gatherings.
- List everything you both need to do on different days to make the event smooth and successful. Include church, work, and family events. Also include every individual task, such as making up guest beds, buying and wrapping gifts, serving beverages, setting the table, clearing up, preparing vegetables, shopping for groceries, doing laundry, entertaining guests, and organizing a family outing or walk. This will help you to understand each other's workloads and stress points.
- Agree who will do what and when. Cross tasks off the list when they're completed to help you both keep track of tasks.
- Discuss your concerns and explore ways to manage stress points better.
- Explore how you could simplify the celebration to create more time to experience God's love and joy, and more time to share His love with your family and those who are hungry for hospitality.
- Plan regular breaks during the busy period so you can catch up with overdue tasks, chill out, or connect with each other.

GET AHEAD

Identify all the tasks you can do in advance and scratch them off your list. If you give gifts, buy a few each month, wrap them, and label them. If you send cards, address them several months in advance, and write personal messages when you have a spare moment. Bake ahead, ask other guests to make and bring their favorite dishes, and look for good offers on ready-to-serve dishes.

SCALE YOUR STRESS

Make a scale using numbers from 0 to 10, where 0 is no stress and 10 is extremely stressed. Place the scale where both you and your spouse can see it, such as on the refrigerator. Use two different magnets, which you can place along the scale to indicate your daily stress levels. Ask how you can support each other during the most stressful times.

CARING CONNECTIONS

Schedule regular couple times for praying together, discussing ongoing needs, thanking each other, and

showing your care for each other. List at least 20 ways you can lovingly connect with each other in one minute. Generously scatter at least 10 of these caring moments throughout the day to help reduce stress, conflict, and resentment. Kiss, squeeze hands, smile, offer to help, make a drink, send a loving message, share a treat, and more.


STRESS POINTS

Every family celebration includes tricky moments and conversations, whether it's managing Uncle Fred, who talks too much; soothing the small child who's struggling with sensory overload; listening to cousin Meg's endless complaints; or calming Tom and Mark's arguments about religion or politics.

Prepare some fun "minute to win it" games to distract people from awkward conversations. (Check out www.thebudgetdiet.com/top-30-minute-to-win-it-games. Some of the ideas are better than others—use your good judgment). Introduce a gratitude activity whenever someone starts being critical or is complaining. Keep a handy list of things people can do to help you so you can invite them out of awkward conversations, such things as folding napkins, setting the table, preparing fruit and vegetables, or reading a story to the children.

When a topic of conversation treads on sensitive areas, try saying, "I hope you don't mind me changing the subject, but I really need your advice/help." Choose something that falls within their area of expertise and experience, such as gardening, cooking, or traveling. Or invite them to share favorite childhood memories with you.

REFLECT GRATEFULLY

When all the intense activity has subsided, make space to reconnect as a couple and do something special together. Talk about what went well, appreciate each other's support, and list what you want to do differently next time. Talk warmly and creatively about how you'll improve these areas. Thank God for what went well, and ask Him to help you make next year even more successful. 

Karen Holford is a qualified family therapist, pastor's wife, and Family Ministries director for the Trans-European Division.



"Specially" Hospitable

WELCOMING PEOPLE WITH SPECIAL DIETS

I'M WHEAT-INTOLERANT. One crumb of wheat will give me severe pain and discomfort, decreased energy, and other nasty symptoms for up to six weeks. I've been aware of my intolerance for more than 20 years, so I've learned to live with it. Here are some things I've learned along the way:

Going to an ordinary Adventist potluck when you have a food allergy or intolerance is like walking through a minefield! Fortunately, as I'm intolerant to wheat and not allergic to it, my reaction isn't life-threatening. But for someone with a severe allergy or a potential for anaphylaxis, incorrectly labeled food can be catastrophic.

My worst experience was at a church banquet. The caterers had been told about my diet, but they had forgotten. I couldn't eat the appetizer, and they promised to find me an entrée I could eat. I asked if I could just eat the vegetables, but they wanted to wait until the entrée was ready. They were too busy to find me anything. I couldn't eat the dessert either. Finally, two hours after the meal started, I was given a quick apology and a plate of cold, leftover vegetables.

THE POTLUCK CHALLENGE

Many people who have special diets no longer come to potlucks because it's too stressful to eat food in an environment that is not allergy-aware and safe. Some bring their own lunch and make sure that no one accidentally drops any crumbs on their food.

We can also feel awkward when we have to ask the cooks specific details about their ingredients. We often feel excluded from church social events, such as pizza parties and veggie-burger barbecues.

And although it's tempting to be curious about our food intolerances and allergies, please try not to ask, "So, what happens if you accidentally eat some?" Most of the side effects are very unpleasant, and we don't really want to discuss them in public!

PROTECT THE PREPARATION

- Ask those with special diets in your church to train others how to care for their needs.
- Write an information leaflet explaining the importance of being scrupulously careful when cooking and serving food for people with special diets.
- Make food for special diets using spotlessly clean utensils and work surfaces. Avoid making other dishes at the same time so that you don't accidentally transfer contaminated ingredients on utensils, by hand, or even through the air.
- Line pans and dishes with baking parchment or foil in case there's a residue of allergens on the container.
- Keep special diet dishes covered and protected so they're not contaminated. Place them on the top shelf of the oven so that contaminants such as pizza crumbs don't fall into the food accidentally.
- Search the Internet for a list of allergen-free ingredients. Lots of everyday recipes are made with perfectly safe ingredients. Use gluten-free breadcrumbs in nut roast recipes, use spiralized vegetables instead of pasta, and cut thin slices of butternut squash or grill aubergine (eggplant) slices to replace pasta strips in lasagne dishes.

- Purchase a variety of allergen-free entrees and desserts and keep them in the church freezer. Make a sign for the food table or church bulletin that welcomes visitors with special diets and invites them to choose special meals that can be quickly prepared especially for them. When they can be guaranteed that the food is safe, they'll feel more comfortable joining in with the meal.
- Provide printed labels for potluck foods listing the most common allergens. Ask people to name their dish and tick any of the allergenic ingredients it contains. Make sure that they check the contents of *every* ingredient they use, as some allergens are not always obvious in things such as seasonings, sauces, and soup mixes. For example, soy sauce usually contains wheat, but many people are not aware of this.
- Your label could look like this:
This dish is ... Eggplant parmigiana.
It was made by ... Karen Holford.
It includes dairy ___ wheat ___ gluten ___
eggs ___ sugar ___ celery ___ soy ___ etc.



“Specially” Hospitable

SERVING SPECIAL FOODS SAFELY

- Place dishes made for special diets on a separate table.
- Provide each special dish with a separate spoon. If someone uses a spoon from another dish in the special food, they will contaminate the food and make it unsafe.
- Discourage people who do not have special diets from trying out the special dishes.
- Invite people with special diets to take their food first. Give out passes for the special diet table to prevent other people from taking the food.
- Never “top up” branded sauce, dressing, and ketchup bottles from cheaper bulk catering packs because it “looks better,” unless it’s exactly the same brand and the same ingredients.

DON’T FORGET COMMUNION

- People who cannot eat wheat and gluten often feel excluded from Holy Communion. Provide a wheat- and gluten-free alternative for everyone to eat, or provide a completely separate plate of wheat- and gluten-free crackers.

INVITE US!

Please invite people with special diets to your home. We just want to be with people without having to worry about the food. Feel free to ask us to bring along an entrée or dessert that everyone can eat, or we can share our favorite recipes with you.

A simple soup or a hearty salad are perfect, and we can bring our own bread if we want to. We’re usually offered fruit salad for dessert, but if you can be a little more creative, that would be wonderful! Search your grocery stores for “free from” alternatives, and find out which of your local bakeries and cafés specialize in wheat- and gluten-free cakes. Look online for raw dessert recipes, which will never include wheat. Try out recipes for raw brownies, made with dates, pecans or walnuts, cocoa, and other natural ingredients.

EVERYBODY’S WELCOME!

With a little thought and preparation, your church can provide meals for those with special diets, and everyone who comes to your church will feel welcome. It’s such a tremendous gift to me when I go to a potluck where I can share in the food—and the joy—with everybody else. Thank you! J

Karen Holford is the Family Ministries director of the Trans-European Division, and she likes experimenting with raw and wheat-free recipes, especially desserts.



The Best Gift Ever!

WHEN GOD SENT JESUS to earth as a tiny baby, He gave us the best gift ever! Jesus came to help us understand how much God loves us. That's amazing! Let's explore the story of Jesus' birth together.



During the story of Jesus' birth, angels keep appearing in the most unexpected places. Read the stories in Matthew 1:18 to 2:15 and Luke 1:1 to 2:21, and count how many times angels spoke to people.

The angels often start by saying, "Don't be afraid!" and then they share some really good news. Cut out the shape of an angel using this pattern as a guide. Make sure your angel is big enough to write on. Write a good-news message on the angel and give it to someone who needs encouragement.



BRIGHT AND MORNING STARS

God sent a star to help the wise men find Jesus. What do you do to help yourself find Jesus? Search your Bible, looking for some of Jesus' names. Cut stars from white cards. On each star write a name of Jesus in a bright, attractive way. Decorate the stars and punch a small hole in each one. Use white thread to hang them at different heights from a circle of wire or a thin branch. Hang your star mobile where it will remind you to think about Jesus.



The Best Gift Ever!



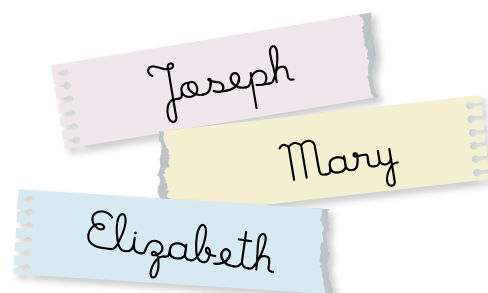
GIVE A STAR

Make stars to share with your neighbors. These could be star-shaped cookies, folded paper stars, or any other stars you would like to make. Try rolling out air-drying clay so that it is ¼-inch or 5 mm thick and press rubber stamps, leaves, pine branches, or thick lace into the clay to make a pattern. Use a narrow straw to make a neat hole in one point of each star. Package your finished stars with encouraging Bible verses and give them to your neighbors.

ALL KINDS OF GIFTS

Match the names of the people below with the gifts they gave to Jesus. Some people gave Him more than one gift. And some gifts were given by more than one person. Can you spot the selfish person who didn't give Him any gifts?

Mary	Perfume
Joseph	A shelter
Angels	A place to grow into a baby
Shepherds	A family
Herod	A warm welcome
Wise Men	A song
Elizabeth	Protection and safety
Innkeeper	Gold



EVERY STORY IS DIFFERENT

Write the name of each of these characters on separate pieces of paper. Put them into a small bag.

Pick out a character and tell the story of Jesus' birth as if you were that person. Some of the characters are not in the actual Bible story, but you can imagine a story that they might tell.

- Mary's mom or dad
 - Joseph
 - Mary
 - Elizabeth
- A young shepherd boy
- An angel in the choir
- The wife of one of the wise men
- The innkeeper





MAKE A SCENE

Create a scene from the story of Jesus' birth. Use toys, plastic brick sets, household items, natural materials, colored and folded paper, or old Christmas cards.

- The angel visits Mary
- Elizabeth and Mary greet each other
- Bethlehem—the town with no spare rooms
- Baby Jesus in the stable
- Shepherds on the hills
- A choir of angels
- The wise men and their gifts



LET'S PRAY

Use the story of Jesus' birth to help you pray for different people and their needs. Here are some ideas:

- Young families and parents with new babies
- People who are traveling
- People who are searching for Jesus
- People who work at night, like the shepherds
- People who are afraid
- People who are homeless, like Mary and Joseph
- People who don't understand about Jesus, like Herod

As you pray, welcome Jesus joyfully into your own heart and home, and thank God for His amazing gift!

FULL OF WONDER

"Wonder" together about the wonderful story of Jesus' birth. Ask each other:

- "I wonder what you like best about the story of Jesus' birth?"
- "I wonder what the most important message in this story is for you?"
- "I wonder who you would most like to be if you were a character in this story?"
- "I wonder what this story tells you about God's love for you?"

There are no right or wrong answers to wondering questions, but they help us to think about the story in a different way and apply it to our lives.



THE GREATEST JOURNEY

The United Kingdom's Bible Society has made a lovely animation about Jesus' birth called "The Greatest Journey." You can search for it on the Internet, or visit https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ggFqPfby_o. Enjoy watching it together!



The Best Gift Ever!

SHOWING GOD'S LOVE

Jesus came to the world as a tiny baby to show us how much God loves us. In the story of His birth we find different ways of showing God's love today. Prayerfully choose one of them and work with your family to do something kind for someone else:

- Welcome a baby in a poor family.
- Give special presents to children who are poor.
- Support a project that helps the homeless.
- Care for families who are refugees.
- Invite someone into your home who is a long way from their own home.
- Sing to bring joy to others.
- Share the good news of Jesus with other people.
- Support an ADRA project.



SO MANY IDEAS!

- Gather all your books about Jesus' birth and read them with your family. Then write and illustrate your own mini-book about His birth.
- Write a really happy song about Jesus' birth. Sing it with your family as if you are a choir of angels! Or use the words of the angels' song and compose your own music.
- Act out the story of Jesus' birth with your family. Make up your own words, find toy animals for the stable, and dress up using whatever you can find in your home. You could video your story to share with others or present it at a senior center. You can even search online for short scripts to help you to tell the story.
- Make a beautiful poster for your home or car window that shares the good news of Jesus' birth with those who pass by.
- Make a miniature nativity scene by downloading the pattern from <http://madebyjoel.com/2013/12/paper-city-nativity-scene-joyfully-expanded.html>. (Scroll down.)



WORSHIP WHILE YOU EAT

The Trans-European Division has designed some dinner placemats full of family worship ideas. You can find them at <https://ted.adventist.org/family-ministries/resources>.

Scroll down the page until you find the placemats. Download the designs you want. There is one about the birth of Jesus, one about generosity, one about gratitude, and several other designs. Use them for family mealtimes during the holiday season. Print off extra sets and laminate them to give as gifts.

Karen Holford is the Family Ministries director of the Trans-European Division, and she likes to help families explore the Bible together.

Southern Africa-Indian Ocean Division

In June 2019, shepherdesses attended a prayer conference for ministerial couples in Windhoek, Namibia.



South Namibia Conference

Also in June 2019, ministerial couples met in Katima Mulilo, Namibia, for a prayer conference.



North Namibia Conference

Southern Asia Division

Many unions in India held a Shepherdess Day of Prayer. Below is a pictorial report:



Jeyarani Sundreshingh, Shepherdess coordinator for Southeast India Union, coordinated a Day of Prayer.



Krupa Victor, Shepherdess coordinator for East-Central India Union, coordinated a Shepherdess Day of Prayer.

NEWS FROM THE FIELD

Eshwamma Peter, Shepherdess coordinator for Bangalore Metro Conference, reports that shepherdesses and retirees participated in the programs. There were also touching testimonies and singing at the churches. Shepherdesses were honored for their faithful service, and special prayers were offered for them. They were motivated to serve the Lord by using their abilities and talents.



Eshwamma Peter, Shepherdess coordinator for Bangalore Metro Conference, coordinated a Shepherdess Day of Prayer.



Shakuntala Chandanshive, Shepherdess coordinator for Western India Union, also coordinated a Day of Prayer for Shepherdesses.

SHEPHERDESS INTERNATIONAL DAY HIMALAYAN SECTION

Shanti Pokharel, Shepherdess coordinator for Himalayan Section, reports that Shepherdess International Day was observed in December 2018 in various churches throughout Nepal. A special program was organized to honor the pastors' wives in recognition of their contribution to the growth of the church. They were presented with shawls and provided with a special fellowship lunch after the service.



West-Central Africa Division





Shepherdesses from Ondo Mission met together for a retreat.

In July 2019, Ashanti Central Conference held a Shepherdess retreat. During the retreat they learned how to make fascinators (hair bands) at Bobiri Forest and Butterfly Sanctuary.



Shepherdesses in Ghana learn how to make fascinators.



Shepherdesses from Ashanti Central Ghana Conference gather at the retreat.



Shepherdesses from Mid-North Ghana Conference meet each month for prayer meeting.

In June 2019, shepherdesses from the Mountain View Conference visited a children's orphanage in North Ghana and donated supplies.



Shepherdesses from Mountain View Conference visit an orphanage in Ghana.



100 DAYS OF PRAYER

FOR GENERAL CONFERENCE SESSION

March 27 – July 4, 2020

Join praying believers all around the world in pleading for the presence and power of the Holy Spirit as we move through the 2020 General Conference Session and into the future.

For more information and resources visit
[REVIVALANDREFORMATION.ORG/100DAYS](https://revivalandreformation.org/100days)

